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Abstract Review of *Lehi's Isle of Promise: A Scriptural Account with Word Definitions and a Commentary* (1989), by Arthur J. Kocherhans.

Arthur J. Kocherhans, *Lehi's Isle of Promise: A Scriptural Account with Word Definitions and a Commentary*. Fullerton, CA: Et Cetera, 1989. xv + 211 pp. \$14.95.

Reviewed by James H. Fleugel

Books that posit models for a Book of Mormon geography have increased in number substantially in the past twenty years or so. Although assuming a geography for the Nephite record is unnecessary when applying it as a tool of salvation, Latter-day Saints undoubtedly find it interesting to relate Book of Mormon place names with those of the modern world, not only as a bulwark against claims that the book cannot be literally true, but also as a guide to understanding the course of events in the narrative, just as Bible maps and gazetteers have been for generations. But, perhaps not surprisingly, Latter-day Saints who have written such books have come up with vastly different ideas as to where in the Americas the Nephites, Lamanites, and Jaredites actually lived. In general, these proposed geographies have evolved from the notion that Book of Mormon events took place in all three major regions of the hemisphere (North, Central, and South America) to the limiting of them to only one or two of these regions.¹ Although space does not allow for a complete review of the history of these ideas, I believe informed readers of this *Review* would agree that the serious scholarship in Book of Mormon geography has, in recent years, turned solely towards Central (more accurately Meso-) America for the beginning, middle, and end of the Book of Mormon saga.

A recent contribution to studies of Book of Mormon geography advocating a South American model comes to us in a soft-cover edition from a small publishing firm in Fullerton, California. Arthur J. Kocherhans's *Lehi's Isle of Promise* is written in a self-assured, often forceful, manner, but it ultimately leaves its own arguments incomplete, since it takes insufficient account of the best scholarship in the field.

In his introduction, Kocherhans writes that his object is "to provide a resource to sustain the conviction for those who want to accept the Book of Mormon as literally true and accurate" (p.

¹ See John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, UT: F.A.R.M.S., 1990), reviewed by Joel C. Janetski on pages 150-53 of this volume.

ix). The use of the word "accurate" here is telling. If the Book of Mormon is true then its accuracy logically follows. But Kocherhans brings to his writing his own sense of how the Book of Mormon narrative should accurately portray such concepts as compass direction, climate, and natural resources, as well as the usage of certain words, primarily "isle." Sadly, I find that Kocherhans's opinions in these matters are formulated from a very limited range of source material (mentioned parenthetically, since there is no index) and a limited personal familiarity with the subject matter.

The first chapter deals with the covenant made by the Lord with Abraham, passed down through Jacob to his sons, and ultimately to Lehi. Kocherhans provides a very basic recounting of the story: the Egyptian captivity, the return to Canaan and its division into "lands of inheritance" for the individual tribes, and the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests. There is no depth here, but the author's purpose is only to describe the geographic aspect of the covenant. In fact, only the right-side pages contain text. Left-side pages are reserved for maps or illustrations and are often left blank where there are none to correspond with the text on the opposite page.

Kocherhans's thesis derives from the idea that, since the Bible so clearly details the division of lands of inheritance among the chosen tribes, we can infer from the Book of Mormon how the Lord divided the American hemisphere between Ephraim and Manasseh. His conclusion, first laid out in chapter 2, is that North America is the inheritance of Ephraimites while South America is the same for the descendants of Manasseh. The problem here is that neither Bible prophecy, nor the Book of Mormon story, present such a picture—certainly not in the way the tribal inheritances are detailed in the Old Testament. Instead, Kocherhans relies on his own reading of the scripture, which often comes down to the use of one word.

An example of this is in Kocherhans's examination of 1 Nephi 13 (where Nephi prophesies the coming of Gentiles to the Americas). In order to demonstrate that the Book of Mormon story did not take place in Mesoamerica, he assumes Columbus to be the individual mentioned in verse 12. The correctness of that assumption is not at issue here; Latter-day Saints have traditionally agreed with this interpretation. But since Columbus never set foot upon the west coast of South America, Kocherhans takes issue with the verb "were" in Nephi's

description: "and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land" (1 Nephi 13:12). To Kocherhans, this means that the Lamanites met by Columbus were not in the promised land in the 1490s; rather the Caribbean area is only adjacent to the one true promised land of the descendants of Lehi—the Andean chain. A reading of the whole chapter, however, will show that the entire prophecy is largely in the past tense. No special condition for the seed of Nephi's brethren mentioned in verse 12 is implied.

Kocherhans also goes to great length to differentiate between the Gentiles described in the same chapter. He insists that those Europeans who established the United States came not to smite the seed of Nephi's brethren, but solely to establish a republic for the inheritance of the descendants of Ephraim. This distinguishes the Gentiles described in verse 13 from those in verse 14 (the ones who smote and scattered the Lamanites). This may be all well and good, but it does raise the issue of how the Indians of North America fit into the Book of Mormon scheme. Does Kocherhans believe that these people were descended from Book of Mormon peoples? He never says. The early Latter-day Saints certainly did, and this is an issue for some in the Church today, since books proposing both the South and Mesoamerican models tend to ignore the special status given to North American Indians by the first generations of Mormons. Kocherhans doesn't even mention North American Indians.

