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### Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*

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**Title**

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**Abstract** Review of *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon* (1989), by Joseph L. Allen.

**Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*. Orem, UT: S.A. Publishers, 1989. ix + 406 pp., including maps and illustrations; with subject index. \$24.95.**

Reviewed by Michael J. Preece

It seems basic to acknowledge at the outset of this review that any book which proposes to show where the events in the Book of Mormon story took place is on shaky ground by the very nature of its subject. In this area we obviously operate without a gold standard. No mortal really knows for certain where the book's events actually happened, nor can we know without some future revelation on the subject. The only available criteria by which we may judge and evaluate any proposed setting for the Book of Mormon are the geographical clues contained in the text of the book itself, correlated with currently available scientific archaeological and geographic information. Beyond these, we have only our intuition—which is fallible at best. This is not to say that such books should not be written. A real contribution to our feeling for the Book of Mormon may be made by placing it in its geographic setting. In the Church we are committed to absolute authenticity of the book. It is a book about real people who lived and died in a finite setting. As we come to know more about that setting, our love for the book can only increase.

I am by trade a physician/cardiologist and in every sense an amateur student of Book of Mormon geography. I have traveled on only one occasion to Mesoamerica with Dr. Allen and Dr. John L. Sorenson (from whom, among others, Dr. Allen draws heavily at significant points). In all, Dr. Allen has made more than 130 trips to this area. How then might I presume to review his book critically? For what they may be worth, I will try to give an honest student's reactions to an experienced author's writings.

Dr. Allen's general thesis is that the events recorded in the Book of Mormon occurred in the geographic area today called Mesoamerica. He bases this proposal on three major arguments: (1) Scholars have determined that the only place on the American continent where a written language was in use during the time period in which the Book of Mormon history occurred was in Mesoamerica. It is in this area that the calendar system and the written language of the Americas had their origins. (2)

Archaeologists have determined that the vast majority of discovered archaeological sites dating to the time period of the Book of Mormon are located in Mesoamerica. (3) The oral traditions, the cultural patterns, and the written history of Mesoamerica contain many interesting parallels with the writings in the Book of Mormon. I will take each of the book's chapters in turn, briefly review its content, and comment on my impressions.

Chapter 1, which is the book's introduction, contains a miscellany of introductory information. A few statements made here left me wanting to discuss them with the author. I was left hoping that a more thorough discussion of each would be provided later in the book. Some examples include: (1) "The spoken language of the Jaredites was probably spoken by both Mulekites and Nephites. When Lehi's colony, as well as Mulek's colony, arrived in the Promised Land, the Jaredites constituted a high majority. Both the Nephites and the Mulekites lived simultaneously with the Jaredites for approximately 200 years to 300 years, after which the Jaredite kingdom fell" (p. 8). Did not both the Mulekites and the Nephites bring to the Western Hemisphere their own language from Palestine, presumably Hebrew? When Mosiah and his Nephite followers discovered the Mulekites in the land of Zarahemla, their spoken language had evolved considerably along different lines, and the two peoples were unable to understand one another. Is it really possible to know the extent to which the Jaredite language influenced that of the Mulekites or later the Nephites? Also, isn't it likely that the culture of the remnants of the Jaredites which survived their great devastating battles would have some lingering influence on the Mulekites and Nephites? Would this influence be expected to cease suddenly at any point in time? (2) Under the heading "Summary of Moroni's life," Allen states that between the years A.D. 400 and 421 Moroni "wandered for 21 years from [his] homeland to New York" (p. 9). Aren't there other possible explanations for the plates' finding their way from Mesoamerica to New York? (3) "We must take the Book of Mormon at face value. To alter its directions, as some current literature suggests, or to demand unbelievable distances, as tradition outlines, is unacceptable" (p. 10). It is my understanding that the issue of directions in the Book of Mormon is not a simple one. Doesn't this issue demand a little consideration and open discussion rather than simply brushing other options aside with this rather dogmatic and simplistic statement? (4) "The

Lamanite culture corresponds with the Classic Maya (200 A.D.-900 A.D.)—suggesting that the largest portion of the Pre-Classic Maya (600 B.C.-200 A.D.) living south and east of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec may have been Lamanites” (p. 6). Is it really an established conclusion that all of the people of that part of Mesoamerica during those years were involved, directly or indirectly, in the Book of Mormon story? How dominant and pervasive in the land were the people of the Book of Mormon? Could there not have been other significant groups of people in the area who do not figure into the Book of Mormon account?

Chapter 2, “Looking at Dates,” provides interesting information on chronological matters. Notable was the interesting defense offered, based on a combination of the Mayan calendar and the writings of the sixteenth-century Spanish writer Ixtlilxochitl, of the dates: 3114 B.C.—the Great Flood; 2700 B.C.—the arrival of the Jaredites in the New World; 1300-1200 B.C.—the events in chapter 5 of the book of Ether.

