Lehi and Sariah’s Wilderness Trek: Illuminating the Real-World Setting

ON THE COVER: Wadi Sayq/Khor Kharlot.
Photo by Justin Andrews
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THE EDITOR’S NOTEBOOK

At the Lord’s command, Lehi, Sariah, and their children departed Jerusalem and headed for their new world. Ishmael and his family joined them soon afterward. Latter-day Saints are aware that this exodus narrated in the early pages of 1 Nephi involved travels in the Arabian Peninsula. Many, however, are less familiar with the route taken and the circumstances and duration of the stops along the way.

This issue of the Journal provides an up-to-date discussion of the correspondence between Nephi’s account and the real-world setting of the trip that he and his family took through ancient Arabia. As it turns out, there are amazing correlations between the account of the land travels and shipbuilding that Nephi provides in 1 Nephi 2–18 and locations now known in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Oman. The authors of the main articles in this issue have pursued this topic further than anyone before them, drawing on scripture and other written records as well as personally exploring areas of the Arabian Peninsula.

Our issue begins with a reminiscence by Lynn Hilton. Lynn and Hope Hilton were the first Latter-day Saints to visit the general area of Nephi’s “Bountiful.” Authors Warren Aston, Richard Wellington and George Potter, and Kent Brown then describe at some length specific possibilities for the trek of Lehi’s family from Jerusalem to Bountiful and what they would have encountered en route. A note of caution: one cannot read just one of these three articles and have a complete picture of the complexities and possibilities of the situation. These authors provide the best thinking currently available on the various aspects of the journey from Jerusalem to Bountiful, but while they agree on some points, they disagree on others. All are working with the same textual data, but each gives greater or lesser weight to, or interprets somewhat differently, the available evidence. This issue of the Journal provides a marvelous opportunity to compare and contrast the assertions of these author-explorers. Since no author had space to write all he could have, the endnotes should be consulted for further discussion and for citations for additional reading, including the authors’ own recent or soon-to-be published works.

To help readers with the process of evaluating the assertions of these authors, two respondents—David LeFevre and Jeffrey Chadwick—provide their own assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of the articles by Aston, Wellington and Potter, and Brown. The articles by Revell Phillips and Stephen Carr further augment our understanding of the Arabian context of the travels of Nephi and his family. Daniel McKinlay’s time line helpfully tracks the progress of Latter-day Saint research on this topic. Items by Nancy Hilton and John Sorenson that appear in regular departments of the Journal round out the offering in this very full issue.

There will continue to be differing views on how to best “fill in the blanks” on those points for which Nephi provides little or no information concerning his family’s wilderness trek through Arabia. Latter-day Saint authors and explorers will continue seeking to comprehend details relevant to Nephi’s account. For the here and now, however, this issue of the Journal provides a great summary of the current thinking on this topic from the Latter-day Saints who have done the most to study and understand this pivotal migration at the beginning of the Book of Mormon. We now have a remarkably good idea of key locations on the route taken by the families of Lehi and Sariah and Ishmael. I invite you to read, consider, and experience anew this fascinating and significant journey.

Dana M. Pike, guest editor
During the almost 30 years since my late wife Hope and I published the results of our investigations on the trek of Lehi and Sariah, which we titled In Search of Lehi’s Trail,¹ a growing number of studies have appeared that have continued both to refine and broaden our understanding of that remarkable journey into the heated landscape of the Arabian desert. It is now possible to say that certain results are assured while others are virtually assured.

Let us review some fixed points from Nephi’s narrative.

