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Plausibility, Probability, and the Cumorah Question

Matthew P. Roper

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Response to Andrew Hedges's "Cumorah and the Limited Mesoamerican Theory."

In his article on the Hill Cumorah, Andrew Hedges challenges two long-held assumptions of advocates of a limited Mesoamerican geography.¹ First, "that the geographical descriptions provided in the text itself require that the final battles of the Jaredites and Nephites took place relatively close to both peoples' centers of civilization near the narrow neck of land," and second, "that the hill where Joseph Smith found the gold plates does not match the Book of Mormon's descriptions of the hill where the final battles took place." While granting that recent alternative models which limit Book of Mormon events to the Great Lakes or Susquehanna River regions "have been convincingly discounted," the author suggests that the limited Mesoamerican view is also problematic and that the above two tenets rest "more on assumptions about the text than a close reading of it and that the text does not require either."² Hedges's admonition that we pay close attention to the text and that we more carefully distinguish between our own deductions and inferences and what the text actually says is a welcome one. While I disagree with much of what the author says in his paper, I am grateful for the opportunity to reexamine the Book of Mormon text and some of my own long-held ideas. It is my hope that the readers of the *Religious Educator* will likewise benefit from the exchange.

Of course, knowing what the Book of Mormon says or doesn't say is only the first step. As with most texts, there are parts of the record that are more ambiguous than others, and these may lend themselves to different possible interpretations, particularly on questions relating to the reconstruction of Book of Mormon geography. In such cases, it is not enough to suggest different *possibilities*. We want to determine which possibility or which interpretation is more *plausible* or *probable*. That means we have to prudently weigh various options in order to judge which possible interpretation is the most *likely*. In some cases, other readings are possible, and the text may not strictly require a limited Mesoamerican view. The more important question is whether these other possibilities are *more likely* than those which favor a limited Mesoamerican model.³ While the Book of Mormon text may not *require* a particular reading, we may rightly judge one possibility to be more plausible, more compelling, and more probable than another. In what follows I will explain why the final battles of the Jaredites and the Nephites, including those at Cumorah, best make sense as having taken place near a narrow neck of land, believed by most contemporary researchers on the Book of Mormon to be in southern Mexico, and why the alternative of a far distant location of a hill in New York does not make sense. I will then address the question of the hill's description as given in the text. I leave the reader to decide whether the weight of the more probable interpretation requires us to read the text in a certain way.

A Land of Many Waters

One indication that the Hill Cumorah was relatively near the narrow neck of land can be seen in what the Book of Mormon says about that hill being in "a land of many waters." Limhi's men "traveled in a land among many waters" (Mosiah 8:8). Mormon also says that Cumorah "was in a land of many waters, rivers and fountains" (Mormon 6:4), suggesting that the lands of Desolation and Cumorah were within the same general region. Since it is unlikely that Limhi's people, coming from the land of Nephi in the land southward, would have traveled very far into the land northward before turning back, the land of many waters must have included or have been relatively near the land of Desolation. Morianton's attempted flight to a region in the land northward "which was covered with large bodies of water" (Alma 50:29) suggests a similar location to the reader. The "large bodies of water" region is reminiscent of the "*waters* of Ripliancum, which by interpretation, is *large*, or to exceed all" (Ether 15:8, emphasis added).

It was there that Coriantumr was nearly killed before the final battle at the Hill Ramah not far away. The Morianton episode suggests that the rebel's intended destination northward was near enough to pose a significant threat to the Nephites within the land of Zarahemla (see Alma 50:32). A land that is mentioned during the reign of Helaman is also described in similar terms as a region of "large bodies of water and many rivers" (Helaman 3:4), leading some readers to believe that these lands were the same, but this land, in contrast to the others, was an "exceedingly great distance" from the land of Zarahemla. John L. Sorenson and others make a believable case that this latter region may have been the Valley of Mexico.⁴

Hedges faults Sorenson for apparent inconsistency in suggesting that the Valley of Mexico, which he estimates to be 450 miles from Chiapas, could be "an exceedingly great distance" from Zarahemla, while at the same time holding that the narrow neck of land could be the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (approximately 120 miles). All of this, of course, depends on who was doing the traveling. A Nephite soldier or messenger might be able or need to move faster than most other individuals would normally travel. We would also expect small groups to travel at a somewhat slower pace, moderate-sized groups to move somewhat slower. A group traveling with women and children or flocks of animals will not move as fast as a group of soldiers. What is missing is some actual data on the movements of comparable groups. It would have been more helpful if he had made use of some of the data Sorenson had already provided on this question.⁵ Based upon historical data for moderate-sized groups numbering in the hundreds and traveling on foot, Sorenson estimates such a group would average between nine and twenty-five miles per day, not one hundred miles a day. Moreover, Hedges's estimate of 450 miles would be as the crow flies, not as the foot walks. A fairer estimate for travelers on foot going from Chiapas to Mexico City would be closer to 650 miles.⁶ At the high end of the estimate, at twenty-five miles per day, such a group might reach their destination in a little over two weeks, but that is about the maximum and does not take into account any other factors that might impact the journey. At the low end of the estimate, nine miles per day, it would take at least seventy-one days, or about two and one-half months. If the groups traveling in the Book of Mormon were large ones numbering in the thousands, which seems likely based on earlier migrations (see Alma 63:4), the distance covered per day may have been even less, lengthening the time needed to arrive at their destination. When one also takes into account possible logistical concerns involved in a

journey from Chiapas to the valley of Mexico in the first century BC, it could easily have been considered “an exceedingly great distance.” Nothing in the text, however, hints that Cumorah was that far away.

Limhi’s Search Party

In the account of the people of King Limhi, a search party of forty-three “diligent” men traveled from the land of Nephi and were “lost” in the wilderness “for the space of many days.” They found the ruins of the Jaredites, which they mistakenly concluded were those of the people of Zarahemla, before returning and reporting back to the king (see Mosiah 8:8). Since the Jaredites were destroyed in the land northward and since the people of Limhi recovered the plates deposited there by Ether, the relative distances between the lands of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Desolation have significant implications for both the scale of Book of Mormon lands as well as the location of the Hill Ramah or Cumorah.