The assumption is made that the Jaredites were the first settlers in the New World. Is the matter really that simple? Is there, for example, good evidence that the land was pristine and uninhabited before 2700 B.C.? And are there compelling data to indicate that all of the Mesoamerican people in the centuries that followed 2700 B.C. were purely of a single lineage and culture?

Dr. Allen finds the date of Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem to be problematic. A review of 1 Nephi 1:4 and subsequent verses suggests that the departure was during or shortly after the “first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah.” Biblical scholars have dated Zedekiah’s appointment to the throne as occurring in 597 B.C. Why is this a problem? Because Dr. Allen’s review of the history of Jerusalem at the time indicates that by that date Babylon had already ransacked Judah and carried off much of her treasure and many of her most capable people. Hence, in 597 B.C. it would hardly have been necessary for Lehi to prophesy of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, as all in Jerusalem would already have experienced much devastation and would not have to be warned. His solution is to suggest that a more appropriate date for Lehi’s departure is 600 B.C. He explains 1 Nephi 1:4 by suggesting that “Zedekiah” is a title and not a specific name, and that Josiah’s son Jehoiakim, who was king of Judah in 600 B.C. was perhaps referred to by this title in 1 Nephi 1:4.

Dr. Allen then struggles to explain the “six-hundred year prophecies in the Book of Mormon. There are actually several

references in the Book of Mormon that prophesy that Jesus would be born six hundred years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem. See 1 Nephi 10:4; 19:8; 2 Nephi 25:19; and 3 Nephi 1:1, 13. Even starting at 600 B.C., rather than 597 B.C., it is difficult to make the numbers come out since Christ's birth is most commonly held to have occurred prior to 4 B.C., the date of the death of Herod the Great. Is the time span "six hundred years" mentioned in the Book of Mormon intended in a literal and specific sense or in more general terms? Dr. Allen believes it is to be interpreted literally, while many might be comfortable with a more liberal interpretation. Thus, he concludes that either Christ was born in 1 B.C. or that the "six hundred years" were years according to the Mayan calendar which each contained 360 days rather than 365.

I had some trouble following the reasoning on pages 26-27 which led to the conclusion that the Jaredite people (Olmecs) were destroyed, presumably to the point of extinction, in about 350 B.C. First of all, it would seem that the great final battles of the Jaredites would not necessarily coincide with the extinction of the entire Jaredite culture. Their warriors were destroyed, but what of their women, children, and men of ages too old or too young to fight? It does not seem likely that a well-established nation with deep roots would simply disappear suddenly. I have always assumed that the early "Mulekites," shortly after their arrival in the "land northward," discovered Coriantumr, a wounded Jaredite leader who lived with them nine months before he died. Perhaps the Mulekites did encounter Coriantumr two and one half centuries after their arrival, but I find nothing in the reasons listed on pages 26 and 27 to compel me to think that they did.

On page 27, in the second paragraph, a correlation is attempted between the first Mosiah's leading the group of people from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla and the archaeological development of Monte Alban. This correlation would be difficult to make since Monte Alban is located well above the narrow neck of land in the "land northward" and, according to our view, Zarahemla is located below the narrow neck in the Chiapas depression. This paragraph assumes that Mosiah's Nephites also colonized a land some three hundred miles to the north of Zarahemla shortly after settling in Zarahemla, which is of course possible.

Dr. Allen's discussion of the possible date of Christ's resurrection and his appearance to the Nephites on pages 27 and

28 is interesting, but hard to follow probably because of the introduction, without adequate background explanation, of the concepts of the "Codex Nuttall" and the calendar dates of "6 Rabbit" and "2 Earthquake."

In paragraph 7 of page 28, Dr. Allen describes a very interesting correlation between the archaeological picture in Mesoamerica and the happenings in the Book of Mormon in the period of Nephite apostasy, A.D. 200 to 350. He suggests that the Gadianton robbers may have had control of the Teotihuacan (Mexico City) area, but he does so without any substantiation.

On pages 36 and 37 (chapter 3, "And Then It Came to Pass"), Dr. Allen asserts that the language spoken by the Nephites led by the first Mosiah and that of the Mulekites in the land of Zarahemla "both . . . had a Jaredite base." The language considerations in the Book of Mormon are obviously complex. It seems reasonable to think that the Mulekites' spoken language might well have been influenced by the language of the Jaredites, but it is not clear at all how the language of the Nephites at that point would have been similarly affected.

On page 40, during a discussion of the proper name "Hermounts," Dr. Allen discusses the term's possible meaning and hypothesizes as follows: "Since the term 'Hermounts' is mentioned in reference to both wilderness and wild and ravenous beasts, we can hypothesize that 'mounts' equates to wilderness and 'her' is equal to wild and ravenous beasts." But if there is no real linguistic evidence to suggest the meaning of the term "Hermounts," it is not useful to "hypothesize" in this manner.

