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## Chapter LXVIII

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**Abstract:** The Lands of the Nephites—Mulek and Lehi—Zarahemla and Nephi—The Wilderness—The Land of First Inheritance—The Journeys Northward—The Waters of Mormon—Lehi—Nephi

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## CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE LANDS OF THE NEPHITES—MULEK AND LEHI—ZARAHENLA AND NEPHI—THE WILDERNESS—THE LAND OF FIRST INHERITANCE—THE JOURNEYS NORTHWARD—THE WATERS OF MORMON—LEHI-NEPHI.

TO THE ancient Nephites the whole of North America was known as the land of Mulek, and South America as the land of Lehi; or, to use the exact language of the Book of Mormon, the land south was called Lehi: and the land north was called Mulek.

The reason why these names were so given was because the Lord brought Mulek into the land north, and Lehi into the land south, when he led them from Judea to this greater land of promise.

From the days of the first Mosiah to the era of Christ's advent, South America was divided into two grand divisions. These were the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi. During this period, except in times of war, the Lamanites occupied the land of Nephi, and the Nephites inhabited the land of Zarahemla.

That these two lands occupied the whole of the southern continent is shown by the statement of the sacred writer: Thus the land of Nephi, and the land of Zarahemla, were nearly surrounded by water; there being a small neck of land between the land northward and the land southward. The width of this narrow neck of land that connected the two continents is in one place said to have been the distance of a day and a half's journey for a Nephite. In another place it is

called a day's journey. Perhaps the places spoken of are not identical, but one may have been slightly to the north of the other along the line of the isthmus.

Both the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla were subdivided, for governmental purposes, into smaller lands, states or districts. Among the Nephites, these lands, in the days of the republic, were ruled by a local chief judge, subject to the chief judge of the whole nation; and among the Lamanites by kings, who were tributary to the head king, whose seat of government was at the city of Lehi-Nephi or Nephi.

The land of Nephi covered a much larger area of country than did the land of Zarahemla. The two countries were separated by the wilderness which extended entirely across the continent from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. The northern edge of this wilderness ran in a line almost due east and west, and passed near the head of the river Sidon. The Sidon is generally understood to be the river in these days called the Magdalena.

All north of this belt of wilderness was considered the land of Zarahemla; all south of it was included in the land of Nephi. We are nowhere told its exact breadth, and can only judge thereof from casual references in the narrative of the Book of Mormon.

The river Sidon flowed through the centre of the Nephite civilization of the days of the republic. After the convulsions that attended the crucifixion of the Holy Messiah, the physical and political geography of the continent was greatly changed, and the new conditions are very vaguely defined by the inspired historians.

On the western bank of the river Sidon was built

the city of Zarahemla. From the time of its first occupancy by the Nephites, to the date of its destruction by fire at the crucifixion, it was the capital or chief city of the nation, the centre of commercial activities, and the seat of government. It was the largest and oldest city within their borders, having been founded by the people of Zarahemla before the exodus of the Nephites, under the first Mosiah, from the land of Nephi.

When the Nephites, by reason of increasing numbers, the exigencies of war, or for other causes founded new cities, the cities so built were generally called after the name of the leader of the colony or some illustrious citizen, and the land immediately surrounding, contiguous or tributary to the new city was called by the same name. As an example we will take the city or land of Ammonihah, regarding which it is written: Now it was the custom of the people of Nephi to call their lands and their cities, and their villages, yea, even all their small villages, after the name of him who first possessed them; and thus it was with the land of Ammonihah.

Some of these lands appear to have been relatively small, more resembling a county, or possibly a township, than any other division at present prevailing in this country. Such we suppose to have been the lands of Helam and Moreanton. Others, such as the lands of Bonntiful and Desolation, embraced wide, extended tracts of country.

The exact place where Lehi and his little colony first landed on this continent is not stated in the Book Mormon: but it is generally believed among the Latter-day Saints to have been on the coast of Chili in thirty

degrees south latitude. In fact, the Prophet Joseph Smith so stated.