Although Limhi’s men were mistaken that the Jaredite ruins were Zarahemla, it is apparent that they had enough information before and after their journey to make such a conclusion *seem* plausible. It is also noteworthy that although they believed they were “lost” they were still able to find their way back to the land of Nephi. That suggests that previous to their departure, they had at least a general idea of the direction they should go to appeal for help and how long it should have taken to get to Zarahemla, even though they were uncertain of the precise route. Under such circumstances a “diligent” search party would perhaps count the days they traveled. In any case, *something* would have led them to eventually conclude that they had gone far enough. Sorenson argues that they would not likely have gone more than twice the estimated distance before turning back.⁷ If we accept that view as reasonable, then the Jaredite land of destruction encountered by Limhi’s men would have been within a comparable distance from the land of Nephi.

While the Book of Mormon does not give us the precise distance from Nephi to Zarahemla, we can form some reasonable inferences based on the text. First, Limhi’s search party was gone for “many days” not “many years” or even “many months.” Second, even if we do not know the precise distance, we have a pretty good idea of how long a journey between Nephi and Zarahemla should have taken. Alma’s group of more than 450 men, women and children with their flocks took about three weeks with divine guidance (see Mosiah 23:3; 24:19–20, 25). Those, however, traveling between Zarahemla and

the land of Nephi who had food problems (see Mosiah 9:3) or who had to hunt for their food on the way (see Alma 17:7–9) are said to have taken “many days.” Ammon’s group of sixteen strong men “who *knew not the course they should travel* in the wilderness” are said to have “wandered *many days* in the wilderness, *even forty days* did they wander” (Mosiah 7:4; emphasis added). That is nearly double what it took Alma’s people and their flocks to travel in the opposite direction. The journey back with Limhi’s refugees is described similarly as taking “many days” (Mosiah 22:13). Unlike Alma’s people, who had divine guidance, Limhi’s group had to rely on what Ammon and his men had learned of the route on the way up, but since they were apparently well provisioned (see Mosiah 22:12), and Ammon and his men now knew the way back, we would assume that the return journey, even if not as direct as Alma’s, would not have exceeded the forty days it had taken them to get there. We can infer from the above that a group of men, women, and children traveling with their livestock, who knew where they were going and had enough food, could travel between Zarahemla and Nephi in somewhere from twenty-two to forty days. In real world terms, it is worth noting that Mormon pioneers, who often traveled with animals crossing the Great Plains, averaged about eleven miles per day. In his study of Guatemala, McBryde notes that men on foot drive herds of pigs through the rugged highlands a distance of seventy miles in eight days, averaging nine miles per day.⁸ If we assume Alma’s people averaged about ten miles per day, the journey between Nephi and Zarahemla would be on the order of 220 miles; this could be somewhat shorter or longer depending on the actual distance traveled per day. If we also assume that Limhi’s search party on their northbound journey took twice as much time as Alma’s group, they could have traveled as much as forty-four days or less before turning back, suggesting that the distance from Nephi to the land of Desolation was in the range of hundreds of miles rather than the thousands.

Final Jaredite Movements

Proponents of a limited Mesoamerican geography also find evidence for the nearness of the Hill Ramah or Cumorah in the account of the final Jaredite battles in the closing chapters of the book of Ether noting that the events mentioned there seem to have occurred near the land of Moron and the center of Jaredite lands just north of the narrow neck.⁹ Hedges disputes that conclusion, insisting that the text of Ether provides “no firm clues” about the directions traveled and that “in most cases direction and distance are open-ended.” I disagree—

directions *are* mentioned in the text, but not those that make likely a drawn-out movement several thousands of miles northward away from the narrow neck of land or a journey from southern Mexico to New York. Hedges writes, “That the pursuit had a significant eastern trajectory, at least at one point, is clear.” Agreed. “That it [the movement of the Jaredite armies] also had a northern trajectory is suggested by the fact that no mention is made of Limhi’s men coming from the south, finding any ruins south of the Desolation/Moron area.” This is circular reasoning. What Limhi’s people found actually suggests that the final Jaredite battles were near the narrow neck of land, since the land of Desolation bordered the land of Bountiful across the isthmus (see Alma 22:30–31). The discoveries of Limhi’s search party are evidence for a far northern Jaredite destruction only if we first assume what Hedges needs to prove, that there was a significant and far distant movement away from Jaredite centers of settlement in the south. There is no indication in the text that the Jaredite armies moved northward to any significant degree. The only directions mentioned in the final Jaredite battles are east and south, but never north.

Hedges places his proposed northward movement to backwater country at the point in the text where Lib chases Coriantumr through the wilderness of Akish (see Ether 14:14–15). After this, “Moron and other familiar sites entirely disappear from the story. In their place comes a succession of plains, lands, valleys, hills, and waters, only one of which, Ramah, appears earlier in the Jaredite narrative.” He finds further justification for this in that Moroni “mentions numerous topographical features and place-names.” It is in this geographical data that he sees his proposed change in theater to a far distant and northerly location. Here, however, he exaggerates the geographical data in the text. Topographical features and other geographical indicators are not “numerous” at this point in the narrative. Quite the opposite—and that is a problem for such a scenario. After the death of Lib, the armies battled their way from the plains of Agosh to the eastern seashore, during which time “many cities” were overthrown by Shiz and burned with fire (see Ether 14:16–26). At or near the eastern seacoast, Coriantumr was able to beat Shiz, who then fled with his armies to the adjacent valleys of Corihor and Shurr to battle at the Hill Comnor (see Ether 14:27–31). From there, after a brief respite, they moved to the “waters of Ripliancum” (Ether 15:8). Since all subsequent movement in the text is *southward* from there (see Ether 15:10), any northward movement by the Jaredite armies would, to be consistent with the text, have to fit into these last few geographical references. Assuming

the narrow neck of land was in Middle America, this seems a slender thread on which to hang a journey of several thousand miles to New York. The lack of *any* reference in the text to a northward trajectory of the Jaredite armies further complicates that scenario.

Hedges's suggestion that at this point the action had moved away from traditional Jaredite lands near the narrow neck of land is somewhat undermined by the reference to the "land" and "valley of Corihor" (Ether 14:27–28). While this is the first and only reference to a land and valley of that name in the text, it does recall the earlier rebel Corihor, who figures in the narrative of the early kings Kib and Shule and who, after his defeat at the hands of the later, repented and then received power in Shule's early kingdom (see Ether 7:3–22). If such power included land or oversight of land under the overall governance of Shule, a location not far from the capital at Moron seems plausible. While the point may not be definitive, it suggests that the "valley of Corihor," the last battle point referenced before Ripliancum and the turn of action southward to Ramah, was relatively near the Jaredite capital, by the narrow neck of land and not thousands of miles away.

