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The Search for Nahom and the End of Lehi's Trail in Southern Arabia

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The Search for Nahom and the End of Lehi's Trail in Southern Arabia*

by Warren P. And Michaela J. Aston

Introduction

In a general sense, the course taken by the Book of Mormon prophet Lehi and his family after leaving Jerusalem about 600 B.C. has never really been in doubt. They traveled in "nearly a south-southeast direction" along the eastern coast of the Red Sea (1 Nephi 16:13), probably following, at least in part, one of the trade routes that carried a huge volume of incense and other commodities north from southern Arabia. After an unspecified, but apparently extended period of travel through the desert, Lehi's party pitched their tents and prepared to "tarry for the space of a time" (1 Nephi 16:33), probably long enough to plant and harvest crops. ¹ During this time Ishmael died "and was buried in the place which was called Nahom" (1 Nephi 16:34).

When they resumed their journey, they "did travel nearly eastward from that time forth" (1 Nephi 17:1),² or toward the

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¹ See George Reynolds and Janne Sjodahl, Commentary on the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1955), 1:167.

² A written statement by Frederick G. Williams that Lehi turned nearly east at the 19th degree latitude is presently unsupportable historically as an inspired utterance, see Frederick G. Williams, "Did Lehi Land in Chile? An assessment of the Frederick G. Williams Statement," F.A.R.M.S. WIL-88, and is inconsistent with the data presented in this report. The same writing designates Chile as Lehi's landing place in the
Indian Ocean. One consequence was to minimize contact with the region to the south, which archaeological data now suggests was relatively heavily populated, even though doing so meant they then had to traverse the most difficult terrain of their entire journey. Their travel in the wilderness ended at the seashore in a land they called Bountiful (1 Nephi 17:5).

Because Nahom is a pivotal point in Lehi's journey, marking a major change in direction, identifying the place on today's map is critical to an understanding of the actual route the journey followed. Its location also becomes a significant clue to the location of Bountiful, the launching place for Lehi's sea voyage to the American continent. This paper examines historical, geographical, and archaeological evidence which helps us specify the location of Nahom and thus also of Bountiful.

The Search for Nahom

The place Nahom is unique among the places Lehi tarried during his wilderness journey. Most places in the wilderness mentioned in the Book of Mormon were named by Lehi (see 1 Nephi 2:8-9, 14; 16:6, 12-13; 17:5). However, the words of 1 Nephi 16:34, "the place which was called Nahom," indicate rather clearly that Nahom was an existing, locally known place name.  

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Americas, a conclusion also at variance with the evidence now available.

3 This verse is also the clearest indication given that Lehi's group had any type of contact with other peoples in Arabia (emphasis added).

In 1978, Ross Christensen of Brigham Young University noted the intriguing possibility that a form of the name Nahom may have survived to modern times. He referred to a map of Yemen prepared in 1763 by Carsten Niebuhr showing a district called Nehhm located about 25 miles northeast of the capital, Sana'a. The following factors argue that "Nehhm" (as the name is given in Niebuhr's map) is the most likely candidate for Nahom. When considered together, all the evidence to date indicates that Lehi's turn "nearly eastward" occurred in or very near the wadi Jauf adjacent to Nehhm in what is today the Yemen Arab Republic.

1. Indications of Antiquity. Maps which preserve this name, as well as descriptions by early historians and travelers, attest that the present-day district of Nehem in Yemen has been known as such since the pre-Islamic era.

The earliest map located to date showing Nehem is the French cartographer Jean Bourguignon D'Anville's 1751 map of Asia. It shows the relation of Nehem to Sana'a the same as on later maps, and is significant because D'Anville used as his sources the writings and maps of much earlier Arab geographers, including Idrisī (1100-1165), Abū'l-Fidā (1273-1331), and Katib Chelebi (1609-1657).

D'Anville's map showed the western world its ignorance of inland Arabia. Desiring to correct this ignorance, Danish King Frederick V sponsored an expedition to Arabia in 1761-64.

5 Ross T. Christensen, "The Place Called Nahom," Ensign (August 1978), 73.

6 G. Tibbets, Arabia in Early Maps (Cambridge: Oleander Press, 1978), Map No. 281; see also 29-30; 166-68.
Carsten Niebuhr, a German surveyor and mapmaker, was the sole survivor of the expedition. His 1763 map of Yemen showed Nehm located about 25 miles northeast of Sana'a. Although the expedition's travels covered only the western half of the modern republic and used only the most basic equipment and methods, its maps and descriptions provided Europeans with the most accurate information about the area for more than a century to come.7

(See Figure 1).

Niebuhr's original writings describe Nehm as a "Lordship" and also as an independent "State of Yemen," one of thirteen such states listed as additional to the dominions of the Imam at Sana'a. For example, in the chapter titled "Of the Principalities of Nehm and Khaulan" is the following:

Nehm is a small district between Dsjof and Hafchid-u-Bekil. The present Sheikh, who is of a warlike character, and often troublesome to the Imam, is an independent prince. He possesses a few small inconsiderable towns, with a fertile mountain, on which are many villages. The inhabitants of Deiban are free; but they always join the Sheikh of Nehm in his wars with the Imam.8

Joseph Halevy, a young French Jew, also spoke of the place. In 1869, while searching for antiquities, Halevy traveled through the countryside disguised as a rabbi. He refers to "the independent hill-canton of NEHM on the arid eastern downs"


8 See map in Robert Heron, tr., Niebuhr's Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1792); see also 2:46-47, 62-63.
northeast of Sana'a. A lesser known account of Halevy's journey is that kept by his local guide, Hayyim Habshush. In his record he refers often to the district of NIHM, the NIHM tribe who lived there, and to their uncommon acceptance of and respect for local Jews.

