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Thomas A. Moore, *A Detailed Chronology of the Book of Mormon*

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Abstract Review of *A Detailed Chronology of the Book of Mormon* (1995), by Thomas O. Moore.

Thomas O. Moore. *A Detailed Chronology of the Book of Mormon.* Lindon, Utah: Power Graphics, 1995. Wall chart. \$29.95.

Reviewed by Randall P. Spackman

A Detailed Chronology of the Book of Mormon is a large (2' x 8.5') plastic-covered wall chart. The details include nearly 540 captions summarizing hundreds of verses of the Book of Mormon, stretching across the main part of the chart in a chronological and geographical design. Time flows from left to right, starting at 600 B.C. and ending at A.D. 420. (Jaredite history is not included.) For about six feet, the upper half of the chart mainly includes a long horizontal color bar representing the northerly city and land of Zarahemla, with short segments of thinner horizontal bars designated for the valley of Gideon, and the lands of Minon, Sidom, Ammonihah, Antionum, Manti, etc. Captions are inserted into and around these color bars. The lower half of the chart is mainly devoted to a large color bar and captions for the promised land and the lands of Nephi, Shilom, Shemlon, Helam, and Amulon, with short segments for the lands of Ishmael, Middoni, Ani-Anti, etc.

Six groups of people are identified by color as well as by location and captions: brown represents the family of Lehi, yellow the Nephites, red the Lamanites, purple the Anti-Nephi-Lehis, green the Mulekites, and gray the robbers. Robbers occupy a thin strip stretching along the chart between the upper and lower halves. On the left, this thin gray strip is called the Narrow Stretch of Wilderness, but on the far right the strip broadens into Mountains, Wilderness, and Secret Places.

Colored arrows zip across the chart from land to land, showing the movement and interaction of various people. When Lamanites are converted and become known as Anti-Nephi-Lehis, the red lands of Nephi, Shilom, and Ishmael gradually turn purple. When Lamanites invade the Nephite land of Manti, the small color bar immediately changes from yellow to red, and then back again when Nephites retake their land.

Scattered across the chart are small graphic devices representing open books of scripture with their own captions: 67 refer to "key doctrinal sections" and 12 identify "historical narratives." On the far left, a large box (set off from the rest of the chart by double lines) contains Thomas O. Moore's six-paragraph testimony of the Book of Mormon and introduction to the chart. On the far right, another large box (with double lines, rounded corners, and a light blue insert between the lines) contains nearly 60 more captions relating to the Savior's ministry among Book of Mormon people. Close by this box is a black-and-white sketch of Bertel Thorvaldsen's statue of Christ.

A small box (drawn with a single line and square corners) contains a six-caption summary of the history of Helaman and the 2,000 young warriors. Two even smaller boxes with square corners contain one caption each and deal with the lands of Mulek and Lehi, and with the calendar change in "9AD." Another eleven small boxes (with single lines and rounded corners) present additional history. Seven of the boxes describe battles reported by Alma between 87 and 61 B.C. These boxes enclose between ten and seventeen captions each. The color scheme in these boxes is slightly different from that of the main chart. Another box identifies Book of Mormon record keepers in chronological order. Two more boxes refer to the Nephite annihilation between A.D. 327 and 385; one is small and contains no scriptural citation, but the other contains 22 citations. The last of the round-cornered boxes depicts line graphs purporting to measure the average number of verses in each ten-year period of the 1,020-year chart, subdivided between "historical" and "doctrinal" subjects.

More details include a time line along the bottom of the entire chart, with each century subdivided into ten-year segments. The scale of this long time line is adjustable: many ten-year segments are less than 0.25" long, while the longest (80 to 70 B.C.) requires nearly 16.75" because of the number of captions. Parallel to the long time line is a second line subdivided by the names of books within the Book of Mormon. The books of Omni, Words of Mormon, and Mosiah overlap in their coverage; here the book line separates into three lines. Another long parallel line runs across the bottom of the chart to show the period of time associated with each record keeper.

Brief notes from the author also appear here and there, referring to events or persons mentioned in the captions. For example, one caption says, "Alma departs out of the land and is never heard of more. Al 45:18–19." Next to this summary, a short yellow arrow points out from the yellow bar. The caption is clear and accurate. The arrow supplies graphic motion. As added detail, a little note appears by the point of this arrow: "ALMA?"