First, of course, we know where the Jerusalem of Lehi’s day stood—in the same place as the modern city. Second, we know where the Red Sea lies, one of the very important geographical realities from Nephi’s account, for it allows us to orient ourselves properly when trying to reconstruct the journey of Lehi and Sariah. Third, we know the wilderness through which they and their party traveled, that of the Arabian Peninsula. From later clues in Nephi’s story, it becomes clear that the party did not strike off into the interior of Arabia, the forbidding Empty Quarter, in the initial, long leg of traveling but remained on the western side of the peninsula by traveling in “nearly a south-southeast direction” (1 Nephi
16:13). Fourth, we are confident of the general area where the party finally emerged from the desert, their “Bountiful,” the place where they built their oceangoing ship (see 1 Nephi 17:5; 18:1–4). This locale must have lain along the southern coast of the modern sultanate of Oman, an area called Dhofar, whose mountains catch the summer monsoon rains and create a green paradise across the maritime plain. It is the only place along the Arabian coastline that matches Nephi’s botanical description of a spot with “much fruit and also wild honey” as well as “timbers” (1 Nephi 17:5; 18:1). Fifth, in a different vein, it is certain that the family owned pack animals. The animals of choice then as now were camels since they were best suited for desert travel. The party members needed them because they took “tents” whose weight was far too great for humans or smaller animals to carry (see 1 Nephi 2:4; 3:9; 16:12).

We start at the beginning of Nephi’s spare narrative. Although his report does not allow us to know the route his parents followed in their departure from Jerusalem—and several were open to them—we can be reasonably confident about the location of the first camp “in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea,” where the word borders may refer to mountainous terrain (1 Nephi 2:5). When I first sought to identify the locale of this camp, I suggested that it was near the oasis settlement of al-Bad in a rather broad valley that descends southward to the Red Sea and lies north and east of the Straits of Tiran. This valley is lined on either side by hills and mountains. Al-Bad is an ancient stopping place for travelers and features wells that offer refreshing water to visitors and residents alike. In addition, during rainstorms, I have observed streams spring to life, which, when combined with the impressive distant mountain peaks, I thought might fit Lehi’s River of Laman and Valley of Lemuel (see 1 Nephi 2:8–10). However, in May 1995, almost serendipitously, two Latter-day Saints, George Potter and Craig Thorsted, happened into an impressive canyon—called a wadi in Arabic—some 75 miles south of modern Aqaba, Jordan, and a dozen miles northwest of al-Bad, wherein ran a “continually running” stream of water (1 Nephi 2:9).

The discovery was almost too good to be true. Running between walls of granite rock that rise 2,000 feet above the wadi floor was a gentle stream.
that, upon inspection, was found to flow above
ground for most of the 3.75 miles of the canyon’s
length. At different times of the year, Potter has
returned to this impressive canyon, named Wadi
Tayyib al-Ism (“the valley of the good name”),
and has learned that the stream runs continuously
throughout the year—even though its flow has
been diminished in recent years by modern pump-
ing—and comes within a few yards of reaching the
Red Sea. The stream thus meets the chief criterion
for Lehi’s River of Laman—“continually running”
(see 1 Nephi 2:8–9). Potter has also examined the
neighboring valleys that open onto the Red Sea and
has found no other “continually running” stream
like this one. These observations allow us to be
confident that we now know the general locale of
the party’s first camp—it lay in this wadi, the only
place within “three days” of walking from the
northeast tip of the Red Sea where a person can
find a “continually running” stream—one that, as a
confirming bonus, flows to the edge of the sea (see
1 Nephi 2:6).

A second locale, now firmly established, is that
of Nahom, where “Ishmael died, and was buried”
(1 Nephi 16:34). The antiquity of this name is
secure because of the archaeological recovery of
three votive altars that bear the tribal name NHM
in the ancient South Arabian language. These
altars all date to the seventh–sixth centuries BC,
when Lehi and Sariah were on their trek, and they
were all donated by a man named "Bt’athar, son of
Sawād, son of Nawān," to the Bar’ān temple near
Marib, Yemen. Called “the first actual archaeo-
logical evidence for the historicity of the Book
of Mormon,” these altars prove the existence of
this name as a territorial and tribal area in south-
western Arabia in the first millennium BC. In this
connection, the late Professor Ross T. Christensen
published a short notice in 1978 in the Ensign
magazine about the appearance of the tribal
name “Nehhm” on a map drawn by a German
explorer to Arabia in the 18th century. This notice
prompted Warren Aston to further investigation,
the results of which showed that the name NHM
or Nihm was known to the Muslim historians al-
One of the most compelling pieces of Nephi’s narrative that we now know matches the circumstances of ancient Arabia has to do with the eastward turn of his party (see 1 Nephi 17:1). In effect, all roads—including shortcuts across forbidding desert terrain—turned east at the Nahom tribal area. This peculiar tradition in this region, which was mandated for caravans by law, could not have been known to contemporaries of Joseph Smith. It has become evident only with the modern study of the fabled Incense Trail and the civilizations of Arabia that benefited from the harvesting and shipping of frankincense and myrrh. Because Lehi’s group turned eastward in this region, it seems evident that they had been generally following or shadowing the north–south segment of the trail, which connects southern Arabia with the Mediterranean area. After all, the trail already featured an infrastructure of wells and places to obtain food and fodder. By turning eastward in this region, they effectively turned against the traffic that was traveling from east to west, coming out of the city of Shabwah, the main incense-gathering center. In all, when we combine the notice of the eastward turn with the known locale of the Nahom tribal region where Ishmael was buried, we establish firmly the area through which Lehi and Sariah must have passed with their group.