Other maps printed in succeeding years and as recently as 1985 confirm the name and location of Nehem.11


11 Maps which show Nehem or an equivalent toponym include the following:

- **NEHEM** on D'Anville's map taken from medieval sources.
- **NEHHM** on the 1763 map by Niebuhr.
- **NEHM** on Ritter's 1852 map.
- **NEHM** in Halevy's 1869 tribal reference.
- **NIHM** in Habshush's 1869 tribal reference.
- **NEHM** listed as a territory of Yemen in an 1897 geography. (V. De Saint-Martin, *New Dictionary of Universal Geography*, vol. 7 Paris, 1897.)
- **BAHAM** on the 1939 G.S.G.S. map, apparently resulting from a misreading or misprinting of the Arabic name of the tribe, NAHAM (Geographical Section General Staff map, 1939).
- **NAHM** in another G.S.G.S. map, printed in 1962, showing the tribal area.
- **NAHM** in Schmidt's 1968 Tribal map (D. Schmidt, *Yemen: The Unknown War* (London: The Bodley Head, 1968). See Figure 3.
- **NIHM** in a 1985 Survey map (Survey Authority Map, printed by Orell Fussli Graphic Arts, Zurich, Switzerland).
Nehem today in the Yemen Arab Republic is a fairly large and somewhat loosely defined district, well known within the country and still associated with the Nahm tribe. However, because it is not one of the administrative provinces of the present-day Republic, it seldom appears on contemporary maps.

2. The Nahm Tribe. The longtime existence of the Nahm tribe, after which the district of Nehem is named, provides further evidence of the antiquity of the name. Unlike most parts of the Arab world, the tribes of Yemen have in some instances survived to the present from the earliest recorded Arab history, long before the advent of Islam (see Figure 2). Although many Yemeni tribes are named after a common ancestor, it is likely that the Nahm tribal name is from a place name rather than the name of any individual.\textsuperscript{12} The geographical isolation of Yemen and the extreme ruggedness of the country has undoubtedly contributed to keeping many of the tribal areas and traditions\textsuperscript{13} secure from the ravages of famine, migration, and conquest, with consequent population replacement.

A recognized authority on Yemeni tribes has commented:

The first thing to be noted about Yemeni tribes is that they have been where they are for a very long time. The names Hashid and Bakil are pre-Islamic. Many of the lesser tribal


\textsuperscript{13} A little known and likely unrecorded Yemeni tribal ritual involving a specific ceremonial handgrip, accompanied by sacred "words" given on most special occasions (perhaps marriage), is known (possibly of Sufi origins). Personal knowledge of this was reported to the authors in Sana'a in October 1987. While intriguing, this is mentioned here only by way of general interest.
names go back a thousand years, and there are few names of present-day tribes that one cannot trace back at least to the 17th century. Tribes as such do not move. Nor do they over-run each other.\textsuperscript{14}

Although the extent of the tribal influence may have varied over the centuries, all references—both ancient and modern—to the Nahm tribe consistently place the group in its present location.

Many of the tribal groupings are referred to in the writings of the tenth century Yemeni historian, Ibn-al-Hā'îk al-Hamdānī, who died in A.D. 945 in Sana\textsuperscript{c}a. The surviving remnants of the ten books comprising his Al Ikil\textsuperscript{l} offer extensive geographical and tribal data, much of which is recorded nowhere else. Among the genealogies and histories of the many tribal groups included in his work is a reference to one Niham, son of Rabia'a, which possibly relates to the present-day Nahm tribe.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Paul Dresch, "Tribalism," unpublished paper, University of Michigan, 1986.

\textsuperscript{15} Al-Hamdani, Al-Ikil\textsuperscript{l}, German trans. by Oscar Lofgren (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 116-17. See also C. Robin, Al Hamdani, A Great Yemeni Scholar—Studies on the Millenial Anniversary of Al Hamdani (University Sana\textsuperscript{a}, 1986).

The traditional genealogy of the Nahm tribe has them descending from Hamdan:

\begin{verbatim}
Saba (Sheba)
    \hline
Kahan
    \hline
Zayd
    \hline
Malik
    \hline
Hamdan
    \hline
Hashid
    \hline
Bakil
    \hline
\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}
NAHM
\end{verbatim}
Another typical reference to the historicity of the tribe is the 1936 comment by the English explorer Philby. While exploring near the Jauf valley, he noted:

A third tribal area farther back in the mountains [is] known as Bilad Nahm--[one of] an ancient trio of laconic names going far back into the history of Hamdan.\textsuperscript{16}

The Nahm tribe today is affiliated with the Zaydi branch of Islam, introduced to Yemen when the fighting Hamdan tribes (Hashid and Bakil) were reconciled around 900 A.D. Since that time, the Zaydi influence has predominated among the northern tribes and has kept the tribal structures largely intact. As of 1987, the tribe numbered approximately 24,000 persons. They continue to occupy the mountainous area northeast of Sana'a bordering the Wadi Jaff.