We do not think it possible, without divine revelation, to determine with accuracy the identical spot where Lehi and his colony landed. We believe that the coast line of that region has entirely changed since those days. Even if we do not take into consideration the overwhelming convulsions that took place at the crucifixion of our Lord, which changed the entire face of nature, there remains the general elevation or subsidence of the land which is continually taking place the world over. Some coasts are rising, some are falling. The land in South America, on its western or Pacific shores, has long been rising, some think for centuries.

If this be so the rise of an inch a year would entirely change the configuration of the sea shore, and give this generation shallows and dry land, where but a few centuries ago there were deep waters. But so far as the results growing out of the terrible earthquakes that occurred at the death of the Savior are concerned, we can form no conclusions, for they were variable. In some regions the waters usurped the place of the land, in others the land encroached upon the waters. Which way it happened near the place where Lehi landed we have no record, and consequently can say nothing. For all we know a huge mountain may now cover the spot, or it may be hidden beneath the blue waters of the Pacific, scores of miles away from any present landing place.

In the region that Lehi landed there he also died. Soon after his death, Nephi, and those of the colony who wished to serve the Lord, departed for another

country. They did so by direct command of heaven. The reason for this command was the murderous hatred shewn by Laman and Lemuel towards Nephi and his friends. These vicious men determined to kill Nephi, that he might not be a king and a ruler over them. Their hearts were wicked, they loved sin and were resolved that they would not be governed by their virtuous and heaven-favored brother.

Nephi and his company journeyed in the wilderness for many days. By the expression "the wilderness," we understand the inspired writer to mean the uncultivated and uninhabited portion of the land. This word appears to be frequently used, in after years, with this signification. At other times it is applied to the desert and uninhabitable regions, the tropical forests, and jungles infested with wild beasts. The journey of the Nephites was northward, as is shown by their later history; but Nephi, in his very brief account of this migration, says nothing with regard to the direction in which they traveled.

At the end of many days a land was found which was deemed suitable for settlement. There the company pitched their tents, and commenced the tillage of the soil. In honor of their leader, it was called the land of Nephi; or to use the modest language of Nephi, My people would that we should call the name of the place Nephi; wherefore we did call it Nephi.

No doubt the choice of location was made by divine inspiration. It was a highly-favored land, rich in mineral and vegetable productions, and yielded abundant crops to the labors of the husbandman.

In this happy country the Nephites dwelt, pros-

pered and increased until they again moved northward. Perhaps not once nor twice they migrated, but several times; for we hold it to be inconsistent with the story of the record and with good judgment to believe that in their first journey they traveled as far north as they were found four hundred years afterwards, when they again took up their line of march, and finally settled in the land of Zarahemla. In the first place there was no necessity for Nephi and his people taking such a lengthy, tedious and hazardous journey; in the second place, in their weak condition, it was nigh unto an impossibility. To have taken a journey of a few hundred miles would have placed them out of the reach of the Lamanites; there was no need for them to travel thousands. Again, in a few years the Lamanites had followed and come up to them; it is altogether inconsistent to think that that people, with its racial characteristics, would in so short a time have accomplished so marvelous a triumph as to follow, hunt up and attack their late brethren if the latter had placed all the distance from Chili to Ecuador between them and their pursuers. When we consider the difficulties of travel through the trackless wilderness, the obstacles interposed by nature, the lack of all roads or other guides to indicate where the Nephites had gone, it seems out of the question to imagine that in twenty years or so, the shiftless, unenterprising Lamanites had accomplished such a feat. To the contrary, we believe that Nephi and those with him traveled until they considered themselves safe, then settled down in a spot which they deemed desirable. By and by the Lamanites came upon them; the Nephites defended themselves as long as they could, and

when they could do so no longer they again moved to the northward. Their early history was one of frequent wars; and as the Lord used the Lamanites as thorns in their sides when they turned from him, we judge for this reason, and that they were found so far north in the days of Amaleki and Mosiah, that the savage descendants of Laman had frequently defeated them and driven them farther and farther away from the land of their first possession.