Finally, all these details are enclosed in a box formed with bold double lines and a dark blue insert. With so much information displayed in such a large format, my first impression was of an unwieldy but colorful synchronization of historical and doctrinal detail. When the wall chart is compared with the *Book of Mormon Chronology Chart*, a small (3.25" x 7.25") bookmark published more than a decade ago by the church, one notes the general and unmistakable graphic similarities, but they are overwhelmed by the profusion of details packed into the wall chart.

I have not verified every caption and reference. The nature of such a chart—apparently a one-man project to abstract details from a complex work—suggests that errors will occur; several are readily apparent. For example, after 1 B.C., the years are described as "1AD," "10AD," etc. This is a common error, an indication of the general lack of understanding of the Dionysian/Gregorian system by which we count solar years. The abbreviation A.D. is grammatically correct when preceding the year number, i.e., *Anno Domini* 10, in the year of the Lord 10 (A.D. 10).

Lamanites first appear in the chart about 560 B.C. Robbers do not appear until about 300 years later in the Narrow Stretch of Wilderness. No scriptures are cited for the depiction of robbers in 260 B.C. About 279 B.C., the Nephite record keeper Amaron reported that "the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed" because "the Lord did visit them in great judgment" (Omni 1:5, 7). Such a destruction need not have come by way of robbers nor would a natural disaster necessarily have created bands of robbers. Lamanite robbers seem to have existed long before 260 B.C. (see Mosiah 10:17; compare 2 Nephi 5:19–25, 34; Jacob 1:1–14; Enos 1:20–25; Jarom 1:5–13; and Omni 1:1–7), but Gadianton robbers do not appear until about 50 B.C. (see Helaman 1–2). The appearance of robbers on the chart around 260 B.C. is not historical.

Between 100 and 92 B.C., the Nephites “began to scatter abroad upon the face of the earth, yea, on the north and on the south, on the east and on the west” (Mosiah 27:6–7). The yellow arrows associated with these verses only point south, southeast, and southwest.

A similar error is the gradual change of the land of Antionum (see Alma 31:3) from being yellow Nephite to red Lamanite. The caption reads: “The Zoramites become Lamanites. Al 35:8–12; 43:3–4.” No arrow connects Antionum with the lands of the Lamanites. The impression given by the chart is that the Zoramites underwent a self-generated metamorphosis. Nonetheless, the Book of Mormon text makes it clear that the Zoramites “began to mix with the Lamanites and to stir them up also to anger” and that “the Zoramites and the Lamanites began to make preparations for war” (Alma 35:10–11). I would have expected to see arrows connecting Antionum with Lamanite lands at this point.

The wall chart represents a level of categorization and summarization that eliminates or perhaps mischaracterizes the actual complexity and detail of the Book of Mormon text. An example of this problem, more striking than misdirected or missing arrows, is the categorization made with the small images of open scriptures. The 67 pictures representing “key doctrinal sections” of the Book of Mormon are scattered across the chart. Are there only 67 “key doctrinal sections” in the Book of Mormon? Of course not. None of the 12 pictures describing “historical narratives” appears before 120 B.C. Are there, in fact, no “historical narratives” in the first 480 years of Book of Mormon history? Of course there are. Then what method of categorization was used to distinguish between “historical narratives” and all the history of the first 480 years? The chart is silent.

This problem also appears in the introductory paragraphs of testimony and description and in the small line graphs that purportedly depict the number of Book of Mormon verses characterized by “doctrinal” and “historical” subject matter. According to the second introductory paragraph, more than 42 percent of the verses in the Book of Mormon are historical. How was that conclusion reached? The chart again is silent.

In general, history is a recorded account of things that were perceived to have happened. Doctrine consists of a statement of

principles, tenets, and beliefs. In the Book of Mormon, the two are often intertwined. For example, Alma 60 contains 36 verses, including the words of Moroni's letter to Pahoran, the governor. The letter may look like 36 historical verses. However, in Alma 60:13, a verse that is integral to the accompanying discourse, Moroni presents the doctrine of the war-afflicted righteous: "For the Lord suffereth the righteous to be slain that his justice and judgment may come upon the wicked; therefore ye need not suppose that the righteous are lost because they are slain; but behold, they do enter into the rest of the Lord their God." How many verses of Alma 60 fall into the doctrinal discourse associated with this clearly doctrinal verse, and how many verses are simply historical narrative? I suppose a decision-making protocol could be established, but I do not know what the ultimate point would be.