Continued existence of the tribe in this same area since at least the tenth century A.D. and likely earlier, when coupled with the longevity of the place name, suggests the possibility of a link with the Book of Mormon Nahom.

3. The Meaning of Nahom. Two closely related Semitic language roots are possible for the term Nahom on the basis of Nephi's account: NHM and NHM. Both roots have similar connotations and both relate to the experiences of Lehi's group

(continued from previous note)
While this genealogy may indicate when the tribe first appeared, it in no way precludes a much earlier origin for the NHM name itself. (Information from personal interviews by author in Sana'a, October 1987, with Abdulrab Sinan Abuluhom, son of the Sheik of the Nahm tribe, and with Dr. Yosef Abdullah, Department of Antiquities and Libraries.)

in Nahom. The basic meaning of NHM is "comfort, console," and other derivations extend its meaning to include "compassion" and "rest." Hugh Nibley has pointed out that in Arabic, NAHAMA refers to a "soft groan, sigh, moan" and is usually applied in the third person.\(^{17}\) In Hebrew the NHM root is used extensively with reference to "consoling" the bereaved and "mourning" the death of another (as in Genesis 37:35; 38:12; 2 Samuel 10:2-3; Isaiah 51:19; Jeremiah 16:7), as well as in numerous other Old Testament texts referring to what is translated as the "repentance of God."\(^{18}\) It first appears with clear meaning in Ugaritic (NHM "console").\(^{19}\)

The second root, NHM, is also found in biblical Hebrew, meaning "to roar" (Isaiah 5:29-30), or to complain or be hungry. Similar connotations are also found in ancient Egyptian (NHM, "thunder, shout," and NHMHM, "roar, thunder") and in Arabic ("growl, groan, roar; suffer from hunger; complain"). The meaning of this root is as apt as NHM in view of the reference to hunger, hardship, and complaining in 1 Nephi 16:35. It is this root which appears today in the Arabic name Nehem.

Thus, the basic meanings of both possible roots behind the name Nahom are appropriate for a place of burial and mourning, or

\(^{17}\) Nibley, Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites, 90-91; in CWHN 5:79.


of hunger and complaining, and correspond closely with what is implicit in the account of the death and burial of Ishmael, namely that Nahom was (or at least included) a burial area.

4. The Rarity of the Name. Although the roots NHM and NHM are relatively common in the Hebrew biblical corpus in various contexts, both are rare as either a personal or place name in Southern Arabia. G. Lankester Harding's exhaustive compilation, An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions, lists only a single occurrence of NHM in the Southern Arabian dialects (as a personal name in the Hadrami dialect) in addition to fourteen instances where it appears in Safaitic texts of North Arabian origin.20

There are two occurrences of NHM in Old Testament genealogies as personal names: "NAHAM" (1 Chronicles 4:19) and "NEHUM" (Nehemiah 7:7). The name may also be related to that of the Old Testament prophet NAHUM, who came from Elkosh in Galilee and whose name means "consoler." Almost nothing is known about Nahum, but it is interesting to note that he was a contemporary of Lehi, and his prophecies against the Assyrian capital Nineveh (a type of the second coming) were made between 660 and 606 B.C.21 The name also appears in Capernaum ("village of Nahum")

20 G. Lankester Harding, An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions (University of Toronto Press, 1971), 602. Another listing of pre-Islamic place names in South West Arabia, Die Ortsnamen in den altsudarabischen Inschriften (Marburg: Abdullah Hassan al-Scheiba, 1982), does not list NHM at all.

21 LDS Bible Dictionary.
on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, probably the
present day site Tell-Hum.\textsuperscript{22}

We may only speculate if there was any historical connection
between the place Nehem, the Naham/Nahm tribe, and Nahum.
However, considering the rarity of the name, the existence of a
place called NEHEM/NEHHM in southwest Arabia, in the same area
which other factors indicate is the place of easterly turning
spoken of in Nephi's account argues favorably for linking the
place to the Nahom mentioned by Nephi.

5. Burial Grounds. Another factor tying the present-day
Nehem to the Nahom of Lehi's day is the existence of an ancient
burial ground in its hills, and of another more extensive region
of tombs farther to the east.

The tombs in Nehem, circular rock structures built in a
typically elevated position in the hills bordering the Jauf
lowlands, have only recently been examined by archaeologists and
may date to 3000 B.C. or earlier. Use of them and even further
construction probably continued until about 1000 A.D.\textsuperscript{23}

A second area of tombs to the east, made known to the
outside world by Philby in 1936, remains one of the largest
burial sites in Arabia. Thousands of circular tombs covering the
Ruwaik, 'Alam Abyadh, 'Alam Aswad outcrops northeast of Marib
(and reportedly the Jidran ridge nearby) are constructed of flat

\textsuperscript{22} Harper's Bible Dictionary (San Francisco: Harper and
Row, 1985), 154.