The Land of Desolation

According to Hedges, the "swift and speedy" war, in which the [Jaredite] combatants 'did march forth from the shedding of blood to the shedding of blood' (Ether 14:22), took them out of the traditional center of Jaredite lands and into a completely different area." Of course the fact that the war was "swift and speedy" need not mean that great distances were covered but could mean that a restricted area was rapidly enveloped in the destruction. This seems to be what the last two chapters of the book of Ether describe. Following the death of Lib, Shiz pursued Coriantumr through the plains of Agosh to the east sea, a region which contained many Jaredite cities and significant resources which the rival armies could either utilize or destroy (see Ether 14:16–26). The reference to "many cities" and the availability of large numbers of people suggest that the region they were passing through was a very significant one in terms of civilization, not a sparsely populated backcountry. The destruction during this phase of the war was apparently unprecedented in both scale and intensity. "And so great and lasting had been the war, and so long had been the scene of bloodshed and carnage, that the whole face of the land was *covered with the bodies of the dead*. And so swift and speedy was the war that there was none left to bury the dead, but they did march forth from the shedding of blood to the shedding of blood, *leaving the bodies of both men,*

women, and children strewed upon the face of the land, to become a prey to the worms of the flesh” (Ether 14:21–22; emphasis added).

Hedges suggests that “what Limhi’s men found in their search for Zarahemla was not the scene of the Jaredites’ final battle, but the scene of a battle (or battles) that had been fought early on in the Jaredite wars, prior to the scene of action shifting from the land of Moron elsewhere.” This seems unlikely based on what the text says. The reference to the destruction of “many cities” and numerous unburied remains reminds us that Limhi’s people found the plates of Ether in the same place that they “discovered a land which was *covered* with bones of men, and of beasts, and was also covered with *ruins of buildings of every kind*” (Mosiah 8:8; emphasis added; see also Mosiah 21:26).¹⁰ The Nephites called that region the “land of Desolation” (see Alma 22:30). While the destruction described in Ether 14 may conceivably have been widespread, its mention at this particular point in Moroni’s narrative seems to pin it to a particular time and region—the first year of Lib in the path of Coriantumr’s flight from Shiz at the escalation of the war. That would mean that Coriantumr’s flight route, from the plains of Agosh to the eastern seacoast, one of the last reported movements in the narrative, would likely have been within or near the land called Desolation by the Nephites and also near the narrow neck of land. A Hill Ramah/Cumorah near Desolation seems more likely than in some distant region far to the north.

Omer’s Flight to Ablom

Another important piece of textual evidence is found in the account of the flight of King Omer from a conspiracy against his life (see Ether 9:3). Based upon this account and other passages such as Ether 7:5–6, proponents of a limited Mesoamerican geography have surmised that the lands of Desolation, Moron, the seashore to the east, the hills Shim and Cumorah were all comparatively close to each other.¹¹ In his paper, Hedges rejects this view, suggesting that the account is too ambiguous to conclude that Moron and Ramah were close together. Omer, he reasons, would have gone as far as necessary, even thousands of miles to escape his potential assassins. He notes that Lehi traveled half way across the world after people sought his life. Lehi, however, fled to a far distant land of promise, never to return. Omer also fled from the power of Akish but did return after his would-be assassins destroyed themselves. That Nimrah and his men were able to find Omer’s small group (see Ether 9:9)—and that the refugees learned details of the destruction of the people of Akish and then went back to resume

Omer's previous rule—argues against a far distant refuge for Omer (see Ether 9:10–13). While the distance between Moron and Ramah is not specified, the proximity of the Jaredite capital to the land of Desolation (see Ether 7:6; Alma 22:29–32) and the lack of reference to any northward movement in these passages suggest that Omer's escape route to Ablom took him near the narrow neck of land, on his way to the eastern seashore. Since the only directional referent mentioned in the passage is east, Omer's escape route from Moron, passing by the hills Shim and Cumorah to the seacoast would seemingly lie upon an essentially west-to-east trajectory, not far from the isthmus, in which a northward direction does not seem to have been a significant factor.

Hedges argues that the reference to Omer “going over” to Shim and Cumorah and “from thence eastward” means that “Omer was traveling directions other than straight east.” I disagree. “Over” is a *topographical* term rather than a *directional* one. “Over” suggests some kind of elevation. To “come over” suggests the crossing of a topographical feature or boundary of some kind. These meanings are consistent with Webster's definition of the term as well as the use of the term in the Book of Mormon, where it is used for crossing a boundary like a river (see Alma 6:7; 8:3; 16:7) or passage over an area between lands (see Alma 15:18; 21:11–12; 30:21; 43:24–25; 59:6). To make sense of the geography here, we have to reconcile the “many days” of Omer's flight in Ether 9:3 with Lib's single flight to the sea in Ether 14:12. Sorenson does so by suggesting that Omer took an unexpected roundabout way over mountains or some other topographical feature in order to avoid pursuit.¹² That seems plausible. On the other hand, the nearness of the Jaredite capital to the land of Desolation and the narrow neck of land and the eastward trajectory of both Omer and Shared and the lack of any northern one strongly argue against a far distant location for the Hill Ramah.

The Hill Shim

Further evidence for the nearness of the Hill Ramah or Cumorah can be found in Mormon's account of the final Nephite battles with the Lamanites, which seem to put the Hill Shim in or near the region of the final Nephite battles.¹³ Hedges questions whether the Hill Shim was even in the land of Desolation. Yet the Book of Mormon does provide clues from which we can infer such a location. The Nephites were driven from the land of Joshua “in the borders west by the seashore” (Mormon 2:6) to the city of Jashon, which Mormon tells us was “near” the Hill Shim (Mormon 2:17). From Jashon the Nephites were driven

to the land and city of Shem (see Mormon 2:20–21). From there they were finally able to beat back their enemies and temporarily regain their possessions in the land southward (see Mormon 2:22–27). The Nephite success in retaking the lands southward suggests that the Hill Shim in the land northward was not far distant from the land of Zarahemla.