I also do not want to draw too much attention to the question of the appropriate level of summarization. That issue is part of any chart, map, or graph used to simplify a more complex set of data. To his credit, the author has attempted to address the problem in the fourth paragraph of the introduction:

The purpose of this work is to serve as a tool in learning and understanding the Book of Mormon. *It is not intended, and should not be used, to replace a serious and personal study of the Book of Mormon.* This work provides a means to visualize and track the complex interactions between Book of Mormon people. It also aligns the parallel histories in such a way that any person can follow each of these histories without getting lost in the complexity of the record. (emphasis added)

My more serious disagreement with the chart is not so much the question of the appropriate level of detail and summarization, as it is the title's claim that the chart represents a "detailed chronology" of the Book of Mormon. The chart is detailed, but the chronology is not. A "detailed chronology" could be expected to include three elements: (a) *measurements* of actual time periods, (b) accurate *dating* of historical events, and (c) an *arrangement* of such events in the order of their occurrence. The chart is based on assumed time periods and dates that have been arranged in an

approximate order. The chart is a general chronological arrangement of summaries of Book of Mormon events associated with assumed dates.

I understand that the chart's title was designed to sell the product, so that it could be distributed into locations where it might be used. The title is intriguing for those interested in Book of Mormon details. There may be many Latter-day Saints who could benefit from hanging the chart on a wall, carefully examining the flow of history indicated by the chart, and noting those places where the chart's summarization does not fully capture the historical details. However, the chart is not truly a "detailed chronology." Given the current state of Book of Mormon chronology, it is unlikely that the author *could* have created a "detailed chronology," especially in chart form.

The topic of Book of Mormon chronology bears more than a superficial resemblance to the subject of Book of Mormon geography. Indeed, the two go hand in hand because events must happen somewhere at some time. According to John L. Sorenson, the subject of Book of Mormon geography has prompted three distinct responses. "On the part of Church authorities caution . . . has prevailed. For a minority of members the reaction has been persistent curiosity. Meanwhile a large majority have been satisfied to ignore the matter."¹

That the attitudes of the curious and the satisfied are generally the same with regard to the topic of Book of Mormon chronology hardly needs noting. However, the church's response to chronology is singularly different from its stance on Book of Mormon geography. The church publishes a chronology in the Book of Mormon, apparently with the intention that the dates given in brackets will help with the study of the Book of Mormon.²

¹ John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book*, rev. ed. (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 1.

² President Gordon B. Hinckley has expressed this sense of assistance: "The evidence for [the Book of Mormon's] truth, for its validity in a world prone to demand evidence, lies not in archaeology or anthropology, though these may be helpful to some. It lies not in word research or historical analysis, though these may be confirmatory. The evidence for its truth lies in reading it. It is a book of God." As quoted in "Viewpoint," *Church News*, 6 January 1996, 16; see also the lower headline on p.1: "Chronology chart helps with study of Book of Mormon—pages 8–9."

The introduction to the Book of Mormon declares: "The record gives an account of two great civilizations. One came from Jerusalem in 600 B.C., and afterward separated into two nations, known as the Nephites and the Lamanites." The introductory page entitled "A Brief Explanation about the Book of Mormon" supports the earlier chronological assertion by referring to "*The Plates of Brass* brought by the people of Lehi from Jerusalem in 600 B.C." The ending of Book of Mormon history is described on the same page in somewhat less absolute terms: "In or about the year A.D. 421, Moroni, the last of the Nephite prophet-historians, sealed the sacred record and hid it up unto the Lord."

At the bottom of each page of the Book of Mormon, historical dates are set within brackets. For example, on page three, 1 Nephi 2:4 reads: "And it came to pass that he *departed into the wilderness." The asterisk refers to the date given in brackets at the bottom of the page: "[*600 B.C.]". The note to this verse cites two scriptures as a basis for determining this date. First Nephi 10:4 reports: "Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world." According to 1 Nephi 19:8: "And behold he cometh, according to the words of the angel, in six hundred years from the time my father left Jerusalem."

