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Book of Mormon Geography

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Abstract: Voices strong objection to the introduction and circulation of maps that attempt to depict the geography of the Book of Mormon. Cannon raises doubts as to the authenticity of a piece entitled the "Route Traveled by Lehi and His Company" that places the landing site of Lehi's party in Chile.

frank and unbiased, to regard all this as a literary invention rather than the sober statement of fact and truth.

For more than a hundred years now men and women have been powerfully moved by the *Book of Mormon*. Last November, in an address delivered in New York City by Secretary Wallace, a great audience was told that "of all the American religious books of the nineteenth century it seems probable that the *Book of Mormon* was the most powerful," for the reason, partly, that it "had contributed to the opening up of one of our great frontiers." That is the simple truth. And this power was exerted largely through the influence of this volume on individual life, as the Secretary pointed out. In a million lives, not only in Western America, but in forty nations, the current of thought, and therefore action, has been profoundly modified and reshaped.

What is the secret of this influence? Undoubtedly it is the factual character of the book's story and teachings, as these center in the redeemership and Godhood of Jesus Christ. The *Book of Mormon* is a powerful testimony to the fact that Jesus

was God, to the fact that he is the Savior of mankind, to the fact that he actually rose from the dead, to the fact that he is as much as ever concerned in the salvation of man. In the four Jewish Gospels he is depicted, chiefly, before his death and resurrection, but in the Nephite Gospel he is shown after his resurrection. In other words, of the one hundred thousand words in the Four Gospels, all but a few are devoted to a consideration of his earthly ministry; whereas, in the Fifth Gospel's thirty-six thousand words, there is nothing scarcely, about his earthly ministry, but only of his heavenly ministry, if it may be called so.

On the assumption, therefore, that this Fifth Gospel is as historical as the Four Gospels (in truth, as was shown in an article in last month's *Instructor*, it is far better attested than they), it easily becomes one of the most revealing documents in human history, since it lays bare the very facts and interests which the race has always sought without finding them.

Verily, Christ is still alive!

BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY

By GEORGE Q. CANNON

(Reprint from the JUVENILE INSTRUCTOR, of January 1, 1890)

There is a tendency, strongly manifested at the present time among some of the brethren, to study the geography of the *Book of Mormon*. We have heard of numerous lectures, illustrated by suggestive maps, being delivered on this subject during the present winter, generally under the auspices of the Improvement Societies and Sunday Schools. We are greatly pleased to notice the increasing interest taken by the Saints in this holy book. It contains the fullness of the gospel of Christ, and those who prayerfully study its sacred pages can be made wise unto salvation. It also unravels many mysteries connected with the history of the ancient world, more particularly of this western continent, mysteries which no other book explains. But valuable as is the *Book of Mormon* both in doctrine and history, yet it is possible to put this sacred volume to uses for which it was never intended, uses which are detrimental rather than advantageous to the cause of truth, and consequently to the work of the Lord.

We have been led to these thoughts from the fact that the brethren who lecture on the

lands of the Nephites or the geography of the *Book of Mormon* are not united in their conclusions. No two of them, so far as we have learned, are agreed on all points, and in many cases the variations amount to thousands of miles. These differences of views lead to discussion, contention and perplexity, and we believe more confusion is caused by these divergences than good is done by the truths elicited.

How is it that there is such a variety of ideas on this subject? Simply because the *Book of Mormon* is not a geographical primer. It was not written to teach geographical truths. What is told us of the situation of the various lands or cities of the ancient Jaredites, Nephites and Lamanites is usually simply an incidental remark connected with the doctrinal or historical portions of the work; and almost invariably only extends to a statement of the relative position of some land or city contiguous to or surrounding places, and nowhere gives us the exact situations or boundaries so that it can be definitely located without fear of error.

It must be remembered that geography as a science, like chronology and other branches of education, was not understood nor taught after the manner or by the methods of the moderns. It could not be amongst those peoples who were not acquainted with the size and form of the earth, as was the case with most of the nations of antiquity, though not with the Nephites. Their seers and prophets appear to have received divine light on this subject.

The First Presidency have often been asked to prepare some suggestive map illustrative of Nephite geography, but have never consented to do so. Nor are we acquainted with any of the Twelve Apostles who would undertake such a task. The reason is, that without further information they are not prepared even to suggest. The word of the Lord or the translation of other ancient records is required to clear up many points now so obscure that, as we have said, no two original investigators agree with regard to them. When, as is the case, one student places a certain city at the Isthmus of Panama, a second in Venezuela, and a third in Guiana or northern Brazil, it is obvious that suggestive maps prepared by these brethren would confuse instead of enlighten; and they cannot be thus far apart in this one important point without relative positions being also widely separate.

For these reasons we have strong objections to the introduction of maps and their circulation among our people which profess to give the location of the Nephite cities and settlements. As we have said, they have a tendency to mislead, instead of enlighten, and they give rise to discussions which will lead to division of sentiment and be very unprofitable. We see no necessity for maps of the character, because, at least, much would be left to the imagination of those who prepare them; and we hope that there will be no attempt made to introduce them or give them general circulation. Of course, there can be no harm result from the study of the geography of this continent at the time it was settled by the Nephites, drawing all the information possible from the record which has been translated for our benefit. But beyond this we do not think it necessary, at the present time, to go, because it is plain to be seen, we think, that evils may result therefrom.

ROUTE TRAVELED BY LEHI AND HIS COMPANY

The *Compendium*, a little book by Franklin D. Richards and James A. Little, was originally published in England, 1857. This edition makes no reference to the route fol-

lowed by Lehi and his company. All American editions, however, beginning with 1882, contain the following:

"*Lehi's Travels—Revelation to Joseph the Seer.* The course that Lehi and his company traveled from Jerusalem to the place of their destination:

"They traveled nearly a south, southeast direction until they came to the nineteenth degree of north latitude; then, nearly east to the Sea of Arabia, then sailed in a southeast direction, and landed on the continent of South America, in Chili, thirty degrees south latitude."

This statement has gained wide acceptance throughout the Church, and has even been copied by various writers. Its authenticity, however, is subject to grave doubt, as witness the following:

The only known source of authority upon which it rests is a single sheet of manuscript presented to the Church Historian's office, in 1864, by Ezra G. Williams, son of Frederick G. Williams, at one time counselor to Joseph Smith in the First Presidency. On one page of the manuscript are some supposedly Book of Mormon characters, and on the other a faulty copy of the revelation printed as section seven of the Doctrine and Covenants, together with the statement that appears in the *Compendium*, with the exception that it lays no claim to being a revelation, neither does it mention the name of the Prophet as its author. Thus the following caption, as it appears in the *Compendium*, "*Lehi's Travels—Revelation to Joseph the Seer,*" is not present in the original manuscript.

In summary, the most that can be said with certainty of the manuscript statement is that it bears good evidence of having been written by the hand of Frederick G. Williams. He himself, however, gives no indication of the identity of its author; neither does he claim it to be of divine origin.

The Church has issued no information concerning the route followed by Lehi and his company. Until this is done, teachers of the Gospel Doctrine department should refrain from expressing definite opinions.

FREDERICK J. PACK.

Chairman Gospel Doctrine Committee.

(Note. The present associate editor of *The Instructor* was one day in the office of the late President Joseph F. Smith when some brethren were asking him to approve a map showing the exact landing place of Lehi and his company. President Smith declined to officially approve of the map, saying that the Lord had not yet revealed it, and that if it were officially approved and afterwards found to be in error, it would affect the faith of the people.—*Asst. Editor.*)