There is one other important part of the story that connects to the eastward turn: the location of Bountiful. For Nephi writes that from Nahom “we did travel nearly eastward from that time forth.” Then he writes, “We did come to the land which we called Bountiful [and] . . . we did pitch our tents by the seashore” (1 Nephi 17:1, 5–6). Hence, we should look for a locale on the southern coast of Arabia that lies almost due east of the Nahom tribal area and that features the botanical characteristics of “much fruit, and also wild honey” as well as “timbers” (1 Nephi 17:5; 18:1). That general locale turns out to be the south coast of the sultanate of Oman. This region is unique because it receives a lot of rain during the summer monsoon season when the southwest winds blow across the Arabian Sea, gathering moisture and pushing rain-laden clouds against the high mountains. From late May to early September, there is a more or less steady drizzle that turns the coastal area into a lush garden. This unique botanical region is bounded on the north by the desert and on the south by the sea. In addition, the coastline features a number of inlet bays that could have served as the place for building Nephi’s ship. Some of these bays are more attractive for Nephi’s shipbuilding than others because of location and size. The important thing is that Nephi could have constructed his ship out of the reach of the pounding surf that characterizes the summer monsoon season.

In sum, many parts of Nephi’s account have come into sharper focus during the 30 years since I began to work on the trek that Lehi and his family undertook. As students of the Book of Mormon continue to study the narrative in light of what we can learn about ancient Arabia, they will shed light on other parts of his narrative. As will become clear, the accompanying studies attempt to move our understanding further forward by refining questions and answers about the journey of Lehi and Sariah that, after their day, became the subject of celebrations by later generations (see Mosiah 2:4).
ACROSS ARABIA WITH LEHI AND SARIAH:

Desert scene south of Marib, Yemen. Photo by Justin Andrews. All maps and other photos courtesy Warren Aston.
Thousands of years ago the prophet Enoch saw that in the last days truth would be sent forth “out of the earth” (Moses 7:62). Joseph of Egypt foretold that a latter-day seer bearing his name would bring forth the words of his posterity “from the dust” (see 2 Nephi 3:19–20), and Isaiah later prophesied of a sealed book in the last days that would “whisper out of the dust” (Isaiah 29:4). Finally, the Psalmist predicted that “truth shall spring out of the earth” (Psalm 85:11). Latter-day Saints, of course, see the coming forth of the Book of Mormon—a record literally taken from out of the earth—as the fulfillment of these prophecies concerning our day. Some 176 years later, however, we can see that these predictions may not only refer to a single event in 1830, as significant as that was, but may also allude to a broader revelatory process whereby other buried records as well as confirmation of their truth will also come from “out of the earth.” The incredible unfolding in recent years of the first 18 chapters of the Book of Mormon as new finds have placed them in their real-world setting can be seen as exactly that.
Lehi and Sariah’s monumental journey from Jerusalem to Bountiful through the modern lands of Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Oman takes place in a setting largely unfamiliar to those who live far from the mountains and deserts of Arabia. In recent decades, however, a small corps of Latter-day Saint researchers has begun exploring the world in which that journey was made. To date, these efforts have demonstrated quite clearly that the incidental details recorded by Nephi fit the ancient world of the Near East accurately. A broad consensus on the route taken, in addition to totally plausible locations for almost all of the important places in Nephi’s text, has resulted. My own research on Arabia (including several expeditions there) has shaped my views on what can be reasonably inferred from the scholarship that attempts to shed light on Lehi and Sariah’s journey. As recent investigations have produced encouraging results, this article highlights findings that will likely influence and guide future research.