These scriptures might justify the date of 600 B.C. if one assumes that the scriptures refer to 600 solar years and the birth of Jesus occurred in A.D. 1. However, other scriptures provide equally credible evidence about the actual departure date of Lehi from Jerusalem. Lehi appears to have been called as a prophet at Jerusalem "in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah" (1 Nephi 1:4). According to the Babylonian Chronicles,³ biblical history (see 2 Kings 24:10–18; 2 Chronicles 36:5–11), and accurate dating of an eclipse in the fifth year of Nabopolassar's reign,⁴ 597 B.C. was the year

³ Donald J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings (626–556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1956), 33.

⁴ Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadrezzar, came to the throne of Babylon on 23/24 November (Julian) 626 B.C. and died on 15/16 August (Julian) 605 B.C. Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 199–201. According to *Ptolemy's Almagest*, trans. and

Zedekiah's reign began.⁵ Thus Lehi was probably called as a prophet in 597 B.C., but not later than 596 B.C.

When Lehi's sons and the family of Ishmael were traveling south from the land of Jerusalem, a furious argument occurred when part of the group wanted to return to Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 7:1–21). Nephi sought to convince the backsliders that Jerusalem would be destroyed (clear evidence that the city had not yet been destroyed). As part of his argument, Nephi prophesied of the coming destruction and reminded his brothers that Zedekiah and his supporters had "rejected the prophets, and Jeremiah have they cast into prison" (1 Nephi 7:14).

The second Babylonian siege of Jerusalem began in January 588 B.C. (see 2 Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 39:1; 52:4; and Ezekiel

annotated by Gerald J. Toomer (London: Duckworth, 1984), 253, one of the astronomical notes compiled by Ptolemy claimed that "In the fifth year of Nabopolassar, which is the 127th year from Nabonassar, 27/28 Athyr in the Egyptian calendar, at the end of the eleventh hour in Babylon, the moon began to be eclipsed." This eclipse has been astronomically calculated to have occurred on the evening of 21/22 April (Julian) 621 B.C., a date which correlates with Hathyr 27/28 in the Egyptian calendar. See Finegan, *Handbook*, 23–29, for the Egyptian calendar system and correlation dates.

⁵ The Babylonian Chronicles provide the date of Nabopolassar's death (8 Abu in his 21st year, the equivalent of our 15/16 August [Julian] 605 B.C.) and the date of Nebuchadrezzar's accession to the throne (1 Ululu, the equivalent of 6/7 September [Julian] 605 B.C.). With 1 Ululu, Nebuchadrezzar began his accession period. The first official year of his reign began with the lunar month of the New Year Festival, Nisanu, which began on 1/2 April (Julian) 604 B.C. The Babylonian Chronicles also provide the date when Nebuchadrezzar seized the city of Jerusalem and took its king into captivity (2 Addaru in Nebuchadrezzar's seventh regnal year, the equivalent of 15/16 March [Julian] 597 B.C.). Zedekiah was chosen to be Nebuchadrezzar's vassal shortly after the capture of Jerusalem in March 597 B.C. and perhaps before the first large group of exiles left the city in April 597 B.C. Wiseman, *Chronicles*, 26–28, 33; Finegan, *Handbook*, 29–33, 198–212; Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.—A.D. 75* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1956), 27–28; Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 182–92; Abraham Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah and the Fall of Jerusalem," *Israel Exploration Journal* 18 (1968): 137–50; K. S. Freedy and Donald B. Redford, "The Dates in Ezekiel in Relation to Biblical, Babylonian and Egyptian Sources," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90 (1970): 462–68, 484.

24:1–2).⁶ However, the Babylonian army withdrew from the city to battle the Egyptian army near the seashore. According to Jeremiah 37, the prophet's incarceration occurred as he attempted to leave Jerusalem, during the period when the Babylonian siege was withdrawn. The time of these events can be estimated from dates given in Ezekiel 29:1–16; 30:20–26; 31:1–18. If one assumes that Ezekiel's dates refer to the actual events, then the siege of Jerusalem was lifted from January to June 587 B.C.⁷ If one assumes that Ezekiel's dates refer to the time when he heard the news in Babylonia, where he was in exile, then the siege may have been withdrawn perhaps as early as August 588 B.C. to January 587 B.C.⁸ Thus the dissension among Lehi's and Ishmael's families occurred more than eight years after Zedekiah's appointment by Nebuchadrezzar and Lehi's calling as a prophet.

