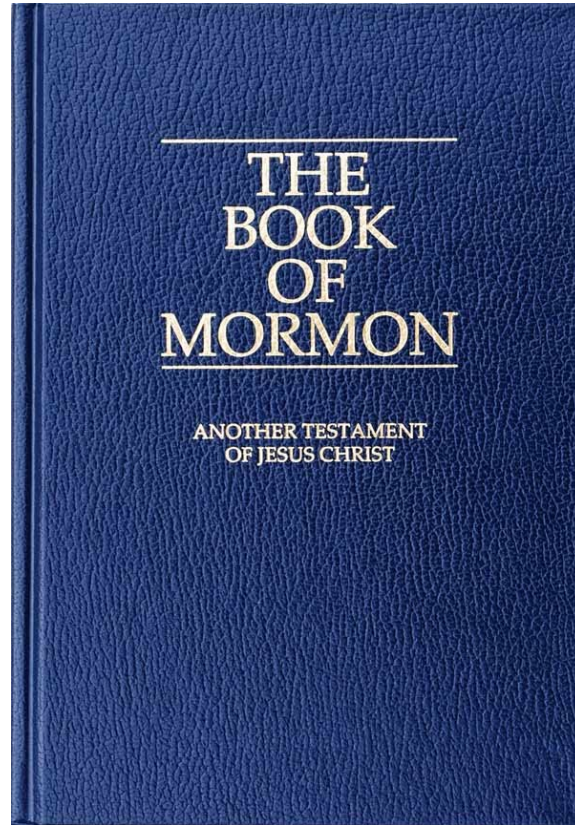


Insights into the Book of Mormon from Scholarly Research – Lehi's Family



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Careful to put study into perspective

Writing in 1890, President George Q. Cannon explained that “the First Presidency have often been asked to prepare some suggestive map illustrative of Nephite geography, but have never consented to do so. Nor are we acquainted with any of the Twelve Apostles who would undertake such a task. The reason is, that without further information they are not prepared even to suggest. The word of the Lord or the translation of other ancient records is required to clear up many points now so obscure.” (George Q. Cannon, editorial, Juvenile Instructor, 1 January 1890)

Careful to put study into perspective

Church leaders, acknowledging the lack of authoritative answers regarding Book of Mormon geography, have encouraged earnest, diligent, and careful study of the matter while counseling the Saints not to allow such interests to cloud their focus on gospel principles.

(Matthew Roper - LDS scholar (2010). Joseph Smith and the Question of Book of Mormon Geography. Mormon Studies Review, 22(2).)

Careful to put study into perspective

In 1903 President Joseph F. Smith taught that regarding Book of Mormon geography, the question, for instance, of the location of the city Zarahemla “was one of interest certainly, but if it could not be located the matter was not of vital importance, and if there were differences of opinion on the question it would not affect the salvation of the people: and he advised against students considering it of such vital importance as the principles of the Gospel” and cautioned them against making questions of Book of Mormon geography “of equal importance with the doctrines contained in the Book.”

(Quoted in “Book of Mormon Students Meet,” Deseret Evening News, 25 May 1903; and “Where was Zarahemla?” Provo Daily Inquirer, 25 May 1903)

Time/Setting

As Hugh Nibley points out, The Book of Mormon is a book that has come to us in a time that is modern in coming forth, but is not so modern that Joseph could have had use of any modern archeology. It was mocked in its day for what scholars considered its strangeness. What makes this interesting is that the more that is learned, the more it coincides with what is discovered. Basically everything we know about the time of Lehi has been discovered in about the last 130 years or so, long after the Book of Mormon was published.

Possible Questions to Answer

1. What was going on in Jerusalem socially, culturally, and politically at the time of Lehi?
2. How did Lehi fit into these social, cultural, and political situations? And what about Laban?
3. Why did the sons of Lehi have no problem approaching Ishmael about joining them, and why was Ishmael willing to go?
4. What was Lehi's possible travel in the wilderness based on science, scripture, and prophetic statements?
5. Does science give us any possible ideas on Lehi's voyage?
6. Do names in the Middle East match names in the Book of Mormon, and if so, can they give us insight?
7. Do the scriptures and science give us any indication as to what the Nephites looked like?
8. Why did Lehi and his descendants write in a form of Egyptian when they were Hebrew and educated as such?
9. Are there any idiosyncrasies of the Book of Mormon that can give us insight?
10. How common was it to write on metal plates?
11. Why was Lehi 8 years in the wilderness? Could it be it took that long to travel that distance?
12. When we do scientific study on a religious item, what should be our main purpose.

Lehi – Culture, Social Class, and Politics

What was going on in Jerusalem socially, culturally, and politically at the time of Lehi?

There were two political powers, Egypt and Babylonia. Egypt, though it had a strong army, was more of a financial power, while Babylonia was the main military power.

In addition there was a sea power which was the Phoenicians. It was mostly allied with Egypt. They carried all types of trade goods.



Lehi – Culture, Social Class, and Politics

What was going on in Jerusalem socially, culturally, and politically at the time of Lehi?

The politics of Israel, and especially Jerusalem were split. The wealthy wanted to align with Egypt. But the common people, because Nebuchadnezzar had already come in and conquered Jerusalem twice, didn't want to provoke Babylonia and were more inclined to follow the advice of Jeremiah.

Even though there was a king, the country was heavily controlled by a council of elders or city princes. Laban, for example, would likely have been one of these.

Lehi's Jerusalem - Politics/Society

Classes in society were strong. These are tribal oriented. Lehi and Nephi decry this,

1 Nephi 17:**35** Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God. . .

But it was a strong part of the Jews at Jerusalem. (Nibley 1988, p 39)

It is interesting to note that the lost ten tribes are: Reuben, Asher, **Ephraim**, Dan, Issachar, **half-tribe of Manasseh**, 2nd **half tribe of Manasseh** (Machir), Naphtali, Zebulun, Gad.