Later events in Mormon's account also suggest that the Hill Shim was relatively close to the narrow neck of land. The city Desolation was near the narrow pass at the treaty line dividing the land northward from the land southward (see Mormon 2:29; 3:5), putting that city in the southern portion of the greater land of Desolation which spanned the narrow neck and bordered on Bountiful (Alma 22:31–32). Its sister city, Teancum, was also in the "borders" near the city Desolation and was by the sea (see Mormon 4:3). After being driven from both cities, which were by the narrow pass (see Mormon 4:14–19), the Nephites fled to the city of Boaz (see Mormon 4:20). When driven from there, the Nephites gathered up the refugees they could save from any towns and villages along the way (see Mormon 4:22). Hedges argues that a lengthy journey to New York may be inferred from this passage, but this is unpersuasive. Mormon describes a routed people, not a trans-continental migration, and nothing in the text suggests that the retreat involved great distances. One thing *is* clear from the passage; after the loss of the city of Boaz, the Nephites were no longer able to block the Lamanites from just one city or strategic point, as they had previously been able to do, but were forced to defend the city Jordan *and* several other cities or strongholds simultaneously (see Mormon 5:3–4). That suggests that north of Boaz the land became wider and that the city of Boaz was the last stronghold along the more defensible narrow bottleneck route that could block the Lamanites from getting into the Nephites' northern possessions. Like the popping of a cork from a bottle, the loss of that strategic point allowed the Lamanite armies to flow into the lands northward, forcing Mormon to remove all the records from the Hill Shim (see Mormon 4:23). Clearly Boaz, the next city mentioned after Teancum and Desolation at the narrow pass was near enough to the Hill Shim that the records hidden there were directly endangered by its loss, or Mormon would have had no need to move them. When we add to this the information discussed previously on Omer's flight to Ablom, a location *near* if not *within* the greater land of Desolation for the Hill Shim cannot be avoided.

Ether, the Cave, and the Record

In his abridgment of the twenty-four plates recovered by Limhi's people, Moroni tells us that Ether dwelt in a cave (a "cavity of a rock") during the final years of the Jaredite conflict and that he went out at night to witness events and then would return to the cave to record them. After fleeing for his life, he wrote the remainder of his account in the cave (see Ether 13:13–14, 18, 22).¹⁴ Hedges acknowledges the potential implications of this point but dismisses the argument. "A careful reading of the text," he suggests, "shows that Ether's cave actually drops out of the story long before the final battle is fought." Does it? Moroni wrote, "And he hid himself in the cavity of a rock by day, and by night he went forth viewing the things which should come upon the people. And as he dwelt in the cavity of a rock he made *the remainder* of this record, viewing the destructions which came upon the people by night" (Ether 13:13–14; emphasis added). In addition to providing personal protection, the cave also provided a place where Ether could write in peace and would save him the trouble of having to carry the plates with him when he went out to observe. After witnessing the final showdown between the two rivals, "the Lord spake unto Ether, and said unto him: Go forth. And he went forth, and beheld that the words of the Lord had all been fulfilled; and he *finished* his record; (and the hundredth part I have not written) and he hid them in a manner that the people of Limhi did find them" (Ether 15:33; emphasis added). In these passages Moroni tells us how Ether accomplished his work. He dwelt in the cave for safety during the day and went out at night to witness and observe. After doing so he then would return to the cave to record what he had witnessed. Moroni does not say that he stayed there every day or that he went out every night or that he even came back every night, but he *does* indicate that Ether came and went from the cave frequently enough to witness the events and return to his refuge to record them. This is inescapable. He is close enough to Ramah to keep track of the numbers of survivors after each day of battle, to hear their mournful cries and witness the final melee between Coriantumr and Shiz. Taken together, both passages (Ether 13:13–14 and Ether 15:33) do suggest that after he saw Coriantumr kill Shiz, Ether "went forth" upon the land to witness the fulfillment of the Lord's prophecies and perhaps confirm that none of the other combatants were left and then returned to the cave as he always did. He then "finished" the remainder of his account as Moroni says he did in the cave and hid the record itself "in a manner that the people of

Limhi did find them” (Ether 15:33). Since Limhi’s people found the record in the land of Desolation (see Mosiah 8:8; 21:26; Alma 22:30), Ether must have hidden it near the final battle scene. Why would he have taken it anywhere else? Hedges argues “that the idea expressed in [Ether]13:14 that he actually ‘finished’ the record there is not to be taken completely literally,” but given what the text says it is difficult to see why it should not be, nor is it clear how not taking this passage literally represents a more careful reading. The proximity of the cave to the final Jaredite movements and the final battle at Ramah clearly place the Hill Ramah near the narrow neck of land, not several thousand miles away.

Coriantumr

Some students of the Book of Mormon have suggested that Coriantumr’s wounded and weakened physical condition would have limited his travel after the final battle near Ramah. Since he was found by the people of Zarahemla, a journey of several thousand miles from New York to Middle America under such conditions is difficult to explain.¹⁵ A closer location would be more reasonable. Contrary to this view, Hedges argues, “Nothing in the text indicates his wounds would have prevented him from traveling after he had time to heal and regain his strength. . . . There is a real chance that he could have recovered sufficiently from his wounds at Ramah to travel long distances.” What the text says casts serious doubt upon such a scenario.

First, the final melee where Coriantumr killed Shiz was not more than a day away from Ramah. So the final battle never took him far from the hill (see Ether 15:28–29).

Second, the question of Coriantumr’s physical condition has to be considered. The wars in Ether 13–15 extend over a period of nearly fifteen years. During that time he was seriously wounded in his thigh, which kept him from going to battle for two years (see Ether 13:31), and he also suffered a wound in his arm (see Ether 14:12). Even more serious were the later wounds inflicted on him by his relentless opponent. “It came to pass that Shiz smote upon Coriantumr that he gave him *many deep wounds*; and *Coriantumr, having lost his blood, fainted*, and was carried away as though he were dead” (Ether 14:30; emphasis added). After a period of recovery (see Ether 15:1), he was able to fight again, sort of: “They fought an exceedingly sore battle, in which Coriantumr was *wounded again*, and he *fainted with the loss of blood*” (Ether 15:9; emphasis added). Were these new wounds or was this a rewounding of the old ones, or both? Four years later, after seven

days of battle at Ramah, he along with the other survivors “fought for the space of three hours, and they *fainted with the loss of blood*” (Ether 15:27; emphasis added). After gaining some strength, they then fled from their enemies and were overtaken the next day where they were forced to fight again. After killing Shiz, “Coriantumr fell to the earth, and *became as if he had no life*” (Ether 15:32; emphasis added). This suggests to me that his physical condition was precarious.

Third, remember Coriantumr’s state of mind when he realizes, too late, the enormity of the destruction and loss of millions of men, women, and children: “He began to sorrow in his heart, . . . and his soul mourned and refused to be comforted” (Ether 15:2–3). So in addition to his physical wounds, he descended into despair.

Fourth, in contrast to earlier occasions when he was carried away (see Ether 14:30), nobody was left to carry him from the field, protect him, or nurse him back to health after the final battle with Shiz. He was alone.