The inquiry will naturally arise, as a result of these suggestions: In what portion of the South American continent lay the home of the Nephites in the days of Mosiah? This cannot be answered authoritatively. We are nowhere told its exact situation. Still, there are many references in the Book of Mormon from which we can judge, to some extent, of its location. Elder Orson Pratt suggests that it was in the country we now call Ecuador. The writer entirely agrees with Elder Pratt's suggestion. Other brethren have placed it considerably farther south; but in our reading of the Book of Mormon we have found no evidence to confirm their suppositions, but much to contradict them.

We believe that the lands occupied by the Nephites before they went down into the land of Zarahemla were situated among the table lands or high valleys of the Andes, much as Utah is located in the bosom of the Rocky Mountains and parallel chains. For these reasons:

First—They were lands rich in minerals, which all through the American continents are found most abundantly in mountain regions. We may (so far as mineral proximity is concerned) compare the country



east of this portion of the Andes—the unexplored, alluvial silvas of the Amazon—to the great plains or prairies east of the Rocky Mountains. These silvas, stretching from the Andes to the Atlantic, we regard as the great wilderness south of Zarahemla so often spoken of in the annals of the Judges.

Secondly, the climate of the torrid low lands, almost directly under the equator, would be intolerable for its heat, and deadly in its humidity; while the country in the high valleys and table lands would be excellently adapted to human life, especially (we may presume) before the great upheavals and convulsions that marked the death of the Redeemer. As the Nephites spread over the country they located in regions where fevers were common, possibly in those parts rendered unhealthy by the overflowing of the rivers, which, when they receded, left large bodies of stagnant water covering the surface of the ground for the greater portion of the year.

It is also probable that in their journeys the Nephites would follow the most available route, rather than plunge into the dense, untrodden, primeval forests of the wilderness; the home of all manner of savage animals, venomous snakes and poisonous reptiles; where a road would have to be cut every foot of the way through the most luxuriant and gigantic tropical vegetation to be found on the face of the globe. Therefore we regard its accessibility as another reason for believing that the Nephites did not leave the great backbone of the continent to descend into the unexplored depths of the region whose character they aptly sum up in the one word, wilderness.

Our readers must not forget that there were two

lands called by the name of Nephi. The one was a limited district immediately surrounding the city of Lehi-Nephi or Nephi. There Mosiah and the Nephites dwelt, about two hundred years before Christ. The other land of Nephi occupied the whole of the continent south of the great wilderness. This wilderness formed its northern boundary, and its frontier thereon ran in a straight course from the east to the west sea, or, to use our modern geographical names, in a straight line from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.

As this wilderness, though of great length east and west, was but a narrow strip north and south, and its northern edge ran close to the head waters of the River Sidon (or Magdalena), it is evident that the land of Nephi covered by far the greater portion of South America. Within its wide boundaries was situated the original land of Nephi; as well as many other lands called by various local names, just in the same way as there are many States in these United States, all together forming one great nation.

It is very obvious how there grew to be these two lands of Nephi. At first, the small district around the capital city comprised all the territory occupied by the Nephites. As they spread out, whatever valley, plain, etc., they reclaimed from the wilderness was considered a part of that land; and thus, year by year, its borders grew wider and wider, while for convenience sake or governmental purposes, the newly built cities and the land surrounding were called by varied names, according to the wishes of the people, most frequently after the leader of the out-going colony or founder of the city. Thus we have a land of Nephi within the land of Nephi; just as we have now-a-days Utah County

within Utah Territory; and the city of New York and the county of New York within the state of New York. To distinguish the smaller land of Nephi from the whole country, it is sometimes called the land of Lehi-Nephi.

We have stated that the small land of Nephi was a very limited district. We think this is easily proven. It was so limited in extent that we are told king Noah built a tower near the temple so high that he could stand upon the top thereof and overlook not only the land of Lehi-Nephi where it was built, but also the land of Shilom and the land of Shemlon, which last named land was possessed by the Lamanites. No matter how high the tower, these lands must have been comparatively small (or at any rate the land of Lehi-Nephi was) to have enabled a man to overlook the whole three from the top of one building.

