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River Sidon South to North

Author(s): Kirk Magleby

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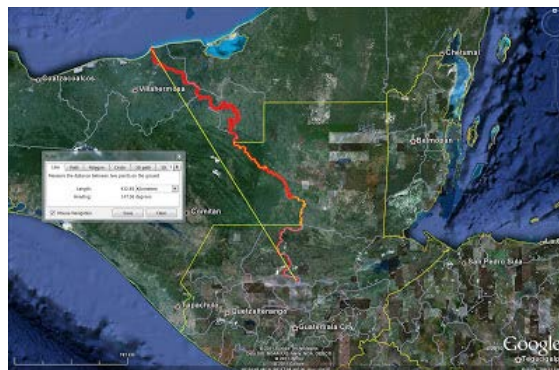
Kirk Magleby

- Q. How do we know the river Sidon flowed south to north?
 - A1. Near the land of Zarahemla, the hill Amnihu [Alma 2:15, 17](#) and the valley of Gideon [Alma 6:7](#) were both east of the river Sidon. Near the city of Zarahemla, the river Sidon had a west bank [Alma 2:34](#). These data points all imply a general north/south orientation for the river in that part of its course.
 - A2. Beyond (south of) the land of Manti, a south wilderness [Alma 16:6, 7](#) lay east of the river Sidon. This implies a general north/south orientation for the river in that part of its course.
 - A3. Upstream from (south of) the land of Manti Alma [43:32](#), Captain Moroni placed part of the Nephite army west of the river Sidon [Alma 43:27](#) and another part east of the river Sidon [Alma 43:53](#). These data points imply a general north/south orientation for the river in that part of its course.
 - A4. One verse in the text has been interpreted to mean that the river Sidon flowed from east to west in part of its course. [Alma 22:27](#) is ambiguous. It could mean that the river Sidon flowed from east to west at that point. Given the repetitive nature of Mormon's phrasing, though, it is more likely that all the east to west references in [Alma 22:27-29](#) refer to the narrow strip of wilderness that separated Nephite lands on the north from Lamanite lands on the south. The text mentions several geographic entities or human activities either east or west of the river Sidon. The text never mentions entities or activities directly north or south of the Sidon. All of these data points reinforce the notion that the Sidon flowed in a general north/south direction over most of its length.
 - A5. The land of Manti was south of the land of Zarahemla [Alma 17:1](#). The land of Manti was also near the head of the river Sidon [Alma 43:22](#). From the head of the river Sidon, one went down in elevation to Zarahemla [Alma 56:25](#). These data points indicate that the river Sidon flowed generally northward from Manti to Zarahemla.
 - A6. The greater land of Nephi was south of the greater land of Zarahemla [Alma 50:7](#). An east/west dividing line separating the two lands ran by the head of the river Sidon [Alma 50:11](#). To go from Zarahemla to Nephi, one went up in elevation [Alma 2:24](#). Therefore, the river Sidon which bordered the land of Zarahemla [Alma 2:15](#) flowed generally from south to north.

- A7. The Mulekites made landfall in the land northward [Alma 22:30](#), then founded their capital, Zarahemla, in the land southward [Mormon 1:6](#) along the Sidon [Mormon 1:10](#). As the Mulekites traveled south from the seacoast they went up in elevation [Alma 22:31](#). This means the Sidon flowed downhill toward the north.

The northerly flow of the Sidon has been well-understood by Book of Mormon students for over a century. In his notes to the 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon, Orson Pratt said the river flowed northward, an observation that persisted in the indices to the 1920 edition prepared under the direction of James E. Talmage and the 1980 edition prepared under the direction of Bruce R. McConkie. In his magnum opus published in 1899 (*A Complete Concordance of the Book of Mormon*), George Reynolds correlated the Sidon with the north-flowing Magdalena in modern Colombia. In his 1917 work *Geography of Mexico and Central America from 2234 BC to 421 AD* Louis Edward Hills correlated the Sidon with the north-flowing Usumacinta. The New World Archaeological Foundation's first season of field work in 1953 was near Huimanguillo, Tabasco west of the north-flowing Grijalva. Daniel H. Ludlow's internal reconstruction of Book of Mormon geography, distributed throughout the Church Educational System for decades, shows the Sidon flowing north to the sea. John E. Clark's article "Book of Mormon Geography" in the 1992 semi-official *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* includes the north-flowing Sidon as one of the few tenets of Book of Mormon geography unambiguously attested in the text.

We established previously that the Usumacinta River is the viable candidate for The Book of Mormon's river Sidon. See the article "[The River Sidon - Precis](#)" in this blog. As we would expect, the Usumacinta flows generally from south to north.



Chixoy/Salinas/Usumacinta River flowing northward to the sea