In 2 Nephi 25:9–10, Nephi explicitly clarifies his understanding and refers to his prophecy to his brothers during their argument in the desert (see 1 Nephi 7:13) to the effect that Jerusalem was to be destroyed "immediately after my father left Jerusalem" (2 Nephi 25:10). The Babylonian army returned to Jerusalem sometime between January and June 587 B.C. (depending on when one assumes the siege was withdrawn). The siege was undertaken with ferocity and resolve, the walls were breached in July 586 B.C., and the wrecked city and corpses were burned in August 586 B.C. (see 2 Kings 25:2–10).⁹ Nephi's understanding

⁶ Finegan, *Handbook*, 205; Freedy and Redford, "The Dates in Ezekiel," 467–68, 484; Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah," 150–51; Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers*, 189–90.

⁷ Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah," 152–53.

⁸ Freedy and Redford, "The Dates in Ezekiel," 470–72, 484. Jeremiah was in prison during Zedekiah's tenth regnal year (October 588 to 587 B.C.) and Nebuchadrezzar's eighteenth regnal year (April 587 to 586 B.C.; see Jeremiah 32:1–2). Thus the events of Jeremiah's imprisonment in Jeremiah 32 may have occurred between April and October 587 B.C. Freedy and Redford, "The Dates in Ezekiel," 467; Parker and Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology*, 28.

⁹ Freedy and Redford, "The Dates in Ezekiel," 467–68, 484; Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah," 150–51; Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers*, 189–90. Ezekiel 33:21 tells of a siege survivor's visit to Ezekiel in Babylonia during January 585 B.C., about five months after the burning of the city (compare Ezra's four-month journey over a similar distance in Ezra 7:9). Freedy and Redford, "The Dates in Ezekiel," 468; Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah," 156; Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers*, 189. Finegan disagreed with these last dates for the

was exact. Jeremiah called upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem to leave the city and go to the Babylonians when the siege was lifted (Jeremiah 38:2). Lehi, whose life was in danger, left only after being commanded by the Lord to do so (see 1 Nephi 2:1–3). All this suggests that Lehi's escape occurred in the latter part of 588 B.C. or the beginning of 587 B.C.

If that is the case, then a 12- or 13-year discrepancy is apparent between the generally helpful 600 B.C. date set forth in the Book of Mormon and the more likely historical date. Does this mean that the historical approach contradicts Lehi's 600-year prophecy? Of course not. The question is not *whether* Lehi's 600-year prophecy was fulfilled. The Book of Mormon records its fulfillment (see 3 Nephi 1:1–21). The Book of Mormon is true. The question is *how* Lehi's 600-year prophecy was fulfilled. That question and its possible answers are just the sorts of things one would expect to find in a "detailed chronology" of the Book of Mormon.

I have attempted elsewhere to outline the issues relevant to a "detailed chronology" of the Book of Mormon and to suggest some plausible answers to such issues.¹⁰ I recognize that the questions and answers in a "detailed chronology" are not important for the vast majority of Latter-day Saints who have spiritual testimonies and whose interests do not include historical detail. Such questions and answers are not matters around which a spiritual testimony of the Book of Mormon is built.

Nor is there any reason for church authorities to be anything but cautious. Wisely, they have recognized the limits of intellectual inquiry. Those limits are fluid because tools of discovery and sources of information change. With such fluidity, the perception of necessary questions and possible answers can also change. The

kingdom of Judah. He eventually dated Zedekiah's first regnal year from Nisan 597 B.C., rather than from Tishri 597 B.C., and thus he placed the final destruction in 587 B.C. and the refugee's visit to Ezekiel in January 586 B.C. Finegan, *Handbook*, 205–8. Earlier, Finegan concluded that the 586 B.C. destruction of Jerusalem was more likely. Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 2:592–94.

¹⁰ Randall P. Spackman, "Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1993).

Book of Mormon needs no official chronology beyond the general dates already supplied.

Today, no "detailed chronology" exists for the Book of Mormon. The wall chart prepared by Thomas O. Moore is not a "detailed chronology." We can congratulate the author for his individual work and persistence. We may use the chart to make our own reading of the Book of Mormon more visually stimulating and, perhaps, more successful. But we must recognize that the time line at the bottom of the chart is not the time line of a "detailed chronology" of the Book of Mormon, nor are the dates given in the chart necessarily accurate.