Manasseh was given two parts so Joseph had three parts total for his birthright in the division of Israel.

The tribes not considered lost: Judah, Simeon (scattered among Israel, mostly in Judah), Benjamin (much reduced, mostly with Judah), and Levi (mostly serving in temple – mostly in Judah).

It is interesting to note that Lehi was from Manasseh, and Sariah from Ephraim, the two sons of Joseph – which were both parts of the mainly lost tribes.

More about Laban

The king was not in total control of the land, but was in fear of the council. In the Amrana letters and the Lachish letters (from the time of Lehi) we learn that this council was made up of men who were a type of city prince . They would usually have a garrison of fifty within the city at their bidding, and tens of thousands in the field. (Nibley, 1988, p94-97).

Note the brothers mention the fifty, the ones they had to fear. Nephi says:

1 Nephi 4:1 And it came to pass that I spake unto my brethren, saying: Let us go up again unto Jerusalem, and let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; for behold he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty, yea, or even than his tens of thousands?

These city princes tended to rob and plunder from each other and accuse each other of being traitors to Egypt. They also would hold audience from people seeking favor. People would often bring gifts to try to get what was desired, but these gifts were often stolen with the people killed or thrown out.

More about Laban

According to Nibley (1998, p98), the Lachish letters (military letters of the time of Lehi) tell us that there was concern for the safety of the city, with possible rebellion against Babylon. The council was wanting to protect their own interest and not alarm the common people, so the meeting at night would have been expected.

Another thing to note is this fracturing of the military. With each of the city princes having part of the army whose loyalty was more to them than the country, the control of the military was fractured and questionable.

Lehi – Culture, Social Class, and Politics

How did Lehi and Laban fit into these social, cultural, and political situations?

Lehi, as a merchant, would have been torn between all of these. The merchants' were mostly aligned with Egypt because that is where they did most of their business. But he was also not a Jew. The three land tribes of Joseph were the power in Israel when it existed, but Judah was prominent in the southern kingdom. He would have been considered lesser in politics even though he was wealthy.

Ishmael

2) Why did the sons of Lehi have no problem approaching Ishmael about joining them, and why was Ishmael willing to go?

Hugh Nibley said most men married their father's brother's daughters, so he speculated that was the case. But in recent years we have something more to go on?

In a letter that surfaced August 23, 1982 through Brent Ashworth a manuscript collector we gain some insight. He dated January 23, 1829 written by Lucy Mack Smith to her sister Mary Pierce.

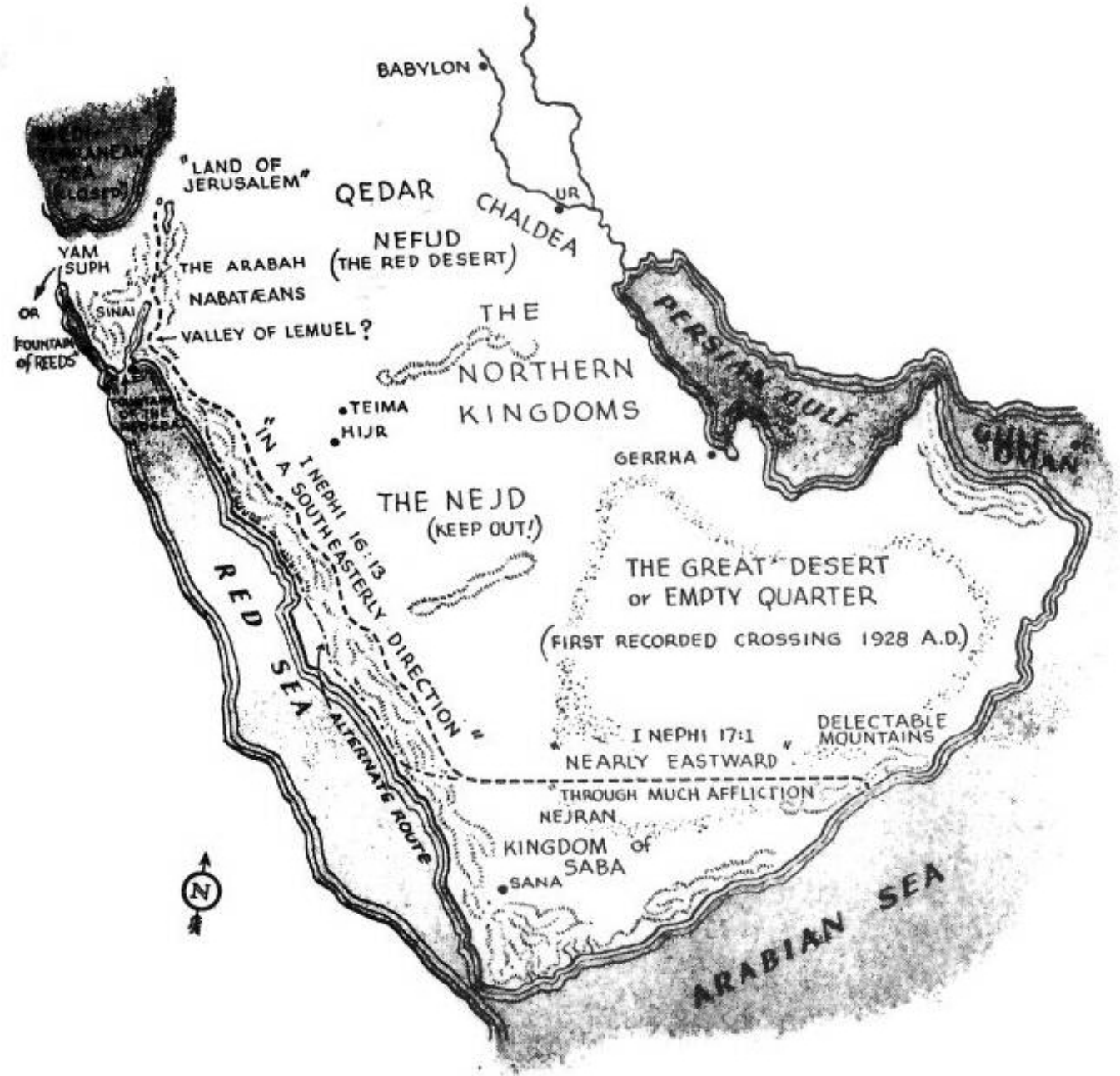
The letter includes (spelling errors included): "I now come to say something of the record it was placed in the earth many hundred years ago by the forefathers of our Indians they descended from a prophet of the Lord whose name was Lehi he fled from Jerusalem with his family and also his wife's brother's family a few days before Nebuchadnezzar besieged the City and layed it in ashes for although Lehi prophesied unto the Jews in the name of the Lord that they must repent of their sins yet they would not, . . ." ¹

