



## Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

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Volume 3 | Number 1

Article 15

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1991

### John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book*

Joel C. Janetski

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#### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Janetski, Joel C. (1991) "John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book*," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 3 : No. 1 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol3/iss1/15>

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**Title**

**Author(s)** Joel C. Janetski

**Reference** *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3/1 (1991): 150-53.

**ISSN** 1050-7930 (print), 2168-3719 (online)

**Abstract** Review of *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (1990), by John L. Sorenson.

**John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1990. Study Aid (SOR-90c). 404 pp., with various maps. \$16.50.**

Reviewed by Joel C. Janetski

This work is aptly named. If you are interested in what has transpired in the study of Book of Mormon geography from the 1830s to the present day, this well-researched, encyclopedic study guide will serve you well.

The format of the book is both chronological and thematic. It consists of eight parts as follows:

### **Part 1. A History of Ideas: The Geography of Book of Mormon Events in Latter-Day Saint Thought**

I found this section of the book particularly fascinating. Sorenson rather clearly traces the evolution of thinking about two kinds of geographical models in Book of Mormon studies: external and internal. The former is concerned with where in the real world, e.g., North America, South America, Central America, etc., the events in the Book of Mormon might have occurred. The latter is the attempt to construct a model or map of Book of Mormon events based on internal evidence without reconciling those events with real places.

Sorenson's insightful narrative comments on how personalities and even politics have entered into this sensitive issue over the past 170 years. Interesting trends noted include the gradual abandonment of the "hemispheric" model wherein the land northward is equated with North America and the land southward with South America and the adoption of a more limited scheme focused on Mesoamerica as the logical place for all Book of Mormon events to have happened. Despite these trends, Sorenson points out that no consensus has emerged.

### **Part 2. Summaries of Models**

This section of the book is introduced by two geographical model indices, one arranged alphabetically by last name of the originator and one arranged chronologically. Following these is a lengthy section wherein all (there are 68 total) of the models are considered in detail. The section is arranged alphabetically

by originator's last name for ease of reference, I presume. The detail on each model includes Area Focus (Mesoamerica, hemispheric, etc.), Features (for example, where is the narrow neck, etc.), various annotations by Sorenson, and the primary reference wherein the model can be studied further, among other things. If maps were generated by the originator, Sorenson has copied them here.

This section forms the heart of the source material for the historical aspect of the book.

### **Part 3. The Resulting Problem and How to Proceed**

Here Sorenson sets up what he sees as a reasonable approach to a study of Book of Mormon geography, with the end result or solution to the problem being the attainment of a "fit" between an internal model of the geography in the Book of Mormon and some place in the external real world. To accomplish this, Sorenson suggests that students first study the text to produce a map based on geographical data from within the text. Once this internal model is generated the second goal can be pursued.

### **Part 4. The Text Verse by Verse: Geographical Relationships, Extents and Characteristics, with Commentary**

This section represents a major contribution to any student's work by providing a complete listing of all sources of textual information on geography within the Book of Mormon. Clearly, this section is offered as a logical follow-up to the suggestion made in Part 3: construct an internal geographical model based on the textual evidence. After stating several assumptions about the information to follow, Sorenson moves systematically through the Book of Mormon, noting all useful scriptural references to geography, and analyzes the utility of those references.

### **Part 5. Index to the Analysis, by Feature**

This section provides a quick reference to the highly detailed, verse-by-verse analysis of Part 4.

### **Part 6. Summary of the Criteria for an Acceptable Model from the Text, by Feature**

Sorenson here offers assistance to prospective students of Book of Mormon geography by making it clear what criteria must be met relative to various Book of Mormon places as new models are generated.

### **Part 7. A "Report Card" for Evaluation Models**

Again, a means of evaluating extant or new models is offered by the author. This section reminds me of a workbook approach wherein students can bore in to the problem and consider with some objectivity the utility of various models.

### **Part 8. A Trial Map Incorporating the Criteria from the Text**

This is Sorenson's answer to his own admonition to generate an internal model or map of Book of Mormon places in Part 3.

## **Appendices**

Three appendices are included with the book. The first could be construed as a complement to Part 1 as the various quotes on geography tend to help flesh out an historic perspective. The other two consider some difficult issues in the study of Book of Mormon geography: the difficulty with calculating distances and establishing or interpreting directions. The appendices are entitled:

A. Statements, by Date, Relevant to the Geography of Book of Mormon Events, by LDS Leaders or Others Reflecting Views Current in the Church

B. The Problem of Establishing Distances

C. The Problem of Directions

## **Comments**

This most recent work by John Sorenson is a solid and highly useful contribution to the study of Book of Mormon geography. It is very much in the Sorenson style in that it is carefully researched and quite readable. However, the readability of the text could be improved by resolving a couple

of mechanical problems. I would suggest using one of the standard in-text citation styles (e.g., Smith 1945) rather than the cumbersome citation of authors and work titles within the text. A more streamlined approach would have required the inclusion of a formal Reference section, the exclusion of which I consider a deficiency. A final suggestion would be the inclusion of captions on the many maps accompanying the section on models. I also wonder a bit how well all of these second-generation maps will copy.

Regardless, with production of this synthesis along with his already published research, Sorenson has set himself apart as the primary scholar on the topic of Book of Mormon geography.