Chapter 4, "Archaeology in Mesoamerica," is a useful summary of the current archaeological sites and the ancient cultures which might possibly have played significant roles in the Book of Mormon story. Dr. Allen suggests a number of correlations between ancient cultures well known in scientific archaeological circles and Book of Mormon peoples: (1) The Olmec culture corresponds with the Jaredites. (2) The Pre-Classic or more agrarian Mayan correlates with the Lamanites and Nephites of 600 B.C. to A.D. 200. (3) The Classic Mayan culture is likely the post Book of Mormon Lamanite culture in which the priests controlled virtually every aspect of the people's lives. (4) The Zapotecs might be the Mulekites, and those who settled and built up the area of Teotihuacan parallel the migration cultures that traveled to the land northward in 50 B.C. (5) The Izapa culture might fit with the Nephites who remained near the

Pacific coastal plain near the land of first inheritance or the point of disembarkation of Lehi and his traveling group.

Chapter 5, "The Olmec/Jaredite Culture," contains Dr. Allen's defense of the idea that the people known today to archaeologists as the Olmecs were the original inhabitants of the New World and were likely the Jaredites of the Book of Mormon. He provides an interesting outline of the evolution of scientific thought regarding the Olmecs and provides several compelling correlations between the Olmecs and the Jaredites. The heartland of the Olmecs was along the gulf coast of Mexico in the states of Veracruz and Tabasco.

It is particularly interesting to learn that a sixteenth-century historian Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl wrote of a group of people who came from the great tower. They were led to a good and fertile land that today is called Mexico. Based on the discovery of their bones, he refers to these people as giants, as apparently they were of unusually large bony structure.

In chapter 6, "The Maya/Lamanite Culture," Dr. Allen's premise is that the Pre-Classic and Early Classic Mayans (570 B.C. to A.D. 420) were, in reality, the same people as the Lamanites, Nephites, and Mulekites in the Book of Mormon. Numerous correlations are drawn between the Book of Mormon text and what archaeologists have taught us about the Mayans.

Located north and west of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (generally held to be the narrow neck of land) is the Oaxaca Valley, dominated anciently by a city where the archaeological site of Monte Alban is now located. The Zapotec Indian civilization had its beginnings here in about 500 B.C. Dr. Allen describes several reasons why it is reasonable to conclude that the Zapotecs were a part of the Mulekite culture (chapter 7, "The Zapotec/Mulekite Culture"). These reasons include: (1) There is a similarity of word comparisons between Hebrew and the Zapotec languages. (2) Monte Alban period I dated to the Mulekite time period. (3) Monte Alban is located in the same area where the early Mulekites possibly lived. (4) A number of elements in the Monte Alban culture appear to be Jewish in origin. (5) The Zapotecs of Monte Alban were influenced by the Olmecs of the Gulf Coast in much the same manner in which he believes the early Mulekites were influenced by the late Jaredites. (6) A small group of conquerors came from Guatemala and Chiapas and superimposed their power over the inhabitants of Monte Alban at the same time that Mosiah led a small group of



Nephites to the land of Zarahemla and became king over both Nephites and Mulekites who lived in the area.

The Book of Mormon text often speaks of a mysterious land. It may be referred to as the "land which was northward" (Alma 63:4) or simply the "land northward" (Alma 63:5-8, 10; Helaman 3:3-4, 7, 10-11). In another place it is referred to as the "northernmost part of the land" (3 Nephi 7:12). It is possible that this land is in the same location as the "great city of Jacobugath" (3 Nephi 9:9). Dr. Allen suggests that this mysterious land might be the ancient city of Teotihuacan, built in the valley of Mexico, near where Mexico City lies today (chapter 8, "The Teotihuacan Culture"). The ancient culture which inhabited this city had its beginnings about 150 B.C. and fell about A.D. 750. The circumstantial evidence that Teotihuacan may indeed have been the "land northward" includes the fact that between 55 B.C. and A.D. 29, the Book of Mormon mentions several migrations into this land where large bodies of water were found. This is the same period when Teotihuacan was experiencing a high growth rate. The valley of Mexico contained many lakes, and in fact Mexico City is built on a dry lake bed. The Book of Mormon speaks of the people in the land northward building houses out of cement because timber was scarce in the land (Helaman 3:7, 10-11). The archaeological site of Teotihuacan contains many buildings made of cement, and timber is indeed scarce in the valley of Mexico.

Obviously not all of the references in the Book of Mormon to the "land northward" necessarily referred to the same, or indeed, to any specific place, since all territory "north" of the narrow neck of land might legitimately be called by that name.

In speculating as to the destination of Hagoth's ships which were launched into the "west sea, by the narrow neck of land" (Alma 63:50-56), Dr. Allen states: "Landing near Acapulco, the people would have then migrated inland to Mexico City and the surrounding areas" (page 105). It would seem that much is presumed here, and the author owes the reader more reasons for his assumptions.

In writing of the Jaredites, Moroni spoke of "secret combinations" that were responsible for the destruction of both the Jaredites and the Nephites (Ether 8:18, 21-22). Dr. Allen points out that in A.D. 350 the government of Teotihuacan was formed by a combination of merchants, priests, and military men. He then implies that this "combination" government may have been the "secret combinations" of the later Nephite period.