\textsuperscript{23} Interview by author with Remy Audoin, Centre Francais
d'Etudes Yemenites, Sana'a, October 1987; his paper is to be
limestone slabs and vary in size from 8m diameter and 3m high to 4m diameter and 1.5m high (see Figure 3). Those examined by Philby had a raised floor in the interior burial chamber. Philby also found the remains of a raised stone pathway leading to what appeared to be a ceremonial "high place" atop a hill close to the Ruwaik ridge. Ostensibly similar to Arabian tombs elsewhere with their circular shape and elevated situation, this burial area is distinguished by its unusual size and number of tombs, particularly when considering its remoteness from any known areas of habitation in the past and from present-day water sources.24

Although much remains to be learned about both areas of tombs, some of the tomb unquestionably predate the time of Lehi and one may well have been the place to which local people led Lehi's mourning party to bury Ishmael.

6. Ruins and Agriculture and Climatic Factors in the Jauf Area. Scholars today generally recognize that major changes of climate have occurred over the past few millennia in at least some parts of Arabia. In many regions, present-day rainfall levels cannot account for the extensive and even extreme erosion that has taken place. Nigel Groom has postulated that the current desiccation commenced somewhere around A.D. 300 when the incense kingdoms began their decline during a time of persistent drought.25

24 Philby, Sheba's Daughters, 370-81 with photographs. The tombs are discussed and pictured in Brian Doe, Monuments of South Arabia (Cambridge: Oleander, 1983), 54-55.

A picture of a land of perennial streams, extensive vegetation cover, and herds of wild animals long since extinct is quite different from the arid wastes which typify most of Arabia today, but it is one which now has ample topographical, cultural, and archaeological support. Nowhere is this more true than in the Wadi Jauf, next to the mountains of Nehem, which may have been irrigated in part from the great dam at Marib until its collapse about A.D. 570.

The area in and around the Jauf valley has probably the highest concentration of ancient cities, temples, and burial areas of the entire Arabian peninsula, clear indications of a more favorable climatic past. These include the Minean capitals of Qarnaw and Baraqish (Yathil) which controlled important sections of the incense trade routes at the time of Lehi.

The import of the burial sites in particular has not been missed by those who have probed the ancient past of the Jauf region. A sampling of their writings and conclusions include the following:

The evidence of more plentiful water in these parts in ancient times argues the presence of a large agricultural and pastoral community in those days. . . . These great desert cemeteries [are] probably by far the most important discovery of my whole journey. . . . If we could date them and identify their builders, one of the great problems of early human civilization would be well on the way to solution.\(^{26}\)

These tombs appear to confirm that this area was once inhabited, and extended for many miles. Now dry and arid,

\(^{26}\) Philby, *Sheba's Daughters*, 381.
such settlements could only have occurred under milder and wetter conditions. This was probably at least before the 3rd millenium B.C. and even earlier.27

A large area of ancient tombs north of Marib may be the remnants of a culture of the sixth to third millenia moist period in the Sayhad, which is now a sand-dune desert.28

The physical evidence now indicates that an area which today supports only a few scattered bedouin, once allowed extensive agriculture and a settled population. Such conditions would be important to clarifying the Book of Mormon record if, as the text implies, Lehi's family remained in this region to grow crops and replenish supplies before departing eastward into the barren wastes skirting the Empty Quarter.

7. The Easterly Turning of the Incense Trail. Perhaps the strongest evidence for the location of Nahom and Lehi's easterly turning point lies in the trade routes in use about 600 B.C. (see Figure 4). As stated above, the direction of Lehi's travels in the wilderness probably followed the incense trading routes. Lehi and his party, however, who were without the time constraints of traders and who had the aid of the Liahona to direct them toward the "more fertile parts" of the desert (1 Nephi 16:13-16), apparently spent long periods in suitable growing regions, utilizing alternative tracks during their eight

27 Brian Doe, Monuments of South Arabia, 54-55; see also Richard L. Bowen, Archaeological Discoveries in South Arabia (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1958), 133.

28 Groom, Frankincense and Myrrh, 235.
years or more of travel covering a distance usually traversed by
trade caravans in two or three months.\textsuperscript{29}

In spite of these detours, it cannot be assumed that Lehi
avoided all populated regions and cities on his journey. The
mere lack of clear reference to other peoples in the Book of
Mormon record is insufficient evidence that they travelled
without encountering others. The narrative proceeds without
mention of other people, although contacts may have been
frequent.

At a number of points they were in or near populated,
settled areas as evidence by archaeological studies (in addition
to the two-way traffic inevitably encountered when on the trading
routes themselves), and there is little basis for thinking they
would have avoided all contact with the settlements in Wadi
Jauf, for example. Indeed, it seems reasonable that they grew
crops in the area around Nahom in preparation for the last part
of their journey. (It would have been physically impossible to
acquire any significant stock of food in the area traversed
since the hunger reported in 1 Nephi 16:18-20.)

