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## Book of Mormon Lands

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**Abstract:** Miller sets out the impact that several Book of Mormon scholars had towards persuading him that the Book of Mormon took place primarily in a small section of Mesoamerica, as opposed to encompassing larger sections of both North America and Mesoamerica.

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## Book of Mormon Lands

Since the Book of Mormon was first published in 1830, critics have claimed that it could not be true for a variety of reasons. Many of these reasons that have been continually brought out over the years relate to items people have said were not in the New World before the Spaniards arrived. Items<sup>1</sup> commonly named include the existence of steel, glass, linen, silk, barley, wheat, and diverse species of animals including the horse. Several LDS and other scholars have addressed these and other criticisms. Some of this information is available on the internet. While the work of all these scholars has benefitted me, the extensive research done by Hugh Nibley and John L. Sorenson, both former professors at Brigham Young University, has proven to be especially enlightening.

Their historical, cultural, and archeological studies have provided a number of important insights into the peoples of the Book of Mormon. In my first few readings of this sacred book I felt that the history of the Jaredites and the Nephites took place in both North and South America - or at least North and Central America. The LDS Church has never made an official statement on where the Book of Mormon peoples lived. It occurred to me some years ago, however, that the Hill Cumorah in the state of New

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<sup>1</sup> These items come to us as translated words from another language. And translations of words in the scriptures are basically all that we have when we read them. There must be a number of times in which we read a given word and come to a different understanding than what was originally meant by the author. Because of this we might not interpret a given word correctly. I think that this holds true for some of the materials, plants and animals spoken of in the Book of Mormon. This should be kept in mind with each of the items discussed in this book.

York could be a renamed hill from the original one that was located in Mesoamerica (Others of course have reached this same conclusion). It was possibly here that Moroni first hid the gold plates that were later moved, and then translated by Joseph Smith to become the Book of Mormon. My opinion of where the Book of Mormon lands actually were has been changed due to the work of several LDS scholars.

One scholar mentioned previously, John L. Sorenson, has provided much evidence to show that the region was probably relatively small. According to him it did not encompass the Americas. He believes that the area of record was just what is now southern Mexico and Guatemala, part of Mesoamerica (Sorenson, 1985, p. 37; 2002, p. 273). As should be expected, though, even among LDS scholars, there are differences of opinion. BYU archaeologist, Raymond T. Matheny, has stated that there is presently insufficient evidence to accurately determine how extensive Book of Mormon lands were. (2008, Pers. Comm.). It could be that the main story of Book of Mormon prophets and their record keeping was in Mesoamerica, but that subsequently, when records were no longer kept, the remaining people dispersed throughout the Americas.

In my opinion there seems to be support for favoring Sorenson's view that Book of Mormon lands probably were part of Mesoamerica. (1985, pp. 14, 37) The Jaredite people mainly would have lived here as well. Certainly there is evidence indicating that they lived somewhere close, or within, what later became Nephite and Lamanite lands. As discussed in the Book of Mosiah (8:7-11), King Limhi sent 43 of his people to locate the land of Zarahemla. Rather than finding this land, though, they discovered a land containing ruins of buildings, one covered with bones of men and beasts, and weapons of war. Records in the form of 24 gold plates

holding a history of this people (see the Book of Ether in the Book of Mormon) were also found. It therefore seems that the center of Jaredite civilization must have been close to that of the later Nephites and Lamanites. In fact it was prophesied by Ether to King Coriantumr that another people would receive his land for their inheritance. (Ether 13:21) Also, Moroni recorded that the army of Coriantumr pitched their tents by the hill Ramah, (“... the same hill where my father Mormon did hide up the records unto the Lord, which were sacred.” (Ether 15:11)

Another evidence for my believing that the land of the Jaredites, Nephites and Lamanites was more likely in Mesoamerica, rather than what is now the eastern part of the United States, has to do with climate and geology. This is despite the fact that the Hill Cumorah<sup>2</sup> as now recognized is in the state of New York. Nowhere in the Book of Mormon is cold weather or snow mentioned. Brigham Young University geology professor, Bart Kowallis, made a good case for the natural disasters occurring among the Nephites and Lamanites, just prior to the resurrected Christ’s appearance, being mainly due to volcanic activity. (Kowallis,1998). I concur with his view that the cause of these disasters, written in 3 Nephi in the Book of Mormon, were of volcanic origin. Mesoamerica even today is a region prone to violent volcanic activity. This activity is often coupled with earthquakes and storms. Geologists Robert H. Dott and Roger L. Batten said, “One of the most volcanically active regions in the World is Central America.” (1988, p. 4) What is now eastern North America, including New York of course, has not experienced volcanic activity for many, many, millions of years. It is a geologically stable region.

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<sup>2</sup> This same name, “Cumorah,” was previously applied to a hill (and land) indicated by the prophet Mormon. He hid the records on gold plates there. (Mormon 6:6)