Intuitively, however, I believe we would rather see the Book of Mormon's secret combinations as clandestine associations which sought to do evil rather than as a legitimate government resulting from the "combination" of different elements of society.

I found chapter 9, "The Izapa Culture," to be one of the most interesting chapters in the book. Dr. Allen describes the ancient archaeological site of Izapa, near the current city of Tapachula, Mexico. Possible relevance of this site to the Book of Mormon is discussed. A helpful section describes the entire history of the archaeological exploration of this site from 1935 to the 1980s, including the role played by the Church-sponsored New World Archaeological Foundation. The chapter also contains a well-illustrated and thorough discussion of the stone monument discovered there called "Stela 5."

Izapa is located in the western coastal plain or "Pacific corridor" of Mesoamerica. It is at the southernmost extremity of Mexico near the Guatemala border. Dr. Allen suggests that it may have been a Nephite city from the time of Lehi's landing to about A.D. 350. There has been intense interest in the Church concerning the possibility that Stela 5, the so-called "tree of life stone," might have been created to illustrate the vision of the tree of life experienced by both Lehi and Nephi (1 Nephi 8, 11, 12). A detailed defense of this proposition is provided. Whether or not the creators of this stone carving had in mind anything to do with Lehi's vision will likely never be known for certain, but it is a fascinating topic for consideration.

One question that occurs in the mind of the reader of this chapter is: How did a city with the vulnerable location of this one maintain its "Nephite" character over the years of the Book of Mormon story? If it was, as Dr. Allen suggests, possibly the land of first inheritance, or the original settlement established by Lehi and his group, one might have expected it to lose its "Nephite" identity as soon as Nephi and his followers were forced to flee from the hostile threats of his "Lamanite" brothers. Later on in the Book of Mormon, it is likely that the Pacific corridor was used by hostile Lamanites as a route by which they traveled from the land of Nephi in the south to Zarahemla in the north to attack the Nephites, in Ammonihah for example (Alma 16:2-3). It would seem that the city must have had to be extraordinarily well defended to maintain its Nephite qualities during this period, given its exposed setting.

Chapter 10 introduces the section of the book called "Traditions," which summarizes the written histories, cultural

patterns, and oral traditions of Mesoamerica, all of which show many interesting parallels with the Book of Mormon text. Chapter 10, "The Customs of the People," specifically summarizes the types of written materials available to us today from which we can learn of these ancient Mesoamerican histories, cultural patterns, and traditions. These include

1. The codices or books written by priests before the Spanish conquest. Most of these were destroyed by Catholic priests after the conquest. Only five major codices have survived, including the Dresden Codex, the Paris Codex, the Madrid Codex, the Grolier Codex, and the Nuttall Codex.

2. Native documents written by Mesoamerican natives after the conquest probably in their native tongues and using as sources either their memories or ancient documents. These include the *Popol Vuh*, written by the Quiche Mayans of Guatemala and containing their mythological description of the creation; the Annals of the Cakchiquels which contain the native description of the Spanish Conquest; the Title of the Lords of Totonicapan; and the Books of Chilam Balam.

3. The Spanish Chronicles or the writings of the post-conquest Catholic clergy of Spanish descent. These chroniclers include Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, Fray Bernardino de Sahagun, Bishop Diego de Landa, Fray Juan de Torquemada, Father Diego Duran, San Bartolome de las Casas, and Bernal Diaz del Castillo.

The most prolific writer on early Mexican history was one of the Spanish chroniclers, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl (A.D. 1568-1648). Chapter 11 contains Dr. Allen's English translation of a part of Ixtlilxochitl's writings, which covers the period of time from the great tower to about A.D. 439. He points out a number of similarities between this chronicler's writings and the Book of Mormon text. These include: (1) They both speak of the first civilization coming from the great tower at the time of the confusion of tongues. (2) They both speak of a white god who was born of a virgin and who ascended to heaven after teaching his people. (3) They both record the date of a great destruction occurring in the first month of the 34th year, or at the death of Christ. (4) They both use the same terminology in describing the manner in which cities were named. Ixtlilxochitl says, "it was their custom to name it [a large city or a small village] according to the first king or leader who possessed the land" (see the parallel wording in Alma 8:7). (5) They both speak of three distinct civilizations that predate the coming of

Christ. These include the Quinametzin, or the giants which came forth from the great tower and which Dr. Allen thinks might be the Jaredites, or the Mesoamerican Olmecs. Secondly there were the Tultecas, wise men who kept records and who worshipped a god they called Quetzalcoatl. These might be the Nephites. Finally there are the Chichimecatl which may be the same people whom the Book of Mormon calls Lamanites. (6) They both record the destruction of the first civilization, who lived in the northern lands, prior to the time of Christ. (7) They both speak of a nation whose principal area meant "land of abundance" or "bountiful."