The major trunk of the incense trading route (i.e. the
section between Ma'in and Marib) passed through the Jauf valley
within a few miles of Nehem; additionally, the first of several
branches of the route in fact turns eastward in the same area,\textsuperscript{30}
exactly as suggested by our reading of the account of 1 Nephi.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., chapter 10 and page 211.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 165-88, map on 167; see figure 4.
Given the quite precise directional description ("nearly a south-southeast direction") recorded in 1 Nephi 16:13, it may be significant that the direction given by Nephi after leaving Nahom seems almost nebulous by comparison. One reason, of course, may be that the water sources followed may have led the party to meander to the extent that Nephi could justifiably only generalize the direction travelled. Another possibility is that their path was so close to true east (or at least their concept of east) that a more specific direction could not be given other than "nearly eastward," in which case Bountiful should be sought farther south and west than the Dhofar bay. In any event, by Lehi's taking one of these paths across the plains, he would have arrived at the fertile coastal region where incense trees grew, the only general region in Arabia where Bountiful could plausibly have been situated. The question of the more specific location of Bountiful is treated next.

The Land of Bountiful

Contained within or implied in the Book of Mormon text are a number of indications of the nature of Nephi's land Bountiful. The name Bountiful seems to have applied both to a general area, "the land which we called Bountiful" (1 Nephi 17:5), and again, "in the land of Bountiful" (1 Nephi 17:7), and to that particular part of the land where they camped: "And we called the place Bountiful" (1 Nephi 17:6). It was beside the ocean (1 Nephi 17:6) and had suitable currents and winds to make a voyage east possible (1 Nephi 18:8). There was "much fruit" (1 Nephi 17:5-6; 18:6). "Timber" for building the ship was available (1 Nephi
A mountain was nearby, where Nephi often went to pray (1 Nephi 17:7; 18:3). To allow an extended stay, there would have been nearby fresh water sources. Cliffs are suggested (but are nowhere specifically mentioned) in the account of Nephi's brothers' attempting to throw him into the sea (1 Nephi 17:48). Although Nephi gives no indication that metal was plentiful there (in fact, locating it required a specific revelation from the Lord), there were some deposits from which ore could be smelted to make the tools needed for ship-building (1 Nephi 17:9-11, 16). Nephi, whose family may have been metal-workers, was apparently familiar with gold, silver, and copper, for he mentions their abundance in the New World (1 Nephi 18:25). However, he only says that "ore" was smelted at Bountiful. While a comprehensive survey of metal and mineral deposits in southern Oman and in the Hadramaut region of the P.D.R.Y. has yet to be made, the only metal so far recorded is copper in varying degrees of purity. It seems likely therefore that the metal Nephi used was a copper-based alloy. It is also interesting to note that the smelting process described


33 See John Tvedtines, "Was Lehi a Caravaneer?" F.A.R.M.S. Preliminary Report TVE-84.

in 1 Nephi 17:11, utilizing a skin bellows, is similar to the method archaeologists have concluded was in use from about 2500 B.C. in Oman.\textsuperscript{35} It seems that Nephi either knew or was shown such a process.

Although it can now be shown that most scriptural requirements for Bountiful can be met at several sites along either the Dhofar or Hadramaut coastal region, Salalah in southern Oman has been considered the most suitable, if not the only, candidate for Lehi's Bountiful since the volume by the Hiltons.\textsuperscript{36} The primary basis for this thought has been a belief that frankincense growth was limited to Dhofar, and that the trading route (i.e. water sources) would therefore have resulted in the group's arriving there. Furthermore, it has been assumed that this was the only place which had the necessary timber for Nephi to use in building a ship.

Continued research, however, has raised problems with the view that Bountiful was at Dhofar. For example, Dhofar was not the only incense-growing region in ancient times but only the northeasterly part of a producing area which extended some 500 miles southwestward. Dhofar, and specifically its regional capital Salalah, can therefore no longer be regarded as unique in terms of meeting the criteria for Bountiful.

1. Where Was The Frankincense Growing Region? Scholars earlier held that frankincense grew only in the Dhofar region

\textsuperscript{35} See \textit{Journal of Oman Studies}, 46; see also Figure 5.

\textsuperscript{36} Lynn M. and Hope Hilton, \textit{In Search of Lehi's Trail} (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1976).
(now southern Oman) and only at certain altitudes, usually stated as above 2000 feet. Nigel Groom, however, has recently established that frankincense also grew at lower altitudes and, more importantly, that it was grown over an extended stretch of coastline from Dhofar south along the Hadramaut. Groom also demonstrates that the information conveyed in the writings of Ptolemy and in the *Periplus*, the most frequently cited accounts concerning the early incense trade, contain some inaccuracies and also vagueness which have led scholars to draw incorrect conclusions about the location of the incense region. He also points out that Pliny's description of the incense land, usually applied to Dhofar, fits equally as well the Hadramaut region of Yemen.  

For example, Pliny pictured the frankincense-growing region as follows:

Eight days' journey from Sabota [Shabwah] is a frankincense-producing district called Sariba—according to the Greeks the name means "secret." The region faces north-east, and is surrounded by impenetrable rocks, and on the right hand side bordered by a sea coast with inaccessible cliffs. The soil is reported to be of a milky white colour with a tinge of red. . . . There are hills rising to a great height, with natural forests on them running right down to the level ground.  

Sariba, the frankincense growing region, is here described as being eight days' journey from Shabwah. Early writers, however, attest that an overland journey from Dhofar to Shabwah would have required up to 30 days. On the other hand, eight

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days' travel fits a journey from the Hadramaut area to Shabwah perfectly. In another travel account, Pliny describes the port of Qana in the lower Hadramaut as being "in the frankincense producing district." Groom additionally theorizes about Pliny's calling the name of the area Sariba. He says:

It may be relevant to Pliny's naming of his region as "Sariba" that there is a settlement in the watershed of the mountains feeding Wadi Hagr [in the Hadramaut] which now bears the name "Sarab." If the reference to the name as meaning "secret" provides a clue, however, then it may be significant that the Arabic for "secret" is sarirah and Wadi Hadramaut is today known as as-Sarir in this sense.