Fifth, the text does not say that Coriantumr found the people of Zarahemla but that *they* found *him* (see Omni 1:21). The Lord brought Mulek and the people of Zarahemla into the land of Desolation before they went southward (see Alma 22:30; Helaman 6:10). A reasonable inference is that they found Coriantumr in the land of Desolation also. He would certainly be in need of care. And how was his old thigh wound? We might envision him hobbling southward for a few miles, but for thousands?

Sixth, the implications of Ether’s prophecy to Coriantumr need attention. The prophet foretold that the king “should *only* live to see the fulfilling of the prophecies which had been spoken concerning another people receiving the land for their inheritance” (Ether 13:21; emphasis added). This does not sound like the promise of a long life.

Finally, there is matter of how long Coriantumr lived after he was found. “Coriantumr was discovered by the people of Zarahemla; and he dwelt with them for the space of nine moons,” that is, less than a year (Omni 1:21). According to Hedges, this passage “says nothing about his health following Ramah, as the text provides no information about how long after the battle he was found.” When we consider his many wounds, his state of mind, his discovery by the people of Zarahemla, likely near the land of Desolation, his living *only* until he saw the fulfillment of the prophecy of other people inheriting the land, and his collapse after killing Shiz (see Ether 15:32), the statement that he lived only nine months after he was found by them is not surprising, and we can only wonder how he managed to live even that long. By the

end of the book of Ether, Coriantumr was a solitary, severely wounded, mentally exhausted veteran of a fifteen-year genocidal war in a state of physical collapse, who had repeatedly lost a lot of blood and just about everything else. Found by Mulek's people, he lived nine months, died, and was buried by them. In light of these factors, does a location for the Hill Ramah or Cumorah near the land of Desolation, by the narrow neck of land, not seem more reasonable than a lengthy and arduous trek to New York and back?¹⁶

Time and Distance

Often unnoticed by readers is the fact that all of the events described in Ether 14:11 through 15:11, including the movement from the land of Moron to the Hill Ramah, apparently occurred during the same year ("the first year of Lib"; Ether 14:11). This has obvious and significant implications for any proposed far distant trajectory, like that suggested by Hedges, since one must somehow fit the events described in the text into that time frame. How far could a premodern army travel in a year? Military historian Ross Hassig, basing his ideas on data from premodern armies, estimates that Aztec armies under normal conditions could march at a rate of between twelve and twenty miles per day (nineteen–thirty-two kilometers).¹⁷ Could they have forced a faster march? Perhaps. However, "a forced march covers greater distance by marching more hours, not by going faster, but it is avoided if possible because it impairs the fighting efficiency of the army."¹⁸ It would also be impossible to keep up a forced march for very long.

Since we know that the Jaredites moved from the land of Moron, which was near the land of Desolation and the narrow neck of land, to the Hill Ramah during the same year, Hassig's numbers give us a reliable measure by which we can gauge the proposed movements of Jaredite armies in the Book of Mormon from the land of Moron somewhere in Middle America to a proposed Hill Ramah in Palmyra, New York. For the purposes of comparison, we will use Sorenson's proposed location for the narrow neck of land at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec as a point of reference. We do this because that is the most northerly of all the proposed Middle American candidates for that location and would be the closest to New York. Sorenson suggests a location for the city Desolation somewhere in the vicinity of Minatitlan in southern Mexico along the river Coatzacoalcos.¹⁹ It is approximately twenty-five hundred miles by road from Minatitlan to Palmyra, New York. Based on Hassig's estimates, it would take a premodern army anywhere from 125 days to 208 days just to travel that distance if it encountered no

impassible obstacles. So anywhere from a third to more than half of the year would have been taken up just by the march itself.

There is more to the story, however, than straight-line estimates. Aztec armies were among the most organized and efficient military forces known to Mesoamerica, yet they never had to march such distances as we are considering here. The Aztecs had a well-established system of roads that facilitated travel, but an army traveling twenty-five hundred miles from Middle America to New York could not have expected these for most of the way. While armies can march without roads, terrain permitting, “doing so drastically reduces their speed, lengthens the campaign, and significantly increases logistical costs.”²⁰ There would be many logistical difficulties for a hypothetical journey from southern Mexico to New York.

After the Jaredites moved out of their traditional centers of control near the isthmus, how would they feed and provide for their army? Assuming they pillaged or gathered up what they could use, there would still be limitations on how much they could carry with them on foot. David Webster, drawing upon Mesoamerican data, notes, “Warriors might have carried their own supplies or been accompanied by porters who did so. Either system is very inefficient and would have limited the duration of campaigns, in my estimation, to two weeks or less, counting travel time each way and the hostilities themselves.”²¹ Based on sixteenth-century records on Indian food consumption, Hassig estimates that Indians needed around 2.1 pounds (.95 kg) of maize per day. Each porter carried an average load of fifty pounds (twenty-three kg) per day. At the height of their power, Aztec armies seem to have averaged about one porter to every two warriors; “nevertheless, this porter-to-warrior ratio and the above consumption rates meant that the army could travel only eight days if all the porters’ loads were dedicated to food (which they were not).”²²

Another key to the Aztecs’ military success is that they had not only well-established roads but a network of tributary towns along their path who could offer supplies to armies that were on the march. These tributary towns along the roads could be notified in advance about the approach of an army and supply needed provisions. This greatly facilitated the reach of such an army, but it depended to a certain degree on good and reliable communication, and once a military force moved out of its centers of control, the army would lose any such advantage. “Another major logistical problem,” notes Hassig, “was securing the necessary two quarts of water per man per day. While providing water was easier than supplying food, the need for water could affect the

route selected, and using available resources such as rivers involved considerable time.”²³

The point here is that all of these factors would significantly decrease the distance any army could travel in a year’s time. Since they would not be able to carry enough provisions with them to last over such a lengthy journey and since hunting would be impractical for large groups, it would be necessary to forage for food and water or plant crops along the way. That would also greatly increase the time any northbound trajectory would take. Then Coriantumr and Shiz would have to find a way to feed their respective armies when they arrived. All of these factors greatly reduce the distance that could be covered by even a well-trained and hardened premodern army.