Fray Bernardino de Sahagun was a sixteenth-century Spanish priest, and Dr. Allen (chapter 12) sees in his writings many applications to the Book of Mormon. In order for them to be applicable, however, some important assumptions must be made. First the "Tultecas" or "Toltecas" of Sahagun must be the same as the Nephites; "Quetzalcoatl" must be Christ; and "Tula" must be the land of Bountiful. Once these assumptions are made, and it may be a bit presumptuous to do so, we may read in Sahagun's writings such things as:

The Tolteca . . . are wise, learned, experienced. . . . They made what was their temple; its name was "house of beams." Today it stands; it exists, considering that it is indestructible, for it is of rock, or stone. . . . Their houses [are] beautiful, tiled in mosaics, smoothed, stuccoed, very marvelous. . . . The house of Quetzalcoatl, which was his place of worship, stood in the water; a large river passed by it; the river which passed by Tula. . . . They invented the art of medicine. . . . These Tolteca were very wise; they were thinkers, for they originated the year count [calendar]. . . . And they understood well the movements of the heavens; their orbits they learned from the stars [see Helaman 12:15]. . . . Their clothing was . . . the blue knotted cape; their sandals were painted blue, light blue, sky blue. . . . They were tall; they were larger. . . . They were devout. Only one was their God. . . . And they had very great faith in . . . Quetzalcoatl and were very obedient, very devout, and very reverent; for all obeyed, all had faith in Quetzalcoatl when he led them from Tula. He caused all to move, to depart, even

though they were settled there, even though very marvelous were the temples . . . situated at Tula.

Dr. Allen also feels that Sahagun may have written of the council in heaven wherein Jesus Christ was selected to be Savior of the world:

It is told that when yet all was in darkness, when yet no sun had shone and no dawn had broken—it is said—the gods gathered themselves together and took counsel among themselves: Come higher, O gods! Who will carry the burden? . . . And upon this, one of them who was there spoke: Tecuciztecatl presented himself. He said: “O gods, I shall be the one.” And again the gods spoke: “(and) who else?” . . . None dared; no one else came forward. Everyone was afraid; they all drew back. And now present was one man, Nanauatzin; he stood there listening among the others to that which was discussed. Then the gods called to this one. They said to him: “Thou shalt be the one, O Nanauatzin.”

Diego de Landa (in chapter 13) was the Catholic bishop of the Yucatan during the latter part of the sixteenth century. The Yucatan was part of the Mayan culture. Among Latter-day Saint investigators, the Mayans have generally been felt to be the apostate remnants of the Lamanite culture. De Landa's historical writings of the Yucatan, therefore, might be expected to contain some tidbits of information on the cultural patterns of this remnant. A few such tidbits are provided.

Any amateur student who has tried to read about the Mesoamerican myth or legend of Quetzalcoatl (chapter 14, “The White God Quetzalcoatl”) has found it a frustrating and confusing exercise. Dr. Allen believes that the legend of Quetzalcoatl originated with the visit of Jesus Christ to Mesoamerica, but he also explains the difficulties in trying to correlate the legend of Quetzalcoatl with Jesus Christ. He points out that subsequent to Christ's visit, scores of individuals, both mythological and real, were given the name or title of Quetzalcoatl. Notably a tenth-century leader and folk hero named Topiltzin took upon himself the name or title of Quetzalcoatl. Indeed most written material about Quetzalcoatl today refers to this tenth-century version. Furthermore, with the passage of time, many pagan attributes have become associated with Quetzalcoatl.

Dr. Allen does list and reference several characteristics of Quetzalcoatl found in early historical writings that seem to parallel the characteristics of Christ: (1) He was recognized as creator of all things. (2) He was born of a virgin. (3) He is described as being white and wearing a white robe. (4) He performed miracles. (5) He taught the ordinance of baptism. (6) He prophesied of future events. (7) He was a universal God in Mesoamerica as opposed to being recognized as merely a local god. (8) A great destruction was associated with him at one point in his life. (9) The cross was a symbol of Quetzalcoatl. (10) He sent out disciples to preach his word. (11) He promised he would come a second time. (12) A new star is associated with him. (13) The children of Quetzalcoatl will become lords and heirs of the earth. It seems, however, that this discussion of Quetzalcoatl might have been better organized to flow more logically from a pedagogical standpoint.

In chapter 15, "Cultural Patterns," Dr. Allen looks at several current and historical cultural features or patterns in Mesoamerica and compares them with those in the Book of Mormon. He suggests as he begins the chapter that as a traveler visits some of the small villages in southern Mexico today, he "gets the feeling that things have not changed very much over the last 2,000 years." The cultural features he treats make up a pertinent list including: astronomy, cement, climate, clothes, corn (grains), directions, food, horses, joy, liquor, metal, medicine, metal (iron), money, serpents, stone boxes, and weapons.

In chapter 16, "A Survey of Geography," the evolution of thinking relative to Book of Mormon geography is summarized from its beginnings in the early days of the Church. The thinking has varied, and still does today, from a nihilistic approach, which believes any attempt to place the book's events in a specific setting is anathema, to the "traditional" approach, suggested early on by Orson Pratt, in which the land northward is North America, the narrow neck of land is the Isthmus of Panama, and the land southward is South America. Another major paradigm includes what Allen calls the "internal geographic map," which is a hypothetical map of topographic relationships and land masses without any attempt to place them on any existing specific map. Finally, he concludes that the majority of current writers and scholars favor a limited setting in Mesoamerica as the most likely location.