Based upon this type of evidence, Groom summarizes as follows:

The belief that Arabian frankincense of classical times came only from Zufar (Dhofar) is incorrect. From Zufar the ancient frankincense growing region extended as far west as the Wadi Hagr area of Hadramaut where it has recently been found growing. The contention that it grew only at an elevation over 2000 feet is also incorrect, although the quality of gums from trees on the coastal plains may be inferior. Loose use of the Arabic word "Luban" to signify incense rather than in its true meaning of "frankincense" makes investigation of this problem difficult.

Frankincense of one quality or another was in fact produced in those days along the coast and in the hinterland of the whole five hundred mile stretch lying between Qana to the west and modern Hadhbarah to the east. The contention of Van Beek and others, which has

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39 Groom, Frankincense and Myrrh, 111.
40 Ibid., 110.
41 Ibid., 111.
42 Ibid., 232; see map page 99.
tended to be generally accepted, that the ancient frankincense region was in Zufar and Zufar alone would seem to be incorrect.43

Thus, evidence that seemed to limit the possible sites of Bountiful to the Dhofar region now appears to be invalid. The requirements for Bountiful could have been met anywhere along an extended area of the coastline, including the Hadramaut, to which an eastward turning at Nehem would have led.

2. Was Dhofar Accessible Enough To Be Bountiful? Adding weight to the argument that Bountiful was not located in Dhofar but in the Hadramaut is the fact that overland trading routes from the Dhofar region were seldom used at any time; in fact, most modern and ancient maps do not show any overland branch of the trading route to and from Dhofar. The frankincense produced in Dhofar was usually shipped southward by sea to the port of Qana (the present Bir Ali in Yemen) and only then overland to the north. Nigel Groom states that it seems improbable that any more than "a trickle of frankincense ever reached Shabwah from Zufar by [the overland route]," and he cites the following points against any major overland traffic from Dhofar:

   A. Two possible overland routes were explored by Thesiger who found nothing to indicate either was ever used as a major trade route.

   B. There were no sites where caravans could have assembled before leaving Dhofar and there is a paucity of archaeological sites in Dhofar in general.

43 Ibid., 114.
C. Early Arab geographers make no references to the land route from Dhofar to Shabwah as being of any significance in the incense trade.

D. The extreme barrenness and the minimal availability of water would not have allowed a heavy or frequent trade on that route.

He concludes:

In general, Shabwah could be reached very much more easily, cheaply and quickly by sending the produce of Zufar to the coast and thence by sea to Qana. While small quantities of frankincense may have gone overland from Zufar for special reasons, such as tax avoidance, a temporary state of insecurity, or to fetch a high price at the start of the season, it seems clear that the major portion of Zufar's frankincense must always have come through Qana. If political circumstances made this route impossible, then the overland route could not have been used on any large scale as an alternative.44

Other authorities now agree. Robert Stookey, discussing the rise and influence of the early Arabian states and kingdoms, says this:

In the earliest periods of which we are informed, the produce was controlled by the rulers of Hadramaut, to the west of Dhofar, who required the bulk of it to be shipped by raft to the port of Qana (i.e., Bir Ali), whence it was carried overland to Shabwah.45

In his 1980 book entitled Oman the Reborn Land, Clements agrees that any overland traffic in incense from Oman was minimal:

The shipments [of frankincense] were exported by sea from the port of Sumharam, the ruins of which survive

44 Ibid., 165-66.

near Salalah, or else were shipped by camel through the Hadramaut and across the Arabian desert.\textsuperscript{46}

Likewise, according to the \textit{Periplus}, which dates back to near the height of the incense trading period, the shipment of the precious gum to Qana was made by boats and by rafts held up with inflated skins.\textsuperscript{47}

In summary then, the major criteria (i.e., fertility and its place on the incense trail) for selecting Dhofar as Bountiful could be satisfied as easily by a number of fertile pockets which are now known to exist further south along the coastline. The past attractiveness of Salalah as a candidate for Bountiful may well have been due more to our relative ignorance of the coastline further south than to those features that specifically recommended it.

Salalah, characterized by comparatively small fertile valleys back in the Qara mountains and separated from the coast by a broad arid plain devoid of natural vegetation, does not meet all the criteria for Bountiful in any one location. From a scriptural point of view, a much more likely candidate is the bay of Rakhyut some 50 miles south of Salalah. With mountains extending right to the seacoast, Rakhyut receives a higher rainfall and naturally occurring vegetation (which includes large


\textsuperscript{47} \textit{The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea}, Schoff, trans. (New Delhi: Oriental Book Reprint, 1947). Groom, \textit{Frankincense and Myrrh}, also discusses the harvest cycles and transportation in detail, especially on 146-47.
trees) extends over a much larger area than at any part of Salalah. Other fertile pockets farther south along the Omani coastline are known, however the inland terrain at those points is so impenetrable as probably to rule them out as candidates for Bountiful.