Guiding Principles

The following three principles have governed my research for over 20 years.

1. “Proof” of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon will not result from scholarly pursuits. As Hugh Nibley stated years ago, “The evidence that will prove or disprove the Book of Mormon does not exist.” The aim of Book of Mormon research is to shed light on its message by providing helpful perspectives and to establish plausibility for the setting and details of the account. Those who claim to have found empirical proof of the Book of Mormon misunderstand not only doctrine but also the very nature of archaeological and historical research, which is highly tentative and subject to revision. Ultimate vindication or proof of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon still comes to each reader only as Moroni outlined (see Moroni 10:3–5).

2. What scripture clearly says must always take precedence over other data from any branch of science or knowledge. We must never undervalue what was written by prophets under inspiration, nor underestimate the Lord’s ability to fulfill his word. While we can extrapolate and even speculate within reasonable limits, scriptural certainties must still govern all that we do. Finally, we must be careful that the intriguing details of the Book of Mormon’s setting do not divert us from its message of the Messiah and from its unique ability to change lives.

3. In reconstructing an ancient desert journey, one must recognize that no amount of library research is sufficient without actual exploration in the locations involved. Parts of Arabia remain largely unexplored, so despite the stunning correlations that have emerged concerning Lehi’s story, more exploratory work is needed. (As of this writing, for example, no other Latter-day Saint has visited every possible location for Nephi’s Bountiful or explored the large region east of Nahom.) The setting of that record must be brought to life through competent research that does nothing to detract from its eternal, instructive truths. The Book of Mormon deserves no less.

On Directions, Trade Routes, Duration

Most readers of the Book of Mormon have yet to fully appreciate Lehi and Sariah’s contributions as leaders of an epic migration that was quite possibly the longest made in premodern times. I will focus mostly on the journey’s later stages, and in particular the locations of Nahom and Bountiful. First, however, I will discuss three issues relevant to the entire journey.

Nephi’s Directions

In the introduction to his record, Nephi tells us that it also includes “the course of their travels.” And, in fact, he does record a directional statement for each of the five stages of land travel:

From the Jerusalem area to the Valley of Lemuel:

he departed into the wilderness . . . by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea; and . . . in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea (1 Nephi 2:4–5)

From the Valley of Lemuel to Shazer:

we traveled . . . [in] nearly a south-southeast direction (1 Nephi 16:13)
From Shazer to the place where Nephi’s bow broke:
we did go forth again . . . following the same direction (1 Nephi 16:14)

From the place where the bow broke to Nahom:
we did again . . . [travel] . . . nearly the same course as in the beginning (1 Nephi 16:33)

From Nahom to Bountiful:
we did travel nearly eastward from that time forth (1 Nephi 17:1)

Since the first four statements are directionally correct for an overland journey from Jerusalem to the Red Sea and then down the western side of Arabia, it seems evident that Nephi’s directions mean the same as they do today. Note how Nephi was able to determine that the direction (to Shazer) was not merely southeast but nearly south-south-east; he could also differentiate a slight adjustment to that direction (“nearly the same course”) in the fourth stage.

Nephi’s ability to determine directions so accurately has profound implications when he writes that the final stage was “nearly eastward.” As he had earlier done, Nephi would surely have recorded a more specific direction if it were possible. As I will later show, the site that best matches Nephi’s Bountiful lies in fact almost directly due east of Nahom, which is, as this article documents, a location now attested archaeologically.

Main trade routes in western Arabia in Lehi’s time.
Are the Ancient Trade Routes Relevant?