Ishmael

“I now come to say some thing of the record it was placed in the earth many hundred years ago by the forefathers of our Indians, they descended from a prophet of the lord whose name was Lehi he fled from Jerusalem with his family and also his wife’s brother’s family a few days before Nebucchadnezzar besieged the city and layed it in ashes, for although Lehi prophesied unto the Jews in the name of the Lord that they must...”

Lehi's Travel Through Wilderness

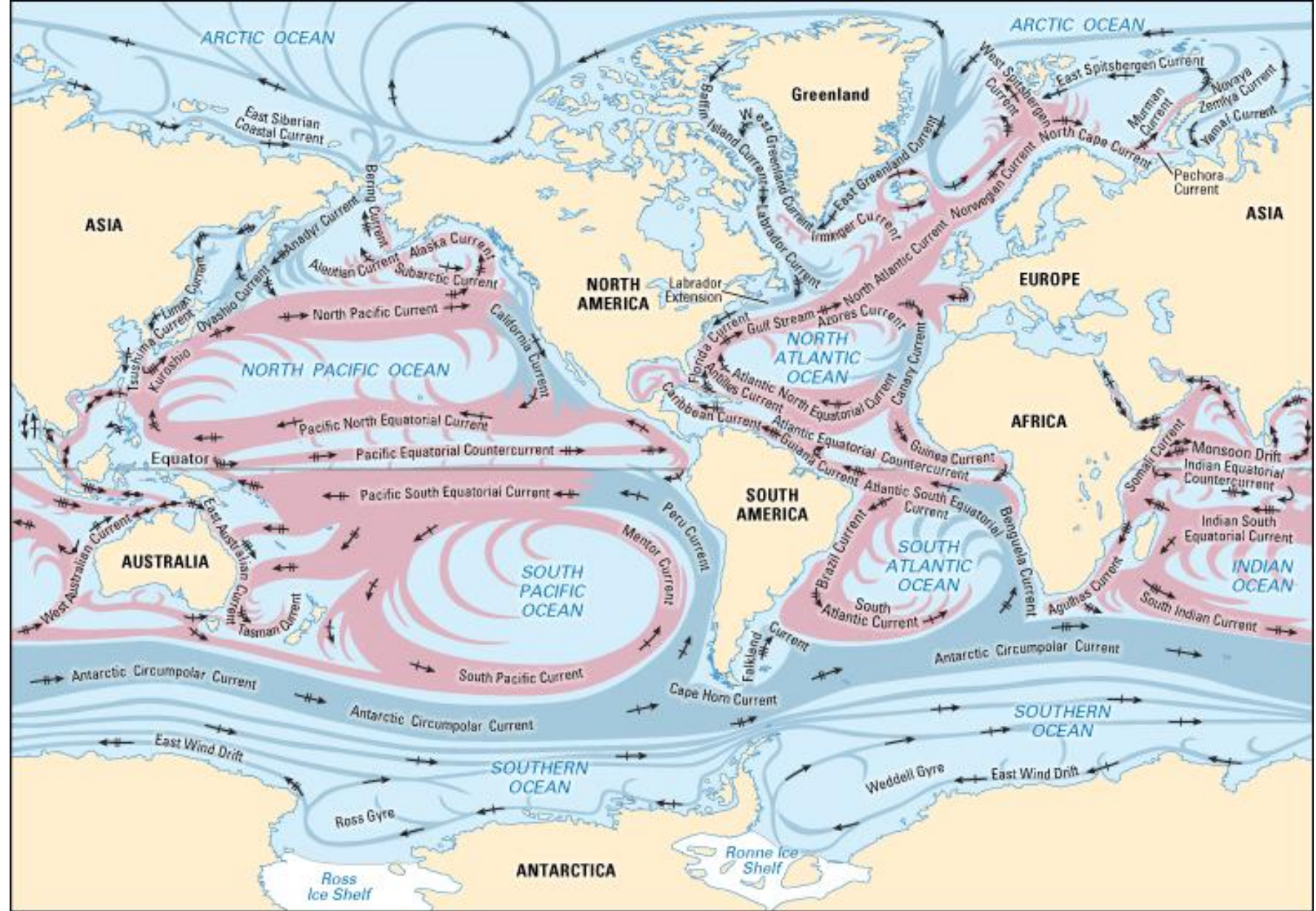
- Lehi traveled South – South east until Nephi broke his bow then Nephi says they turned east.
- The Prophet Joseph said that was at the 19th parallel. (John A Widtsoe, "Is Book of Mormon Geography Known?", IE 53 (1950): 547 – Also "Lehi In the Desert" P. 150
- Note that Hugh Nibley had already calculated this based on the Book of Mormon, culture, and geography before he found Elder Widtsoe's article. Nibley knew that if a different route were taken, Lehi would have run into trouble for crossing tribal lands of dangerous tribes.