While Salalah may yet prove to be the "Bountiful" place Nephi wrote of, when all aspects—including the proposed location of Nahom—are considered, it is clear that the bases for its selection as Bountiful are not at this time compelling.

3. The Case for a Hadramaut Bountiful. While the already sparse descriptive content of Nephi's record seems even more so concerning the last stage of their desert travels, the following factors allow us to make an informed judgment as to their route and thus the likely location of Bountiful.

A. "We did travel nearly eastward" (1 Nephi 17:1). As earlier noted, assuming the Nehem is Yemen is equivalent to Book of Mormon Nahom, a strict interpretation of this statement of direction would suggest a location for Bountiful on the coast southwest of the Dhofar region, although the latter is still within the bounds of possibility.

B. Fertility. Almost nothing has been recorded concerning the upper Hadramaut coastline, however stretches of heavily wooded area within the Wadi Masila ('Valley of Floods') today\(^{48}\) may at least be indicative of coastal conditions in the past under a more favorable climate. There can be little doubt that

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the general fertility of the region—evidenced by the production of incense anciently—is such that this criterion for Bountiful may be met in a number of coastal areas.

C. Terrain. As shown in Figure 7, a natural pathway to the coast from the interior deserts is provided by the Wadis Hadramaut and Masila. Almost directly east of Nahom and the Jauf valley, the Wadi Masila reaches the coast a little south of Sayhut and encompasses the only perennial river in the entire Arabian peninsula. A path taken south of this would have encountered almost impenetrable mountains, and to the north, the barren plateau fringing the great sand desert Ar RubC Al Khāli. While there is nothing in the Book of Mormon text indicating that Lehi followed a wadi to the coast, neither is there any reference which rules it out, and it seems reasonable.

D. The Prophet Hūd. An additional factor which might have some relevance to the present discussion is the possible, yet distant, similarity between Arab traditions of a prophet named Hūd and the literary images contained in Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life. This subject has been explored by William Hamblin. Relevant to this study is the fact that the legend

49 William Hamblin, "Pre-Islamic Arabian Prophets," in Mormons and Muslims (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1983), 85-104. The prophet Hūd is clearly established as a pre-Islamic figure by both Quranic references and by numerous other writings and inscriptions. The name-title 'Hūd' means 'the Jew' suggesting the possibility that Hūd and Lehi may be the same person; see Winnett and Read, Ancient Records from North Arabia (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 45. (While Lehi was not of the tribe of Judah, he had come from Jerusalem, and in the eyes of non-Israelites could well have been considered Jewish.) Hamblin suggests that possibly over time, Lehi's personal name was forgotten among the locals to whom he preached and that he was eventually remembered simply as "the Jew."
of Hūd centers in the Hadramaut region.\textsuperscript{50} Despite tantalizing possible links between Hūd and Lehi, however, no causal tie to the Book of Mormon prophet (or to a follower of his who remained behind) can presently be shown. What is clear, however, is that the story of Lehi fits very well in all its aspects into the general pattern of pre-Islamic prophets.

\textbf{Conclusion}

On the basis of the arguments presented, we propose that after the burial of Ishmael at Nahom, Lehi and his family travelled almost due east through the Wadi Jauf and across the northern edge of the Ramlat Sab'atayn desert to the Wadi Hadramaut, thence to the coast through the Wadi Masila, emerging either at the main mouth of the river south of Sayhut or perhaps at a lesser tributary a little further to the north. All the geographical elements relating to the desert travels of Lehi can thus be shown to fit in the Arabian setting. The preservation of the name NHM, and the evidence of travel routes lead us to the Wadi Jauf in Yemen as the easterly turning point of Lehi's journey. The place Bountiful fits locations on either the

\begin{center}
Almost nothing is known of the CAAd tribe to whom Hūd, in some accounts, was sent; however a sister tribe, the Thamūd, may date to as early as the eighth century B.C.
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{50} An ancient place of pilgrimage, Qabr Nabi Allah Hud (or Qabr Hud), located a few miles east of Tarim, is in the Wadi Hadramaut; see Brian Doe, \textit{Monuments of South Arabia}, 57-58; and Ronald Lewcock, \textit{Wadi Hadramaut and the Walled City of Shibam} (Paris: UNESCO, 1986), 17, 53, 55, 124-5. The center of a religious cult dating back before Islam, Qabr Hud has been the main object of pilgrimage for the region and like other such sites in the valley is protected from tribal feuds. The place today includes a well maintained town which remains empty except for the three days of annual pilgrimage. Festivals commemorating Hud continue to the observed in the P.D.R.Y.
Hadramaut or the Dhofar coast. There are no inconsistencies or unreasonable statements in the account written by Nephi. Instead, we find an account in which geographical incidentals become ever more accurate and appropriate as our understanding of South Arabia of Lehi's day increases.
F.A.R.M.S. UPDATE
(c) September 1986
Lehi's Trail and Nahom Revisited

In 1976 Lynn M. and Hope Hilton, In Search of Lehi's Trail (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), p. 94, in Ensign (September-October 1976), proposed that the place called Nahom (1 Ne. 16:34), where Ishmael died and was buried, was around al-Qunfidah near the Red Sea coast of Saudi Arabia. Ross T. Christensen, Ensign (August 1978), p. 73, soon suggested an alternative location farther south for Nahom, based on a map of Yemen prepared as a result of a 1762-64 exploration by Carsten Niebuhr for the Danish King Frederick V.