But the Jaredite forces in these final chapters of Ether were *not* a typical army. By the time they got to Ramah, they had gathered not only soldiers but also numerous civilians—men, women, and children of various dispositions and conditions. The “armies” of Coriantumr and Shiz (or were they more like angry, armed mobs?), would be far less organized and less disciplined and would move even slower than a typical army; hence the estimates based on Aztec conditions may be too optimistic. When one also factors in the time it takes to fight, kill, pillage, fortify, and recover strength after the battles and destruction mentioned in the text, a one-year journey of such a distance for the Jaredite armies seems not merely unlikely, but impossible.²⁴

In addition to the above, other considerations also come into play. Assuming a New York location for the ancient Hill Cumorah, what advantages would such a proposal provide to Mormon and the Nephites? Mormon was deeply pained by the suffering of Nephite women and children (see Moroni 9:19; Helaman 15:2). Given such suffering, why would he propose a journey of twenty-five hundred miles for a battle for which he, at least, knew there was no hope of military victory? Were there no places between southern Mexico and New York where the Nephites could make a final stand? And why would the Lamanite king, who was clearly having his own way at this point, ever agree to such a proposal? As Hammond bluntly put it years ago, “The Lamanites were wicked but they were not stupid. They, as well as Mormon, knew that the Nephites had already lost the war—and it needed but one more battle to end it. Why not do all of this in the country where each side could furnish the necessary equipment and provisions of war instead of having to fend for them in the mountains, in the deserts, and in the rivers?”²⁵ Can one imagine Robert E. Lee asking Ulysses S. Grant in 1865 to allow the tattered armies of southern Virginia *and all*

of their Confederate sympathizers to leave Virginia and gather to Mexico City for a battle in order to decide the fate of the Union?

Years ago, in response to criticism of the Book of Mormon, Hugh Nibley noted several historical examples of military leaders in antiquity who made lengthy journeys in military campaigns, suggesting that such leaders would have brushed off such objections about distances with a laugh.²⁶ Hedges points to Nibley's work and offers several examples of his own to support his case for a lengthy retreat away from Jaredite and Nephite centers by the narrow neck of land to the Hill Cumorah for the final battle. Though well intentioned, these arguments are problematic on a number of levels.²⁷ One difficulty with the analogies is that they do not address comparable historical situations. Hammond's response to Nibley comments is relevant here.

All of these conquering commanders conducted campaigns of subjugation. Each was hunting for someone who would stand up to him and fight. Not one of these agreed with his adversary that they both leave their homelands and go to a far distant unknown land simply to fight to a finish. Not one of them took with him a million or more home folk, old men, old women, cripples and pregnant women, for whom he would have had to provide logistics. . . . To have been fair with Mormon's portrayal of the preparation for the battle at Cumorah he would have had to find mutual agreement between—say Caesar and Pompey to go to Moscow instead of Thessaly to fight the battle of Pharsalus. He would have had to show further that Caesar was obliged to take along with him and provide logistics for the fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters of each of the soldiers, as well as all other Romans who favored him instead of Pompey, including the aged, the cripples and the new-born babes. Yes, surely Pompey would have brushed such a proposal "aside with a laugh."²⁸

A final consideration is of course the fact that Mormon would need to be in a place where he could write, abridge, and finish up his sacred record, as well as a place to hide up all the Nephite records once that was done. This would be difficult to do on the road or in flight. Just transporting all the records would have presented a nightmarish challenge. Would it make better sense for him to propose a lengthy journey from southern Mexico to New York, one that would take his people the more part of a year just to traverse, or would he not rather choose a closer location within traditional Nephite lands still under their control with which he and his people were familiar where he could complete that task more or less unobstructed?

Criteria for Cumorah

We should remember that what is at issue is not where Moroni buried his father's record, but whether the hill in New York was the final battlefield described in the record where both the Jaredites and the Nephites met their ends.²⁹ Based upon the text and inferences drawn from the text, many readers have concluded that Mormon's Cumorah and Joseph Smith's Cumorah were not the same hill and that the former, which is mentioned in the text as the final battlefield of the Nephites, was relatively close to the centers of Jaredite and Nephite settlements near the narrow neck of land, while the latter, where Moroni hid up his father's record, possibly a namesake of the other, was not.³⁰ David Palmer and other investigators have put forth criteria that any candidate for Mormon's hill should meet. They have also argued, I think persuasively, that while the New York hill seems inconsistent with this description, at least one plausible Mesoamerican candidate exists that is.³¹ Hedges argues that many of these criteria are faulty, since they are not all explicitly mentioned in the texts describing the Hill Cumorah. Some of these criteria, however, logically follow from the evidence already discussed above.³²

Recent scholarship on the question suggests that the *only* natural phenomenon that could account for all of the events described in chapters 8 through 10 of 3 Nephi would be volcanic activity.³³ Hedges does not dispute the validity of these conclusions, but he questions their relevance to the Cumorah question. The connection is reasonable, however, if the Jaredite and Nephite armies never left their primary centers of settlements near the isthmus. The destruction at the death of Christ enveloped important settlements at both ends of the lands southward and northward, bracketing the region in which these events were witnessed to have occurred. That sphere of destruction included the Amulonite city Jerusalem in the land of Nephi at the southern extremity (see 3 Nephi 9:7), and Jacobugath in "the northernmost part of the land northward" (3 Nephi 7:12). Since Cumorah seems to have been close to or within the land of Desolation in the southern portion of the land northward, that seemingly places it within the destruction zone, even if the hill is not referenced in 3 Nephi. Given these parameters, the suggestion that Cumorah was in a volcanic zone seems reasonable, although it poses a serious problems for the New York correlation.

Hedges disputes the idea that Cumorah's "fountains" refer to natural springs. Although problematic for the New York hill, it fits

particularly well with Cerro Vigia in Mexico.³⁴ He notes that the term “fountain” is also used by Nephi to refer to the Red Sea (see 1 Nephi 2:9) as well as the river from the vision of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 12:16), but since Mormon describes rivers *in addition to* fountains in the land of Cumorah, they must refer to something *other than* rivers (see Mormon 6:4). Springs seem likely. Seas in this context do not—even more so if, as Hedges argues, the Hill Cumorah is *not* near the eastern sea. In his teachings, Mormon also distinguishes between good fountains which bring forth good water and bitter fountains which bring forth bad water, which more readily suits the idea of a spring than the ocean (see Moroni 7:11).