Pacific Ocean Currents

(Note Lehi's Jaredites)



CURRENTS DURING NORTHERN HEMISPHERE WINTER

- Cold currents
- Warm currents
- Indicates a current that reverses direction during Northern Hemisphere summer

SPEED OF CURRENTS (1 knot = 1 nautical mile [6.076 feet] per hour)

- Less than 0.5 knots
- 0.5-0.8 knots
- Greater than 0.8 knots

Scale is true only on the Equator

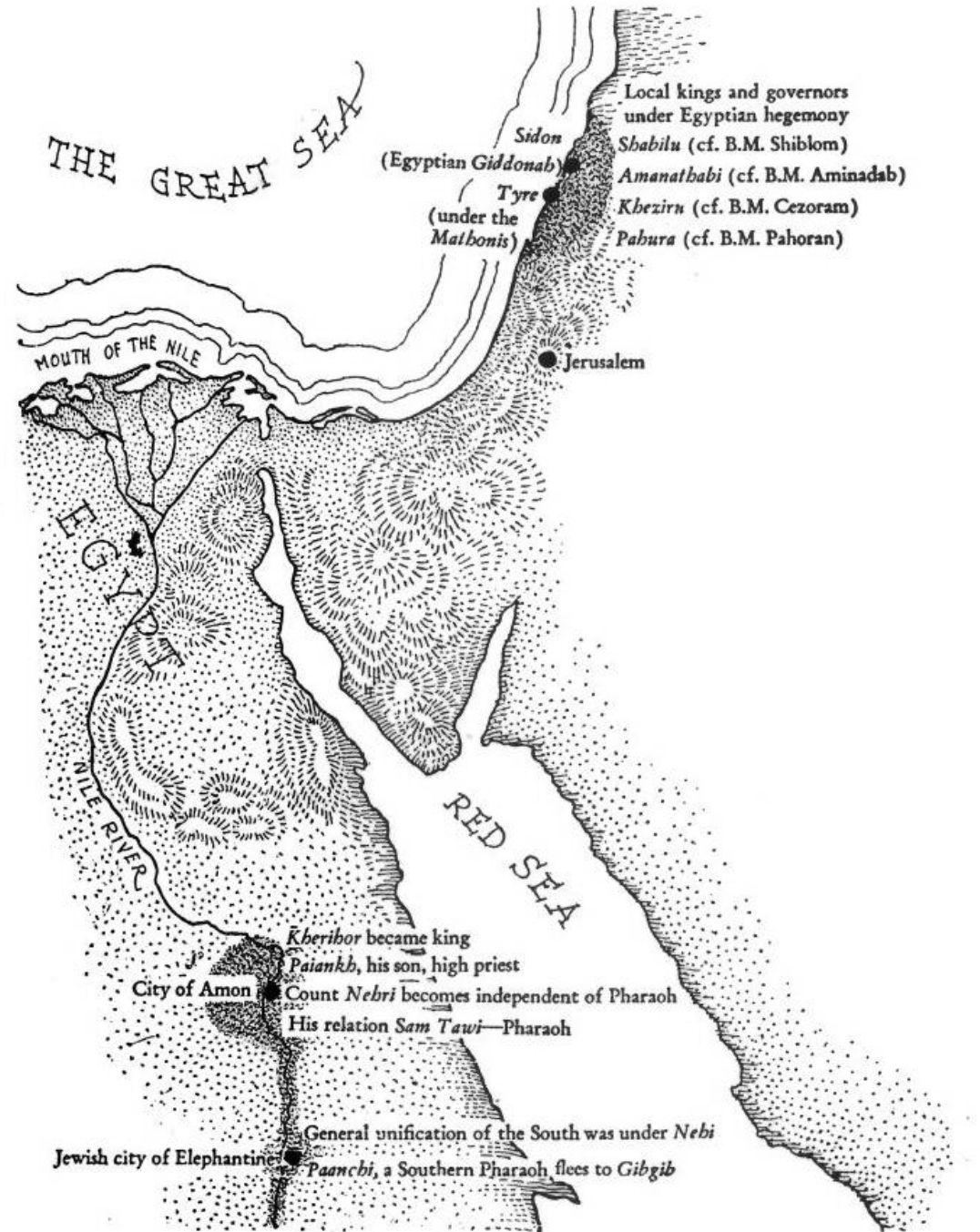
0 1500 3000 mi

0 2000 4000 km

Do names in the time of Lehi in the Middle East match the Book of Mormon

Yes, according to Hugh Nibley,
and almost all come from one
place, around Amon.

It is interesting to note that the place
they come from is also where most
merchants were trained in Egyptian.



Clues As To What The Nephites Looked Like

[Mosiah 25:13](#)

And now all the people of Zarahemla were numbered with the Nephites, and this because the kingdom had been conferred upon none but those who were descendants of Nephi.

Thor Heyerdahl tells us what the archeology indicates about many of the white men of South America and the islands of the Pacific. But in particular, their leaders had a very telling characteristic which is found in many of the statues, but best seen in the ones on Easter Island.



Picture of statues on Easter Island

Red Hair Of Statues

Red stone hauled from quarry far from others. This is done on many statues on islands as well as in South America.

Easter Island is also called by Polynesians “Navel” or “Birth” island. Some translations mean “look to heaven” or “look to home” and it is the first island, or closest island to South America, in the Polynesian cluster. One place on Peruvian coast, near where they may have left from is called “Eye of Heaven”.

Seldom Discussed Fact (much from Thor Heyerdahl)

- Peruvians say, many whites had red hair (flame). P.24
- We know from the prophets that the people of the Polynesian islands are Lehi's descendants (<https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/book-mormon-alma-testimony-word/15-hagoth-and-polynesians-0>)
- Legends on islands talk of men with red hair. (P. 182-183) Easter Island statues made that way.
- Islands (mostly just Easter Island) have tradition of hatred and destruction of white man by brown.
- Oral traditions say original Easter Islanders white and destroyed by Brown.
- Still some remote islands with white, red and blond haired islanders.