Accordingly, in November 1984, Warren P. and Michaela J. Aston of Australia visited North Yemen searching for additional evidence concerning Nahom and how far south Lehi and his party travelled before turning east. They were able to locate a 1976 map at the University of Sana'a in the Yemen Arab Republic that showed "Nehem" located some 35 miles northeast of Sana'a. This appeared to be the same region Niebuhr listed as "Nehm." Moreover, the Nahm or Naham tribe has existed in the area since at least the tenth century A.D. If further work supports their tentative findings associating "Nehem" with the Book of Mormon "Nahom" several details regarding Lehi's route will need to be reassessed. In particular, the identification of the land Bountiful on the southern coast of the Arabian peninsula, from which the group set sail for the New World, may need to be moved westward from that proposed by the Hiltons.

There are two Semitic language roots suggested by the Book of Mormon Nahom: nhm and nhm. Either or both may stand behind the name Nahom in 1 Ne. 16. Hugh Nibley in the Improvement Era in 1950 suggested that the name Nahom must come from a Semitic root signing lamenting, and grieving (in Arabic as nahama, "sigh, groan, moan, especially with another"); see Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), pp. 90-91. In Hebrew, the root nhm is often used for "mourning" someone else's death or "consoling" the bereaved (Gen. 37:35, 38:12, 50:21; 2 Sam. 10:2-3; Is. 22:4, 51:19; Jer. 16:7). See H. Van Dyke Parunak, "A Semantic Survey of NHM," Biblica 56 (1975): 512-32, who compares Ugartic nhm, "console." Since the Astons found that a large zone of ancient tombs extends over many miles within the region of Nehem in Yemen, this could indicate the longtime use of this area as a burial ground, possibly making a name signifying "grieving" highly appropriate, if only as a play on similar roots.

The name of the area in Yemen now mapped as "Nehem" and pronounced by local inhabitants Nâ-hum, derived from the Arabic root nhm, whose basic meaning is "groan, groan, roar; suffer from hunger; complain. The same root is found in biblical Hebrew (Is. 5:29-30; Hos. 24:23), and in ancient Egyptian (nhm, "thunder, shout"; nhhm, "roar, thunder"). Thus, a ritual concomitant of mourning (groaning) is also associated with this root, as well as the sense of suffering from hunger, which is equally apt in the context of 1 Ne. 16:35, which reports much complaining, suffering, and hunger.

The Astons further found that current scholars plot out a more complicated trail system for the frankincense trade than was thought a decade ago. Those trails came farther south along the Red Sea coast before branching off eastward than the Hiltons' sources showed. And instead of there being only a single area, Dhofar (Zufar), producing frankincense, it now appears that an area some 500 miles long along the south coast of the Arabian peninsula produced this precious substance. Nigel Groom, Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade (London: Longman Group, 1981). See also "Arabia's Frankincense Trail," National Geographic 168:4 (October 1985): 474-512. It was shipped from the eastern areas (including the Salalah area favored by the Hiltons for Bountiful) in coastal vessels to Qana, thence northward along the trail toward the consuming centers in the Near East. These facts make it less likely than had appeared that Lehi's party would have reached the sea as far east as Salalah.

Instead, Lehi's group may have ended its desert journey in the coastal Hadramawt area of modern South Yemen. In that region, William Hamblin has found pre-Islamic traditions about a prophet named Hud, whose tomb is located near the border between Oman and South Yemen: "Pre-Islamic Arabian Prophets," in Spencer Palmer, ed., Mormons and Muslims (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1983), pp. 87-89. Like Lehi, Hud reputedly prophesied against certain idol worshippers who were "renowned for their elaborate buildings" (cf. 1 Ne. 8:26), was rejected because of the pride of the people (cf. 1 Ne. 8:27), but escaped while the wicked were destroyed. See Qur'an 7:65-72; 11:50-60; 26:123-40. Lehi and Hud seem to have been kindred spirits.

More work is clearly needed on these subjects. The Astons believe that a carefully staged trip into the Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen), currently difficult for Westerners to enter, would be valuable. For centuries, the sands have blown across Lehi's trail. Perhaps a few additional clues yet remain about what Lehi's group travelled.
Figure 1 - Niebuhr's 1763 Map of Yemen
FIGURE 2
The Tribes of Yemen

- Members of the Hashid confederation
† Members of the Bakil confederation
THE ANCIENT INCENSE TRADE LAND ROUTES

- Empty Quarter
- Frankincense Growing Areas
- Incense Trade Land Route
ANCIENT COPPER SMELTING IN OMAN: Excavations indicate that anciently a pear-shaped furnace about 40cm wide at the base and approximately 50cm in height was used, aided by bellows which allowed a temperature of 1150°C to be reached. Small pieces of sulphidic ore mixed with charcoal were introduced into the furnace and the process repeated until a fairly pure copper resulted and could be poured into a hole in the ground to cool.

FIGURE 5

FIGURE 6 - BURIAL TOMBS

Reconstructed side view of tomb.

A partially collapsed tomb at 'Alam Abyadh NE of Marib located in 1936 by Philby.