In one paragraph on page 194 he fails to distinguish between the concepts of "narrow neck" of land and "narrow pass." This leads to a confusing comparison between different authors' ideas of these concepts.

In chapter 17, "An Exercise in Geography," Dr. Allen takes the geographic information in two segments of the Book of Mormon text (Alma 22:27-33 and Alma 50:7-15) and makes specific suggestions as to the locations in Mesoamerica of the land of Bountiful, the land of Zarahemla, the land of Nephi, and the cities by the east sea (Moroni and Lehi). The major difference between Dr. Allen's formulation and that of Dr. John L. Sorenson is made clear here. Dr. Allen places the cities of Moroni and Lehi on the Caribbean coast of Belize. Thus the boundary between Zarahemla and Bountiful runs directly east to west, and Bountiful is a large land mass involving the southern part of the Yucatan Peninsula from Belize to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Dr. Sorenson, on the other hand, places the cities of Moroni and Lehi on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico just east of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The boundary between Zarahemla and Bountiful then runs almost north and south, and Bountiful is a narrow land just east of the Coatzacoalcos River in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Dr. Allen's concept of directions in the Book of Mormon is that north, south, east, and west are true compass directions, while Dr. Sorenson uses the concept of "Nephite north" in which east is toward the Gulf of Mexico, west is toward the Pacific coast, and north and south are appropriately modified to fit in between. Both seem to agree as to the location of the land of Desolation, just west of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

I must admit to a preexisting bias in favor of Dr. Sorenson's formulation. If one studies Dr. Allen's maps 17-6 and 17-7 on pages 203 and 204 respectively, one might see why I am uncomfortable with the location of Bountiful, especially because of the intimate relationship which it should have with the land of Desolation and the narrow pass leading to the land northward (Alma 22:30; 52:9). Also, it is difficult to correlate Dr. Allen's Bountiful with Hagoth and his ship building and with the narrow neck of land as described in Alma 63:5. Admittedly, though, it would be unwise for any investigator to reject either model and close his mind to ongoing dialogue.

Dr. Allen's premise in chapter 18 is that the land northward in the Book of Mormon is the land area northward from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, including the Mexican states

now known as Oaxaca, Veracruz, Puebla, and part of Tabasco. He further proposes that the land northward extended to the valley of Mexico where Mexico City is located. He justifies his premise by itemizing several points of compatibility between the Book of Mormon text and archaeological findings pertinent to this area. He then provides an apparently comprehensive listing of Book of Mormon verses that include a mention of the land northward, the land of Desolation, the land north, north, land which was northward, northerly, and northward. This scriptural listing seems a bit exhaustive and exhausting. Though it does provide a good deal of information about the land northward, this information must be gleaned from a large body of repetitious facts. Perhaps a more readable approach might have been to list pertinent points of information once and provide their scriptural references.

Chapter 19 is concerned with the land southward. Dr. Allen proposes that the land southward is the land located southward from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, including the Mexican states of Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatan, and Quintana Roo. He also includes the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Belize, and the northern tip of Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

We are introduced to the idea that Lehi's group, on their arrival in the Western Hemisphere, probably encountered "scantily clothed, sun-baked, dark-skinned natives living along the coast. . . . Most likely Laman and Lemuel, in their traditional jealousy of Nephi assumed the leadership of these natives. Thus began the great Lamanite (Maya) culture."

Among those investigators who have provided us their concepts of the layout of Book of Mormon cities there are, inevitably I think, some differences. One of the basic differences is the way in which the land southward is divided into the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla by the "narrow strip of wilderness." Here we learn that Dr. Allen places that dividing line in highland Guatemala, running east to west, from the area of the southern Yucatan, just south of Belize, to the Pacific coast near the town of Tapachula, Mexico. Zarahemla then is the entire Yucatan peninsula, the Usumacinta River valley, and the Chiapas depression. The land of Nephi is highland Guatemala and parts of El Salvador. The alternate concept, that espoused by John L. Sorenson, would orient the narrow strip of wilderness in a more north-to-south direction, located in highland Guatemala just south of its border with



Mexico. This dividing line would then extend south from the Gulf of Mexico near the combined deltas of the Usumacinta and Grijalva rivers. This formulation excludes the general area of the Yucatan as a part of the land of Zarahemla. As stated previously, this reviewer is uncomfortable with the long distance separating the city of Bountiful and the narrow neck of land in Dr. Allen's formulation. The scripture seems clear that the land of Bountiful with its capital city Bountiful is "northward," bordering on the land called Desolation (Alma 22:30-32). Dr. Allen suggests that "Bountiful," in addition to being a specific land and the name of that land's capital city, is also synonymous with the entire land southward (including the lands of Bountiful, Zarahemla, and Nephi). This third meaning of the term "Bountiful" seems unnecessary if one assumes that the land Bountiful is a limited area situated transversely across the narrow neck of land immediately southward of the "line" (likely a river) separating the land southward from the land of Desolation.