In the opening sentences of his dedicatory prayer at the New Zealand Temple, April 20, 1958, President David O. McKay stated: We express gratitude that to these fertile islands thou didst guide descendants of Father Lehi and hast enabled them to prosper (McKay 2).

Tahitian Red Hair (Vaitiare)



Note: Egyptian archeology.

Joseph



Why Did Lehi Write in Egyptian

We now realize that the ancient Jews could write quickly and boldly, in an artistic flowing hand, with the loving penmanship of those who enjoy writing." And the Nephites got rid of this to learn in its place the most awkward, difficult, and impractical system of writing ever devised by man! Why all the trouble? Simply to save space. What space? Space on valuable plates. (Lehi In The Desert p 15)

Now Egyptian could be written in less space than Hebrew because in Lehi's day demotic was actually a shorthand, extremely cramped and abbreviated; and it was a shorthand for the very reason that it was thoroughly idiomatic, that is, peculiarly adapted to the sounds and thought processes of one language and one language only. It could be used very economically for writing Egyptian, but not for any other language. (Lehi In The Desert p 15)

Did wealthy Lehi learn Egyptian just to save space?

No. He learned Egyptian to read and write Egyptian.

Why?

Egyptian Writing

To understand why he wrote in Egyptian we need to look at the politics of the Middle East at the time of Lehi that would help us understand more about the Book of Mormon?

Politics At The Time Of Lehi

- The world at the time was controlled by two powers, Babylon, and Egypt.
- Egypt was mostly a financial power but still had a strong military
- Babylon was mostly a military power and was unrivaled in this.

Babylon had already defeated Judah once, sacking Jerusalem, and it was then that Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah in as king of Judah.

Because of the wealth that flowed out of Egypt, the wealthy, upper class, and merchants wanted an alliance with Egypt. Lehi was of this merchant class. Though Jeremiah warned against it, the wealthy felt that with Egypt as an ally they could stand against Babylon. It should be noted that Lehi was of this group originally and when he changed, those who were family and friends would have been against him.