Additional criteria for the Hill Cumorah are derived from what the text says about the hill itself (see Mormon 6:4). What *advantage* did Mormon and his people hope to gain from gathering to such a location? Hedges questions whether the hill would have needed to be large or a significant landmark. Even so, it is difficult to see what advantage a lengthy journey to the hill in Palmyra would have offered to the 230,000 Nephites and their families who were planning to fight there. Hedges questions whether the battle even involved the hill at all, but this seems a reasonable inference. After Mormon’s people gather to the land of Cumorah, they camp “round about” the hill (Mormon 6:4), suggesting that the hill itself possessed, or at least that the Nephites believed that it possessed, some strategic value. Mormon’s language also suggests that the Nephites at Cumorah were arrayed in a *defensive* position rather than an offensive one. For example, the Nephites “behold the armies of the Lamanites *marching towards them*” and “*await* to receive *them*” (Mormon 6:7; emphasis added). The Lamanites “came to battle *against us*” (Mormon 6:8; emphasis added). “They did fall upon my people” (Mormon 6:9). It appears that the Nephites awaited their enemies at Cumorah (see Mormon 8:2) rather than marching out to meet them. Given the defensive considerations, does it not seem likely that this played a key part in their decision to locate at the hill in the first place? The New York hill does not seem to be large enough to have accommodated the defensive needs of so large a force. Mormon as an able military leader would have known what those needs would be and would have kept them in mind when he selected the site. This careful selection does not mean that all of the fighting need have taken place on the hill, but that the hill was somehow central to the battle seems unavoidable.

One advantage in the abundance of water at Cumorah is that it would be useful in cultivating crops to feed the large numbers of

Nephites gathered there and would help attract potential recruits.³⁵ Hedges argues that the text itself does not say that they grew food on the spot, so this criteria is not a valid one. In earlier times of warfare, he reminds us, the Nephites were able to receive provisions from elsewhere. He notes that in the war against the Gadianton robbers the Nephites collected enough provisions to last for seven years (see 3 Nephi 4:4), and Helaman's army was resupplied by provisions from elsewhere. These analogies, however, are not apt to Mormon's day (see Moroni 9:7–8, 16–19). In their war with the robbers, the Nephites gathered to the center of their lands, not in some far distant location (see 3 Nephi 3:21). Helaman's men were only a few days from their supply source at Zarahemla, yet, in spite of his army's proximity to Zarahemla, his men nearly starved to death (see Alma 58:6–9).

No doubt, the Nephites who gathered to Cumorah would have taken what they could carry with them, but they were having trouble holding onto things (see Helaman 13:30–36; Mormon 2:10; compare the Jaredites; Ether 14:1–2), and a lengthy journey of more than a few weeks on foot would deplete most if not all of the food they were carrying.³⁶ And what about hostile tribes along the way? Even if they somehow managed to reach a far distant location in New York, suffering minimal casualties from clashes with such tribes, what would they eat when they got there? Hedges suggests that “the battle at Cumorah may have been fueled largely from somewhere outside.” From where? Is it not more logical to suppose that Cumorah was relatively close to the old centers of Nephite settlement in the land northward?

It also seems likely that the Hill Cumorah would need to be large enough that it could provide a view of hundreds of thousands of bodies (230,000 Nephite dead along with those fallen Lamanites), and yet low enough that Mormon and the other wounded survivors could climb it in a few hours during the night to witness the scene from there “on the morrow.” Hedges disputes whether Mormon actually surveyed all the fallen armies from the top of the hill since it says he “did behold” his fallen ten thousand and that of his son Moroni without explicitly stating that he “did behold” the others, but since the Nephite armies with their twenty-three cohorts of ten thousand were camped “round about” the hill it seems reasonable that he saw them as well. A hill, Hedges says, “need not even be particularly large for a large number of people to fight around or near it. Hundreds of thousands could fight around or in the vicinity of a fence post if they were so inclined.” Perhaps, but why would a million men, women, and children *choose* to march to and fight around a fence post or at a far distant hill?

In addition to the fact that the hill would need to be of such a kind as to provide a place where the many Nephite records could be hidden (see Mormon 6:6), Mormon would have needed to keep the hiding place and its location a secret from most, if not all, of the Nephites, with the exception of his son and possibly another faithful companion or two. With nearly a quarter of a million Nephites, most of them grossly wicked, camped around the hill (see Mormon 6:4, 11–15), how would Mormon keep his endeavor a secret? The hill needed to be large enough that Mormon could accomplish this task in relative secrecy, something that would be especially difficult to do if Mormon's hill was the one in Palmyra. While such considerations do not prove the Mesoamerican candidate, Cerro Vigia, to be the hill in question, they do suggest that it is a more plausible candidate than the hill in Palmyra.

Basic and central to the contemporary Mesoamerican view of Book of Mormon geography is the idea that the lands and peoples described in the Book of Mormon “were limited in extent” and that in reading the narrative we should “think in terms of hundreds of miles instead of thousands, and of millions of people instead of hundreds of millions.”³⁷ The proximity of the Jaredite Hill Ramah, later known to the Nephites as the Hill Cumorah, is an intrinsic part of that view. Any thesis that puts the hill thousands of miles away from the narrow neck of land does not do justice to the Book of Mormon text or to reasonable inferences that may be drawn from it. The problems of distances and logistics that would have been involved in such a hypothetical scenario are deeply problematic, if not insuperable. These are difficulties, however, that arise from our own assumptions, rather than from the Book of Mormon itself. On the other hand, a model with Mormon's Cumorah in Mesoamerica, though not without its own set of questions and challenges, is far more consistent and believable. **RE**

Notes

1. Key works in the development of the limited Mesoamerican view among Latter-day Saints include Jean Russell Driggs, *The Palestine of America* (Salt Lake City: 1925); J. A. and J. N. Washburn, *An Approach to the Study of Book of Mormon Geography* (Provo, UT: New Era Publishing, 1939); the Washburns' book, though dated and long out of print, is still a very good introduction to the subject; Fletcher B. Hammond, *Geography of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Printing, 1959); Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 6, 447–51; David Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1981); John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985); John Clark, “A

Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 20–70; John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Map* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000). On the history of the development of ideas about Book of Mormon geography, see John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 7–35; Matthew Roper, “Limited Geography and the Book of Mormon: Historical Antecedents and Early Interpretations,” *FARMS Review* 16, no. 2 (2004): 225–75.

2. Hedges has also challenged the view that early Latter-day Saint leaders abandoned the so-called hemispheric model of Book of Mormon geography in favor of a more limited Central American model (see “Book of Mormon Geography in the World of Joseph Smith,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 8, nos. 1–2 [Spring–Fall 2007]: 77–89). Elsewhere he argues in favor of the Panamanian narrow neck of land over the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which he argues is too wide (see “The Narrow Neck of Land,” *Religious Educator* 9, no. 3 [2008]: 151–60).