It was on the borders of this land, at the outer edge of its cultivated grounds, in the forest (or thicket) of Mormon, that Alma used to hide himself in the daytime, from the searches of the king, while he ministered among the people when the shades of evening gave him security. It was there he gathered the believers in his teachings, baptized them in the waters of Mormon, and organized the Church of Jesus Christ, From the waters of Mormon to Zarahemla it was twenty-two days' actual travel for an emigrant train.

Alma having been warned of the Lord that the armies of king Noah would come upon his people. the latter gathered together their flocks, and took of their grain and departed into the wilderness which divided the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla. They fled eight days' journey into the wilderness when they

rested and commenced to build a city, which they called Helam. Being afterwards compelled to leave this city, on account of the persecutions of the Lamanites and Amulonites, they again took their journey northward, and reached the homes of the main body of the Nephites in Zarahemla in about fourteen days.

Here we have a people encumbered and delayed by flocks and herds, heavily laden with grain, etc., making the journey (in two separate stages) in twenty-two days. It is scarcely supposable that they traveled in a direct line; mountains, rivers and swamps would render the journey somewhat circuitous or winding. But even supposing that they did advance in an almost direct line from point to point, it would only make the distance between Nephi and Zarahemla 220 miles, if they traveled ten miles a day; 330, if they traveled fifteen miles; and 440 if they journeyed twenty miles a day.

Our readers must decide for themselves which distance per day is the most likely that a company, driving their flocks and herds before them, would advance through an unexplored wilderness, full of natural hindrances, and without roads, bridges, ferries and other helps to the traveler.

Zarahemla was situated on the Sidon, certainly a considerable distance from its head waters, as other lands and cities (such as Minon and Manti) are mentioned as lying far above it. If we measure the distance from such a point southward, either 200, 300 or 400 miles, all these measurements will bring us into the country now called Ecuador.

We are of the opinion that the land of Lehi-Nephi was situated in one of the higher valleys, or extensive

plateaus of the Andes. In the first place, admitting it was in Ecuador, it would lie almost immediately under the equator, and the lowlands, as before suggested, would be unbearable for an industrious population on account of the great heat; as well as exceedingly unhealthy by reason of chills, fever, and like complaints.

Again, the crops of which the Nephites raised most abundantly—barley and wheat—are not those that flourish in a tropical climate, but can be grown most advantageously in a temperate region, such as could be found in these higher valleys.

It was also a land rich in mineral wealth, which is not probable would have been the case if it had been situated among the wide-spreading alluvial plains east of the Andes.

It is likewise spoken of as a hilly or mountainous country. The hill north of the land of Shilom is frequently mentioned in the historical narrative. For instance:

Ammon came to a hill, which is north of the land of Shilom (*Mosiah vii. 5*).

King Limhi caused his guards to go to the hill which was north of Shilom (*Mosiah vii. 16*).

King Noah erected a great tower on the hill north of the land of Shilom (*Mosiah xi. 13*.)

For another reason, the expression “up” is almost always used when reference is made to persons going towards the land of Nephi. Not only did they travel from Zarahemla up the Sidon and across the wilderness to Nephi, but also *up* from the land of Ishmael and other portions of the land of Nephi to the city of Nephi and its surroundings. In contradistinction to

this, persons leaving Nephi went down to the land of Zarahemla and other places.

The only time in which the word down is used, when referring to persons going towards Nephi, is when certain persons came down to the city from off the hill mentioned above.

Some of our readers may object to the statement that the city of Nephi and the city of Lehi-Nephi were one and the same place; and that the land round about was sometimes called the land of Lehi-Nephi, and sometimes the land of Nephi only. But we think that a careful perusal of the record of Zeniff, in the Book of Mormon, will convince them of the fact; especially if they will compare it with the last few verses of the book of Omni. Zeniff in one place speaks of possessing, by treaty with the Lamanites, the land of Lehi-Nephi (*Mosiah i. v. 6*), and a few verses later on (verse 14), he talks of the thirteenth year of his reign in the land of Nephi.

If we mistake not, the name of Lehi-Nephi occurs only seven times in the Book of Mormon; everywhere else the name Nephi is used when referring to this land.