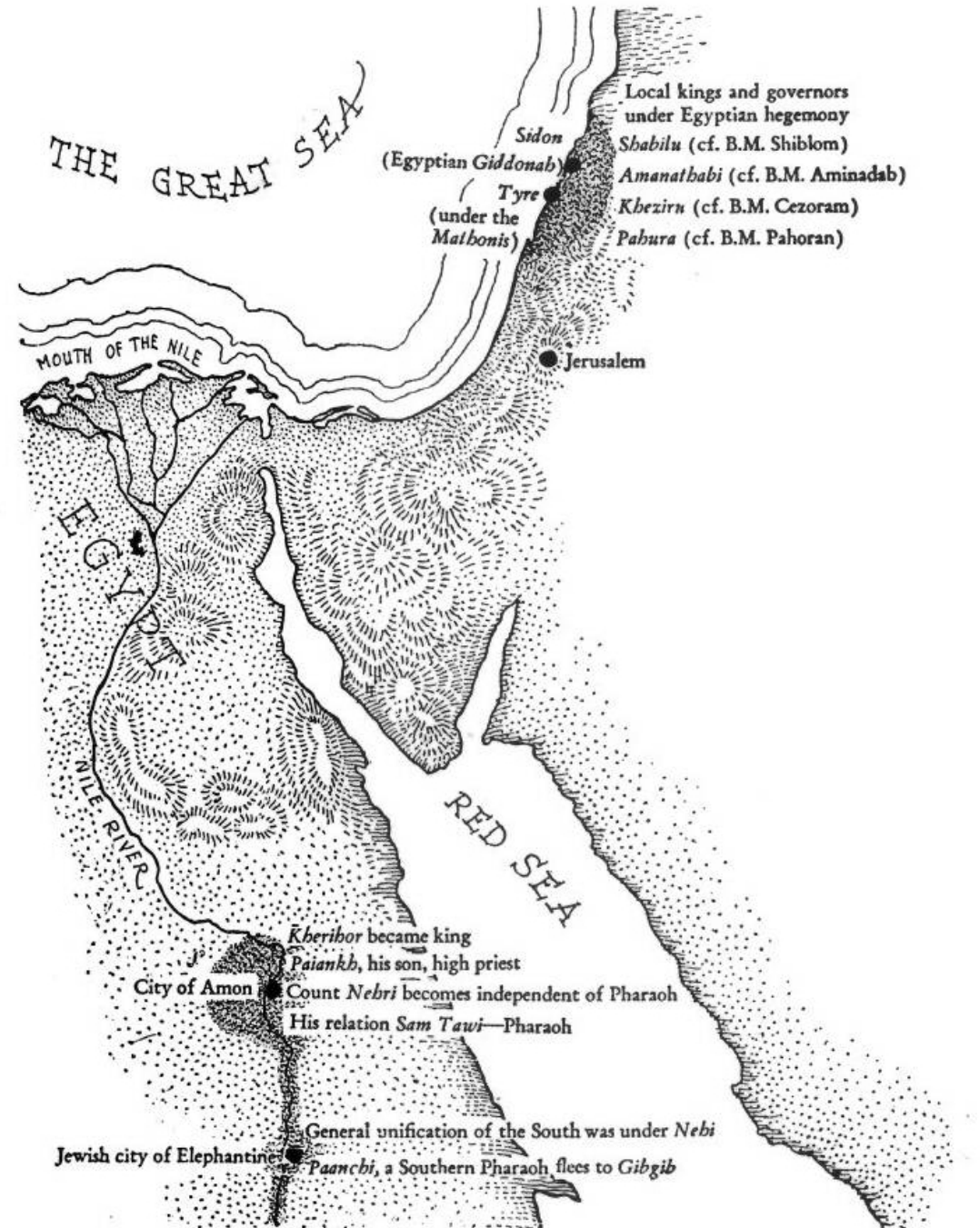
Politics and Egyptian Writing

- Egypt (the commercial power) and Babylonia (the military power) were heading for a showdown and the elite of Jerusalem were wanting to cast in their lots with Egypt. And Jeremiah (46:11-26) was warning against the over-fondness for the Egyptian prosperity. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert* (8-9)
- The reason Lehi would have spoken and written in Egyptian is that it was the language of money and of merchants. Many in Israel went to train in Egypt. Lehi surely was one of these.
- The ties between Egypt and Israel was strong.
- “It was the Egyptian cultural heritage rather than her government that was all-powerful.” Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert* (11)
- “behold, are not the Ethiopian, the Syrian, and all foreigners alike instructed in the language of Egypt?” Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert* (11) quoting Meyer
- “Lehi was a very rich Jew; he was proud of his Egyptian education, spoke and wrote Egyptian, and insisted on his sons learning the language.” Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert* (11-12)

Mosiah 1:4 For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings, and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God, even down to this present time.

Politics and Egyptian Writing

- The Egyptians were the power of commerce on Phoenician galleys - most trade passing through Sidon.(8)
- Jewish soldiers and merchants were at home in upper Egypt Nibley, Lehi in the Desert (10)



Idiosyncrasies of the Book of Mormon that give insight

- **8** And it came to pass that he called the name of the river, Laman, and it emptied into the Red Sea; and the valley was in the borders near the mouth thereof.
- **9** And when my father saw that the waters of the river emptied into the fountain of the Red Sea, he spake unto Laman, saying: O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness!
- **10** And he also spake unto Lemuel: **O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast**, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord!
- **11** Now this he spake because of the stiffneckedness of Laman and Lemuel; for behold they did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a visionary man, and had led them out of the land of Jerusalem, to leave the land of their inheritance, and their gold, and their silver, and their precious things, to perish in the wilderness. And this they said he had done because of the foolish imaginations of his heart.
- **12** And thus Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them.
- **13** Neither did they believe that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets. And they were like unto the Jews who were at Jerusalem, who sought to take away the life of my father.
- **14** And it came to pass that my father did speak unto them in the valley of Lemuel, with power, being filled with the Spirit, until their frames did shake before him. And he did confound them, that they durst not utter against him; wherefore, they did as he commanded them.
- **15 And my father dwelt in a tent.**
- **16** And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers.
- (See also 2 Nephi 4:32 – Nephi’s prayer: “. . . that I may walk in the low valley . . .” (instead of high roads like we’d say))

Idiosyncrasies of the Book of Mormon that give insight

[Alma 13:1](#) ...again, my brethren, **I would cite your minds forward** to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children; and I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the...

Cite your minds forward to history. The ancient Jews, as did many cultures, considered the past in front of us (forward) because we could see it, while the future was behind us (back) because we could not.

Forward as Past

An ancient Jewish and Cossack poem in the book “Two of Time: Time and Space in Jewish Modernisms” by Jordan Finkin the man named Elyokim says:

And his eyes wandered forward ---

Forward through the passage of generations which sprang up and passed away like smoke

Here, upon the steppe...And he remembered the days of the Khazars:

Here was a Jewish kingdom, men strong and stern,

Horses of the steppe, spear and bow, shield and lances.

Finkin, a Jewish (nonLDS) scholar says, “forward means into the past!”

The greatest criticism Joseph initially received was that the record was on plates.

How common was it to write on metal plates?

Gold plates



In the time of Joseph Smith, no metal plates were really heard of. However, in Peru, the temple in Cusco was full of such plates which it was well known that the Spaniards melted to send back to Spain.

In modern times discovery of such plates is plentiful. Some of the most famous include:

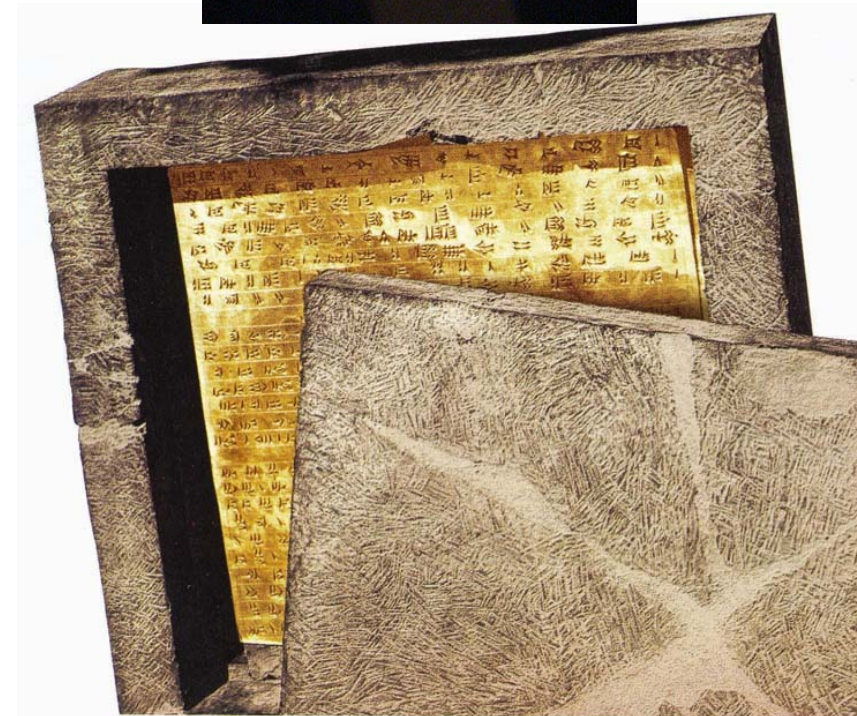
Etruscan Gold Book (top right)

Gold plates of King Darius (Bottom right)

Copper scroll (part of dead sea scrolls) (top)

Pyrgi Gold Tablets

In temple of Peru according to guide.