The ancient trade routes (the so-called Frank-incense Trail) that brought incense and other products up from southern Arabia to the Mediterranean region connected water sources but also followed desert terrain suitable for camel caravans, as Lehi’s party would also have done.

Some early writers assumed that Lehi followed the entire trade route in reverse, eventually arriving at the incense-growing region on the south coast of Arabia, equated with Bountiful. While there is no question that the Lehites must have used the trade routes for a significant distance, the matter is not so simple: to begin with, their time in the wilderness occupied eight years, a distance covered by traders in only three or four months, so clearly some extended stops were made by Lehi’s group. Delays and difficulties from seeking tribal permissions and paying taxes are unlikely for a small family group not carrying commercial goods; the Lehites probably attracted scant attention on their journey. There would also seem little need for a Liahona if all that was necessary was to follow an established trade route.

Most importantly, however, as travel from Nahom to Bountiful was “nearly eastward from that time forth” (1 Nephi 17:1), trade routes are ruled out; due to the lack of water sources there were never any trade routes in an easterly direction from the Nahom area. From Nahom the trade route veered southeast toward Marib and Timna, then east to Shabwah; the Lehites would then have needed to backtrack northwest for hundreds of miles in a great arc to reach the fertile coast. Such a zigzag course runs counter to Nephi’s unambiguous directional statement.

Accepting that this final stage would have been away from trade routes helps us understand what Nephi recorded. The Lord’s instruction not to “make much fire” (1 Nephi 17:12) is highly significant. In well-traveled areas the making of fire would not have presented a problem, and perhaps the group needed to conserve fuel resources. They now ate their meat raw (see 17:2), probably spiced as many Arabs still do; camel’s milk would have helped them cope with reduced availability of water. All this paints a clear picture of survival in a region away from other people. This region today remains almost devoid of water, people, and roads.

It is testament to the literal accuracy of Nephi’s record that it fits what is now known about this part of Arabia. From Nahom the stony Mahrah plateau leads “nearly eastward” between two deserts (the Empty Quarter desert to the north and the Ramlat Saba’tayn desert in the south) all the way to the

At Nahom, Lehi’s party turned abruptly eastward, a direction away from established trade routes.
fertile coast. This totally feasible “nearly eastward” pathway from Nahom is one of the most significant findings in recent years; no one knew that degree of detail about Arabian geography even 100 years after the Book of Mormon was given to the world.

How Long Was Each Stage of the Journey?

Finally, Nephi’s text suggests that much of the eight years in the wilderness was spent in the Valley of Lemuel, in ancient Midian, safely distant from Jerusalem. The valley seems to have been a place for Lehi’s people to regroup and prepare more fully for their journey after the hasty departure from their home. From here, Nephi and his brothers returned twice to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates (and, as it turned out, Zoram) and Ishmael’s family. Sacrifices were offered here, and it seems clear that Lehi presented to his family their own genealogy, the teachings found on the brass plates, and his own revelations, including his vision of the tree of life. Solidifying the group, Nephi, his three brothers, and Zoram married the five daughters of Ishmael (see 1 Nephi 16:7); Nephi also had at least two sisters who may have been married to the two sons of Ishmael who brought their “families” with them (see 1 Nephi 7:6). The birth of children to all these couples would naturally soon follow their marriages. Jacob and Joseph were also born to Lehi and Sariah “in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 18:7), perhaps in the Valley of Lemuel. All this activity, forming the bulk of Nephi’s desert account, and also a “great many more things” (1 Nephi 9:1), likely took a considerable period. On the morning of their departure, Lehi received the Liahona, perhaps the reason that Nephi could determine directions so precisely.9

In contrast, the other stopping places en route to Bountiful occupy only a few verses each in Nephi’s account and may have been stops only to rest and to replenish supplies. I see no good reason to suppose that the last stage of the journey, crossing the barren wastelands to Bountiful, was much longer in duration than the earlier stages. Despite its many difficulties, Nephi chose to record more positive things than negative about it, stating that the Lord provided the “means” for them to survive in the desert (see 1 Nephi 17:2, 3). This help may have included leading them to large pools of standing water, which remain for months after rare rainfall. Nephi no doubt saw the parallels between the exodus of his family and the earlier exodus of Moses and the children of Israel.10 Later in the Book of Mormon, Alma, who had access to the Lehites’ fuller account, reveals the reason that they did not progress in their desert journey at times: their lack of faith. As with the Israelites, their afflictions are specified as “hunger and thirst” (compare Alma 37:41–42; Exodus 16:3; 17:3) rather than physical bondage or servitude. This fits perfectly with what we now know of the terrain they had to cover.