3. Hedges wonders if the Adena and Hopewell Cultures of the Ohio and Mississippi regions may have been associated in some way with migrants from Book of Mormon lands. If so, he reasons, “we may need to look farther to the north in some sort of Jaredite and Nephite backcountry,” so “a site in upstate New York should at least be considered a possibility.” This assumes that the possibility in question first passes the test of textual consistency and plausibility.

4. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 266–67; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 5:61–67.

5. Sorenson, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events*, 393–97.

6. By road it is about 640 miles from Tuxtla Gutierrez to Mexico City.

7. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 14.

8. Felix Webster McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography of Southern Guatemala* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1945), 39.

9. Washburn, *Book of Mormon Geography*, 22–43; Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium*, 450.

10. Significantly, this is the first and in fact the *only* reference in these later chapters to the destruction of “many cities.”

11. Driggs, *The Palestine of America*, 7; Washburn, *Book of Mormon Geography*, 29–38; Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium*, 449–50.

12. Sorenson, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events*, 309–10; Sorenson, *Mormon’s Map*, 46–48.

13. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium*, 448–49.

14. Washburn, *Book of Mormon Geography*, 49–50; Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 15.

15. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium*, 448.

16. Why would he then leave New York and head back *another* twenty-five hundred miles southward toward the isthmus? If Hedges is correct, all of Coriantumr’s people, now dead, would have already left Mexico with him. The roundtrip journey would have been nearly five thousand miles.

17. Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 66–67.

18. Hassig, *Aztec Warfare*, 66–67.

19. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 345. Both Palmer and Sorenson have previously suggested that the land of Moron may have been located in highland

Oaxaca. Sorenson informed me recently that he now rejects this correlation and would place the Jaredite capital somewhere in the vicinity of central or even southern Veracruz. This would be more consistent with my arguments here.

20. Hassig, *Aztec Warfare*, 67.

21. David Webster, "That Not So Peaceful Civilization: A Review of Maya War," *Journal of World Prehistory* 14, no. 1 (2000): 100.

22. Hassig, *Aztec Warfare*, 64.

23. Hassig, *Aztec Warfare*, 65.

24. This is of course assuming that the narrow neck of land was the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the *closest* of the proposed Middle American candidates for that isthmus. If we propose a more southerly location such as Honduras or Costa Rica or Panama (Hedges, "The Narrow Neck of Land," 156–58), the distance becomes even more problematic.

25. Fletcher B. Hammond, *Geography of the Book of Mormon: "Where Is the Hill Cumorah?"* (Salt Lake City: Utah Printing, 1964), 26–27.

26. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 227–28; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 428–30.

27. Bruce W. Warren, "Further on the Claims of the Book of Mormon as to the Origin and Character of its First Civilization," *University Archaeological Society Newsletter* 27, June 1, 1955, 1–6; reprinted in Ross T. Christensen, ed., *Progress in Archaeology: An Anthology* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1963), 89–95; David B. Honey, "Ecological Nomadism Versus Epic Heroism in Ether: Nibley's Works on the Jaredites," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2 (1990): 143–63.

28. Hammond, *Geography of the Book of Mormon*, 99–100.

29. On the question of how Moroni may have carried the plates from Mesoamerica to New York, see Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 44–45; H. Donl Peterson, "Moroni, the Last of the Nephite Prophets," in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995), 243–47.

30. Washburn, *Book of Mormon Geography*, 209; Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium*, 451. Based upon our current understanding I think it likely that the hill in New York was named after the site near the narrow neck of land by Moroni or earlier Lehitites who migrated to North America during or after Book of Mormon times. The practice of the same name being applied to multiple sites has precedent in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. In the Book of Mormon, Nephite dissidents and Lamanites built a city which they named Jerusalem, "calling it after the land of their fathers' nativity" (Alma 21:1). Other Book of Mormon places which were given biblical names include Ephraim, Gilgal, Helam, Jordan, Midian, Judea, Sidon and Ramah. In Syro-Palestine there were as many as five different sites named Ramah. Patrick M. Arnold, "Ramah," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:613–14. In the Book of Mormon there is a hill Manti at Zarahemla and a land and city of that name further south. There is the land and the city of Desolation (Mormon 3:5, 7), and also the "desolation of Nehors" (Alma 16:11). There was a hill called Onidah in the Zoramite lands in Antionum (Alma 32:4) and another Onidah in the land of Nephi (Alma 47:5). Since there is ample precedent in the texts of the Bible and the Book of Mormon for applying

the same name to different sites, it would not be surprising if Moroni or Nephite migrants into the land northward followed this practice and named the New York hill after the earlier one.

31. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah*, 73–123; Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 347–50. Both argue that this would be the Cerro Vigia in southern Veracruz, Mexico.

32. He disputes the idea that the hill was near an eastern seacoast. “A thousand miles could lie between the hill and the eastern sea as easily as ten,” but as we have seen above, that cannot be the case. The proximity of the hill to the narrow neck of land and the inference that it was on or near a region that had plains, hills and valleys also follows from the same evidence. If we assume also, as most readers do, that the narrow neck of land was somewhere in Middle America, then the point about the hill being in a temperate zone is also a reasonable inference.

33. Bart J. Kowallis, “In the Thirty and Fourth Year: A Geologist’s View of the Great Destruction in 3 Nephi,” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 3 (1997–98): 137–90; “When Day Turned to Night,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 66–67.

34. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah*, 97; Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 347–48.

35. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah*, 97–98; Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 347–48.

36. Robert D. Drennan, “Long Distance Transport Costs in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica,” *American Anthropologist* 86, no. 1 (March 1984): 105–7, 110; Hassig, *Aztec Warfare*, 64; Webster, “That Not So Peaceful Civilization,” 100.

37. Washburn, *Book of Mormon Geography*, 268. This does not mean, according to the limited Mesoamerican view, that Book of Mormon peoples did not spread to other regions of the Americas and the Pacific where they may have influenced or become integrated into other cultures. “Their only point is that the record itself does not tell about these things. It is limited to a relatively small area” (Washburn, *Book of Mormon Geography*, 213). “It is possible and quite probable, that sometime during the Book of Mormon history, some adventurous Nephites and Lamanites settled in what is now the western plains of the United States, the Mississippi Valley, and as far north as the Great Lakes region. But, no account of what they did was important enough for Mormon to include it in his abridgment of the Large Plates of Nephi” (Hammond, *Geography of the Book of Mormon*, 151–52). Sperry assumed that the episode involving Zelph was a “fringe battle” involving migrant peoples who were not involved in the activities of Mormon and his people (Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium*, 451).