Why Was Lehi 8 Years In The Wilderness?

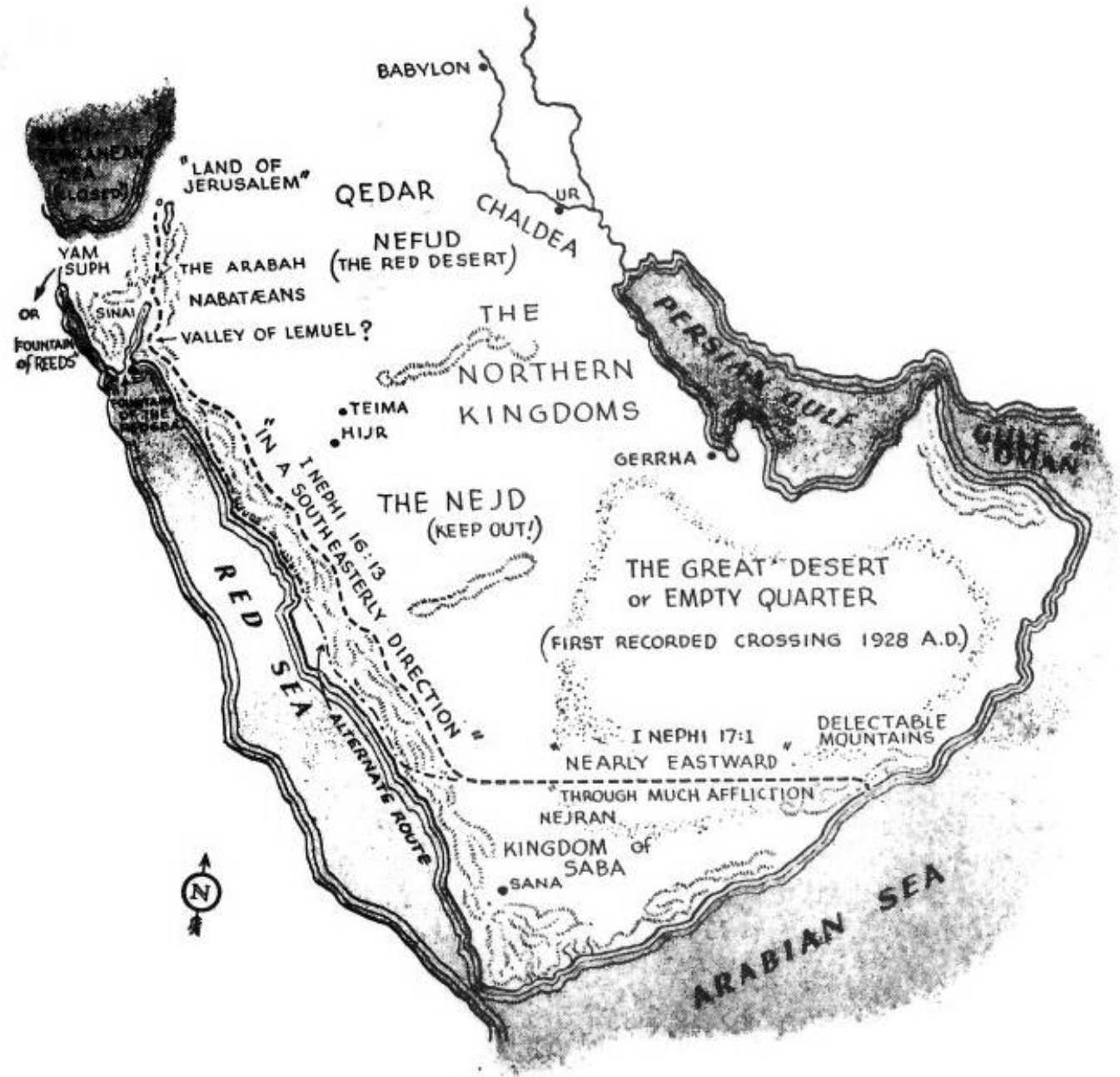
Could it be that the travel took that long?