Though Dr. Allen favors the Chiapas depression as the site of the land of Zarahemla (and thus the Grijalva River as the river Sidon), he has not excluded the idea that Zarahemla might have been located in the Usumacinta valley—implying that the Usumacinta River is still in the running for the river Sidon.

In chapter 20, "Landing Sites," Dr. Allen speculates, marshalling textual evidence, as to the location of the disembarkation sites of the Jaredites, the Mulekites, and Lehi's colony. Little information is available to help us specifically locate these sites, especially that of the Jaredites, though some evidence does exist.

Most investigators feel that the ancient Olmec civilization (chapter 21, "The Voyage of the Jaredites"), whose population centered along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, were the Jaredites of the Book of Mormon. This doesn't necessarily mean that their landing site was on the Atlantic side, however, since they may have wandered many years before finally settling. Dr. Allen presents a helpful summary of the arguments for both an Atlantic crossing and those for a Pacific crossing. He favors the latter and summarizes the reasons for his conclusion.

Allen traces Lehi's journey from Jerusalem to Mesoamerica in chapter 22, "The Voyage of Lehi's Colony." He proposes the area of Tapachula, Mexico (the ancient ruins of Izapa), as a possible site for the "land of first inheritance."

Dr. Allen proposes in chapter 23 that the Mulekites disembarked near Panuco, which is near the present-day city of Tampico, Mexico. He presents a thorough and interesting discussion of all Book of Mormon references to the Mulekites, including the writings of sixteenth-century Mesoamerican historians which may refer to the Mulekites.

He suggests that the "king-men" of Alma 51:5 and 51:8 were Mulekites whose "attempts to establish kings may have been Mulekite (tribe of Judah) attempts to regain the glory of the olden days in Jerusalem." This conclusion seems unwarranted, especially since the people of Zarahemla, as they were discovered by Mosiah, were hardly people of "high birth" (Alma 51:8) likely to harbor an elitist mentality.

In chapter 24, "Things That Are Narrow," we learn that Dr. Allen regards the "narrow neck of land" as the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and believes that the "narrow pass" refers to the old King's Highway that runs north, paralleling the Coatzacoalcos River, from the Pacific coastal plain to the gulf coast and then north along the gulf coast. Others, such as John L. Sorenson, have suggested a more restricted definition of the "narrow pass." Actually Dr. Allen's and Dr. Sorenson's concepts of the narrow pass need not be regarded as altogether different. Allen suggests that the narrow pass is the full length of the King's Highway as it winds its way from the Pacific coast some 125 miles to near the Gulf of Mexico before turning parallel to the gulf coast to traverse the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Sorenson feels that the narrow pass is a short portion of this highway route running east and west from a point just west of the Coatzacoalcos River for a few miles to Acuyacan, Mexico.

In chapter 25, "Wilderness Areas," Allen defines "wilderness" as uninhabited areas. He reviews all references in the Book of Mormon text to the word "wilderness" with emphasis on plausible distances between major Book of Mormon sites. He includes an interesting archaeological description and illustration of defensive earthworks found near Tikal which might have been similar to those which Moroni caused to be built surrounding cities near the eastern seashore (Alma 49:2, 4, 19, 22; 50:1-4; 53:4-5). He again addresses the question of the location of the land and city of Bountiful. He proposes a location in the north of the Yucatan Peninsula near the Caribbean coast. He again struggles with Alma 22:32 and Alma 63:5, which indicate a contiguous relationship of the land Bountiful with the land of Desolation, the west sea, the narrow

neck of land, and the land northward. To solve this problem and maintain the northern Yucatan as a plausible site for the city of Bountiful, he reiterates the proposal that the term "Bountiful" is used not only for naming a city and a land but also a vast area extending from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to and including the Yucatan. He also suggests an alternate explanation, which is that there were two lands Bountiful—one on the Caribbean coast and one along the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Allen begins chapter 26, "Bodies of Water," with a discussion of the east sea and the west sea. The lay student of Book of Mormon geography can't help but be somewhat amused by the struggles that occur in this area. No one argues about the identification of the west sea. It is the Pacific Ocean even though the Pacific Ocean is located to the south of this area of Mesoamerica. The disagreements begin with the identity of the east sea. Dr. Allen and others believe that the east sea is the Caribbean, while John L. Sorenson thinks it is likely the Gulf of Mexico. Alma 22:32 as it is usually interpreted supports Dr. Sorenson's contention, since all investigators agree that the border between Desolation and Bountiful runs north to south across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec parallel to the Coatzacoalcos River. Intuitively one tends to interpret the verse as meaning that a well-conditioned Nephite could run from the east sea to the west sea along this border in a day and a half. The east sea would then have to be the Gulf of Mexico. Dr. Allen has an alternate explanation of this verse, though his explanation is frankly a bit confusing to me. After musing over his explanation, I think I finally understand it. Let me explain. The phrase in Alma 22:32, "from the east to the west sea" does not refer to a distance between two seas. Rather it refers to the distance from some specific inland point to the shore of the west sea. If we follow the boundary line between the lands of Desolation and Bountiful south from the Gulf of Mexico, we expect to come to some notable point along that common border. The exact identity of this point is the confusing part of Dr. Allen's explanation. He provides the explanation that this point is "Desolation's east boundary" which is not a point at all, but rather a line. If Dr. Allen's interpretation of this verse is correct, it would be fair to say that there is some ambiguity in this verse regarding the distance which the verse is trying to quantify. Also, assuming Dr. Allen's explanation is accurate, there is a bit of irony in all this. The direction which the Nephite would be traveling on this line is still referred to in the Book of Mormon