“The Place Which Was Called Nahom”

Nahom, the burial place of Ishmael, is the first uniquely Book of Mormon location that can be
verified archaeologically. The wording of 1 Nephi 16:34, “the place which was called Nahom,” makes it seem clear that Nahom was an already-existing, locally known name. It appears that Nephi, knowing that the group would never return to the Old World, was careful to place on record the name of the burial place of Ishmael, his father-in-law. Because it is unlikely that Ishmael conveniently died right at a burial place, his body may have been carried for some distance, perhaps for days, before being given a proper burial at Nahom.

The place-name Nahom is found in only one location in Arabia, and there are some strong clues suggestive of its origin. In Epigraphic South Arabian, the language of southern Arabia in Nephi’s day, NHM refers to masonry dressed by chipping. Because Nahom was a burial place, it is possible that the name originally derived from the construction of aboveground burial tombs. While a local name, to a native Hebrew speaker it held peculiarly appropriate links to what had happened there in connection with Ishmael’s death. The roots of the name refer to comforting, consoling, groaning, and so on; thus there was no need to give the place another name. In biblical Hebrew, one of these possible roots (NHM) is often used in connection with mourning a death. Nephi’s deceptively simple account captures all of these elements perfectly.

The Nahom Altar Discoveries

The late Ross T. Christensen of Brigham Young University was the first to suggest, in 1978, that Nephi’s Nahom might correspond to a place called “Nehhm” on a 1763 map of Yemen. Beginning in 1984, my research in Yemen eventually confirmed that this was a large tribal area centered roughly 25 miles northeast of the Yemeni capital Sana’a and that the name has survived to the present day. Discovering that travel “eastward” to the coast from Nahom was feasible further strengthened the likelihood that it was the same place Nephi had referred to.

Over several years I was able to document the place-name (the consonants NHM variously spelled as Nihm, Nehem, Nahm, Naham, and so on but always in the same location) in other early maps, in Arab historical references, and in a letter written by the Prophet Muhammad, all these sources referring back to about AD 100, with strong inferences that the name was older still. In 1995 I presented these data at the Seminar for Arabian Studies in England. Scholars agree that the tribe was located where it still is but may have had a wider influence.

Until recently, however, a gap of about seven centuries remained between what could be documented and Nephi’s 600 BC reference to Nahom. In 1997 a German team’s excavation of the Bar‘an temple site near Marib in Yemen uncovered a num-
ber of inscribed limestone altars dedicated to three local gods. The inscription carved into one of these altars, which had already been dated to between 700 and 600 BC, named its donor as Bi’athтар, the grandson of Naw’um the Nihmite (or from the place of the tribe of Nihm).18 Latter-day Saint scholars were alerted to the find in a 1999 *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* article.19

On 12 September 2000, two colleagues, Lynn Hilton and Gregory Witt, and I identified a second altar bearing the name Nihm at the site. Standing about 26 inches tall, this second altar bore an identical inscription to the first. Two months later, with the cooperation of the German archaeological team at the site, I returned to Yemen and made a complete examination of the temple complex and other altars, one of which later proved to also have the same inscription.20

The text, unchanged on all three altars, refers to the ruler Yada’-il, who is likely the prolific builder Yada’-il Dharih II (about 630 BC), or perhaps a later ruler, Yada’-il Bayyin II (about 580 BC).21 In either case, this places the making of the altars to within decades of Lehi’s day. In addition, since Naw’um was the grandfather of Bi’athтар, the name Nihm itself must be at least two generations older still, thus dating to about the seventh and eighth centuries BC. The altar discovery was reported (along with a photograph) in the February 2001 *Ensign* magazine and referred to in the April 2001 general conference.22 In his landmark 2002 work published by Oxford University Press, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*, scholar Terryl L. Givens provided the following assessment of the find: “Found in the very area where Nephi’s record locates Nahom, these altars may thus be said to constitute the first actual archaeological evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon.”23 The three altars provide irrefutable evidence that the name NHM truly dates to before Lehi’s era in 600 BC, just as Nephi recorded.