Transportation of that Day

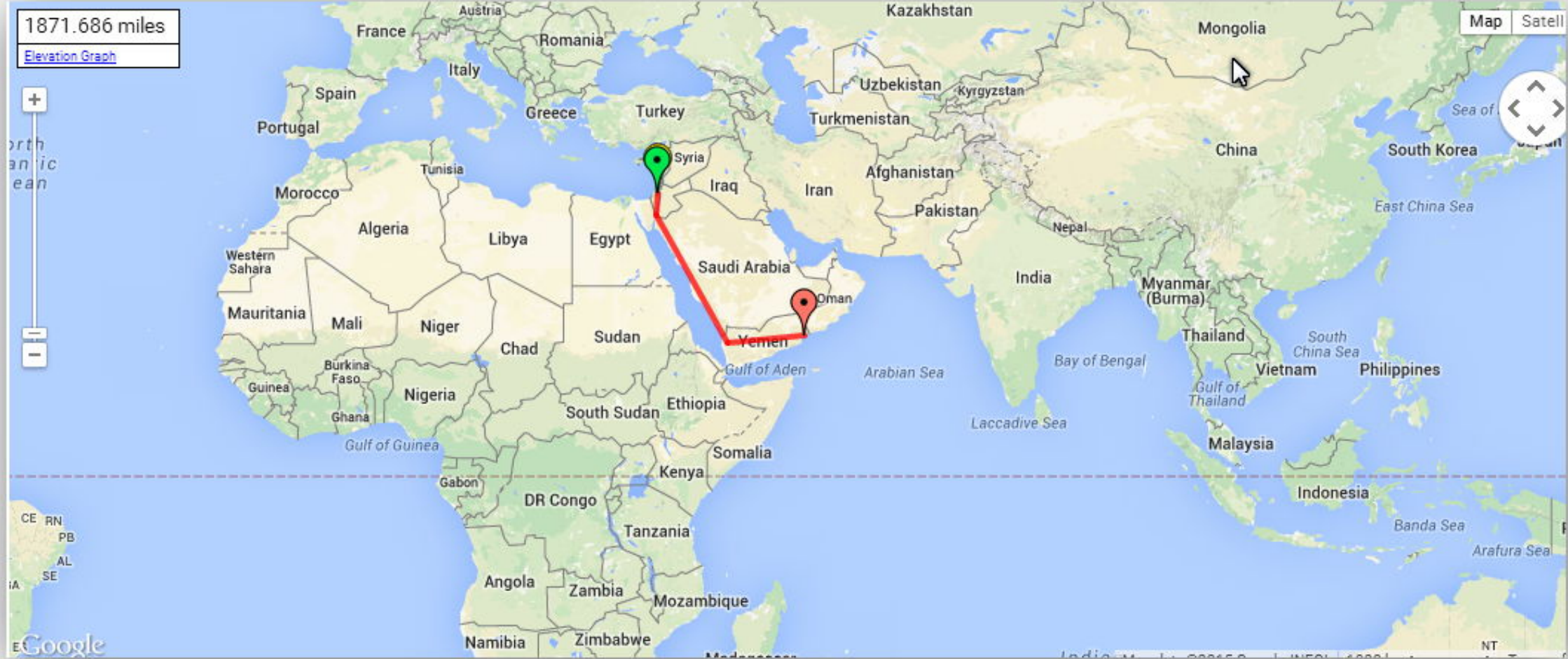
Means of Travel	Distances	Examples
Walking	about 20 miles per day	Peter walks 40 miles from Joppa to Caesarea in two days (Acts 10.23-25)
Camels	As a pack animal, a camel can carry as much as 1,000 lbs. and travel almost 30 miles per day. As a saddle animal, a camel can take its rider as far as 100 miles a day.	An Ishmaelite camel caravan takes spices from Gilead to Egypt (Gen 37.25). Rebekah and her traveling companions get on camels and leave with Abraham's servant (Gen 24.61).
Donkeys	About 20 miles per day. Donkeys were used for transporting goods, and were not used for riding except by women, children, or those too weak to walk	The "Good Samaritan" uses his donkey to transport the man wounded by thieves (Luke 10.34).
Horses	From 25 to 35 miles per day. If people changed horses throughout the day, they could travel greater distances.	With a change of horses at Antipatris, Paul is taken by military escort from Jerusalem to Caesarea, approx. 60 miles, in two days (Acts 23.23-31).

Lehi's Travel Through Wilderness

- Lehi traveled South – South east until Nephi broke his bow then Nephi says they turned east.
- The Prophet Joseph said that was at the 19th parallel. (John A Widtsoe, "Is Book of Mormon Geography Known?", IE 53 (1950): 547 – Also "Lehi In the Desert" P. 150
- Note that Hugh Nibley had already calculated this based on the Book of Mormon, and culture and geography before he found Elder Widtsoe's article. Nibley knew that if a different route were taken, Lehi would have run into trouble for crossing tribal lands of dangerous tribes.



Lehi's Distance Traveled (by mappedometer.com) Almost 1900 Miles



Note:

1900/20 is approximately
95 days of travel.

So, why was Lehi 8 years in the wilderness

One explanation might be Alma 37:41-44 which indicates because of lack of faith the Liahona would quit working and they would have to wait or wander the wrong way on their own.

- **38** And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director—or our fathers called it Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it.
- **40** And it did work for them according to their faith in God; therefore, if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done; therefore they had this miracle, and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God, day by day.
- **41** Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means it did show unto them marvelous works. They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey;
- **42** Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions.
- **43** And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass (now these things were temporal) they did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual.

How long are we in our own wildernesses.

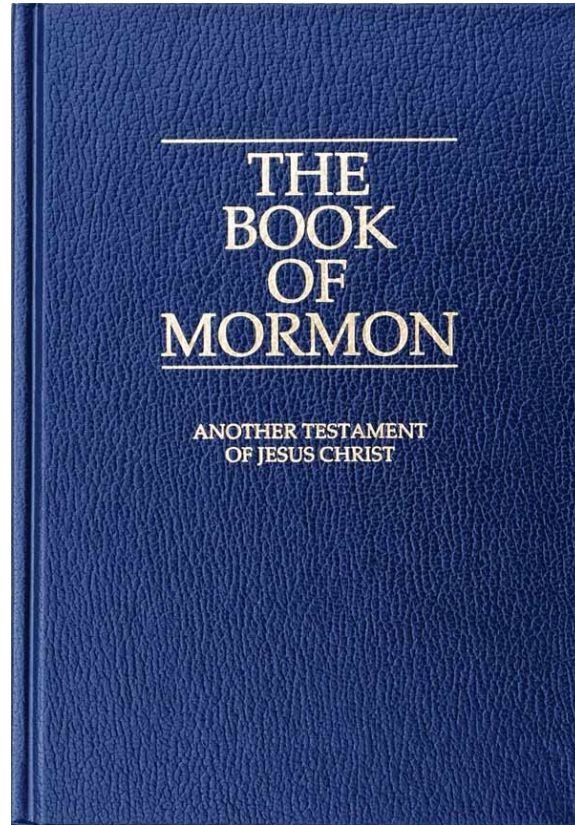
End of main presentation

“Keep the fire of your testimony of the restored gospel and your witness of our Redeemer burning so brightly that our children can warm their hands by the fire of your faith.” -

President Boyd K. Packer,
"The Golden Years"



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Extra if time

See slides on Kontiki.

References

Nibley, H. (1988) Lehi in the desert. The world of the Jaredites. There were Jaredites. Salt Lake City, Utah. Deseret Book.