In chapter 3 Kocherhans tries to show how the Lehi party must have come to Chile based upon global wind direction, climate, and resources. He provides no source references for his information on climate and wind conditions, but his source for the Chilean area that provides the best confirmation of 1 Nephi 18:25 ("we did find all manner of ore, both of gold and of silver, and of copper") is a map from the *World Book Encyclopedia*. Although Kocherhans's title for the map is "Minerals of Chile" (p. 114), the encyclopedia itself clearly labeled the map as showing modern (Kocherhans uses the 1969 edition) industrial sites. That Kocherhans could not find corresponding information (supposedly from the *World Book Encyclopedia* as well) for Mesoamerica is proof enough for him that that region could not be the Lehi landfall. Needless to say, maps of modern industrial sites in a popular encyclopedia do not

confirm or deny the existence of Book of Mormon ores in Mesoamerica.²

In another part of this chapter Kocherhans describes the Liahona in this manner:

Nephi had Lehi's compass in crossing the waters to the promised land. It continued to be a recognized instrument of navigation among the Nephites (Alma 37:38, 43) and an instrument called a compass has continued to be used even down to our day for directional purposes (p. 99).

Here is an example of how he insists that the language of the Joseph Smith translation forces Book of Mormon vocabulary to correspond with modern usage. Various references to the 1828 edition of Noah Webster's *Dictionary* are supposed to form a scholarly link between the translation and conditions in the outside world. But in this case, at least, there is no implication in the text of the Book of Mormon itself that the Liahona was a magnetic compass. Rather, it is clearly described as a revelatory device dependent not upon magnetism but upon obedience to the Lord (1 Nephi 18:12). The Book of Mormon makes this explicit, but because the translation also uses "compass" and because Kocherhans interprets that only to be a magnetic compass, he has carefully thought himself into anachronism.

Chapter 4 reintroduces the South American inundation theory previously proposed in published form by Venice Priddis.³ For Kocherhans, as for Priddis, a large Andean island resolves the use of the word "isle" in 2 Nephi 10:20 ("for the Lord has made the sea our path, and we are upon an isle of the sea"). Kocherhans is quick to refer us to an 1828 dictionary definition, "a tract of land surrounded by water, or a detached portion of land embosomed in the ocean" (p. 135). However, in the verse quoted above, Jacob is referring primarily to the ocean voyage from the Near East. Since the Lord, according to Jacob, "made the sea our path," Jacob calls the result of that voyage "an isle of the sea." The exact dimensions of the land mass they occupied were probably never known to the Nephites, but the fact that they came there by ship led Jacob to refer to it as an isle.

² John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1985), 278-88.

³ Venice Priddis, *The Book and the Map: New Insights into Book of Mormon Geography* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975).

Kocherhans admits that 2 Nephi 10:20 is the only use of "isle" in the whole Book of Mormon. But his references to the plural form, "isles," only point out the illogic of this strict usage. He cites, for example, 1 Nephi 19, where in several verses the house of Israel is said to be scattered among the "isles" of the sea. But the Lord will "remember the isles of the sea; yea, and all the people of the house of Israel, will I gather in" (1 Nephi 19:16). Does this mean that all the people of Israel were scattered to small islands?

Kocherhans insists that an island location for the Nephites and Jaredites is necessary to isolate them properly from outside contact. Rejecting John L. Sorenson's views on Nephite and Jaredite cohabitation with other peoples,⁴ Kocherhans writes that, were they not cut off, "surely someone in the outside world, in their [the Jaredites'] two thousand year record, would have reported on them" (p. 133). Reported to whom? Europeans did not have meaningful contact with American civilizations until Columbus, centuries after the rise and fall of the Olmec civilization. Later in the book, Kocherhans writes that the "isle" is "physically as isolated today, except by air travel, as it ever was" (p. 167). This admission renders the notion of having an Andean island unnecessary.

Finally, there is the insistence that the Amazon Valley and much of the rest of South America was under water until the crucifixion. Kocherhans writes, "The only thing I can see that needs to be worked out is the time element of the uplift of the land mass, and I'm voting for the Book of Mormon time" (p. 143). The illogic of this statement is symbolic of the author's whole mind-set. The Book of Mormon says nothing of South America being inundated until a point only 2000 years ago; Kocherhans does. Although he makes repeated statements to the effect that he wishes the scripture to speak for itself, it is his own preconceived notions of how the world should work that make for a book of no real scholarly value. Readers should take a warning from such books and realize that certain assumptions about the history of the earth should not be read back into the standard works, even when employed with the best of intention.

4 Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 83-84.