as east to west, which is certainly not in keeping with the compass. In another place, Dr. Allen makes a concession to the Gulf of Mexico's being the "sea . . . on the east" (Alma 50:34).

Also in chapter 26, Dr. Allen takes ten major bodies of water mentioned in the Book of Mormon and discusses plausible specific Mesoamerican sites for them. These include the west sea (Pacific Ocean); the east sea (the Caribbean); the waters of Mormon (Lake Atitlan); the waters of Sebus (no specific body of water suggested); a land of pure water (the village of Almolonga in the Department of Quetzaltenango); the river Sidon (even though he suggests both the Grijalva and Usumacinta rivers as possibilities, he defends only the Grijalva), the land of many waters (the gulf coast area near Villahermosa and the Tuxtla Mountains, north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec around the probable sites for the hill Cumorah and the hill Shim); the place where the sea divides the land (the Coatzacoalcos River); the waters of Ripliancum (the Papaloapan water basin); and the large bodies of water in the land northward (the lakes in the Valley of Mexico where Mexico City is now located).

Most of the emphasis in chapter 27, "Hills and Valleys," is given to Dr. Allen's selection of the Hill Vigia or the Cerro del Vigia (in Spanish, the "hill of the view") as the ancient hills Ramah and Cumorah. His explanation is thorough and instills a desire to visit the site.

Most of chapter 28, "The Land of Nephi," concerns itself with Dr. Allen's defense of the idea (first significantly advanced by John L. Sorenson) that the ancient archaeological site of Kaminaljuyu, located near Guatemala City, is the city of Nephi. Similarly in chapter 29, "The Land of Zarahemla," he mainly defends the idea that the land of Zarahemla was located in the Chiapas depression and that the city of Zarahemla is likely the archaeological site called Santa Rosa located on the west of the Grijalva River. Some of his other hypotheses were interesting and new ideas, at least to this reviewer, although many of his points have been gathered and borrowed wholesale from other sources. For example, he proposes that the ancient site of Monte Alban, located north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, was a Mulekite city between the years 500 and 200 B.C., a la Sorenson. Allen alone further proposes that Monte Alban became a Nephite city between 180 B.C. and A.D. 350. He suggests that one reason the Lamanites and Gadianton robbers wanted the Nephites destroyed is that the Nephites occupied a land area that lay between the land northward in the valley of

Mexico, controlled by the Gadianton band, and the land southward, controlled by the Lamanites. Thus the Nephites stood in the way of commercial and cultural exchange between these two larger nations.

There are remarkable correlations between the cultural characteristics of the Book of Mormon people during the period of apostasy beginning about A.D. 200 and the Mayans during their Early Classic period. These are outlined in chapter 30, "The Great Apostasy." Dr. Allen cites both Book of Mormon verses and archaeological records which provide evidence that both cultures showed the emergence of a ruling hereditary elite of vain and apostate priests who surrounded themselves with luxury and built buildings with impressive and massive exteriors but with little concern for the practical use of their interior spaces.

The final chapter, 31, concerns itself primarily with the growth of the Church in Mexico since the restoration of the gospel in 1830.

Dr. Allen has obviously made good use of a scriptural word search computer program. In analyzing various geographic topics he has sometimes used this program to review all pertinent Book of Mormon references to a word or to words pertinent to that topic. This is usually helpful though on occasion the lists of references seem overly long and redundant.

If the book has an overall weakness, I suggest that its pedagogy is sometimes inconsistent. It seems that some of the chapters are a bit more tedious reading than they need to be. One is occasionally cognizant of a good deal of repetition. Each chapter contains excellent and useful information, yet perhaps a bit more thought could have been given to the succinctness and logical flow with which the information is presented.

Some of the book's chapters are concluded with a section called "questions commonly asked." Questions are asked and then answered. Presumably these questions are the one's most frequently asked by those whom the author has conducted on tours. The questions were few and the answers brief. I did not often find these questions to be the ones I would like to ask.

I have one personal criterion by which I tend to judge a nonfiction book: How much of the author's "heart and soul" have been put into the book? In other words, how rigorous and dedicated an effort has gone into the production of the book. Using this criterion, I would have to give Dr. Allen's book high

marks. There is little question that this book reports his life's work to date.