**Burial Sites in Nahom**

Given that Nahom was a place of burial, the 1936 discovery of the largest ancient burial site in all of Arabia close to the boundary of the modern Nihm tribe is obviously significant. This necropolis consists of thousands of circular aboveground tombs built of roughly hewn limestone slabs spread over several ridges,24 dating as far back as 2900 BC.25 At least two much smaller burial sites are also located within the modern tribal area of Nihm.26 With the altar discovery confirming the antiquity of the name Nahom, these ancient burial areas now have a special significance for Latter-day Saints: one is likely the actual burial place of Ishmael.

**“And We Called the Place Bountiful”**

The sensitive reader can detect the enthusiasm and relief captured in Nephi’s words as he wrote of the group’s arrival at the shores of the Indian Ocean after a journey of some 2,100 miles across Arabia (see 1 Nephi 17:6).27 For those in the party with the faith to see that they had been divinely led, the green vista they had arrived at was truly a place “prepared of the Lord” (17:5). They emerged into a place full of trees and other vegetation, some bearing edible fruit, a discovery that would impress anyone after eight years of desert life; in fact “much fruit” was the very reason Bountiful was so named (see 17:5, 6).

Clearly, the group was also impressed with the vast ocean panorama before them. Nephi recorded a proper name for the ocean, Irreantum, meaning “many waters” (1 Nephi 17:5) and for which a plausible South Arabian origin has recently been suggested.28 Since 1830, however, critics of the Book of Mormon have seen Nephi’s “Bountiful” as a particularly easy target because of its claims of fruit and timber. For over a century, Latter-day Saint writers could only assign the location of Bountiful to a vague “somewhere” in Arabia.

**Nephi’s Criteria for Bountiful**

No attempt to locate Bountiful on today’s map can be made without first carefully evaluating the Book of Mormon text. First Nephi provides us with an unexpectedly detailed picture of the place, as the following 12 observations make clear.

1. *Nearly eastward* from Nahom. There is a clear directional link between the locations of Bountiful and Nahom. Bountiful lay “nearly eastward” from Nahom (1 Nephi 17:1). Given Nephi’s ability to determine directions in the Old World accurately, we should expect Bountiful to be close to the 16th degree north latitude, as we now know Nahom is.
2. Accessible from the interior. Clearly, the terrain had to permit reasonable access from the interior deserts to the coast, something impossible at some places along the Arabian coast.

3. Surrounding fertility. Nephi’s mentions of Bountiful (1 Nephi 17:5,7) suggest that a wider area may have enjoyed notable fertility, in addition to that of the initial encampment (see 17:6).

4. Sheltered location. Logically on the east coast of Arabia, Bountiful offered an initial tent encampment (see 1 Nephi 17:5–6) but also long-term shelter. The site had to offer a suitable place like a sheltered bay for constructing and launching a sizable ship (see 18:8).

5. Much fruit and wild honey. Bountiful was named for its “much fruit” and “wild honey” (see 1 Nephi 17:5,6; 18:6), and perhaps for its small game that could be hunted (see 18:6). It is likely that Bountiful was uninhabited when Lehi’s party arrived there (see item 11); if so, this would require that the fruit there was not cultivated but was growing wild.

6. Shipbuilding timber. Enough timber of types and sizes to permit building an oceangoing vessel was available (see 1 Nephi 18:1,2) and seemingly at hand.

7. Year-round freshwater. Year-round water is required for the abundant flora described and the group’s extended stay (carrying water would have diverted significant time from the demanding labor of shipbuilding).

8. Nearby mount. A mountain prominent enough to justify Nephi’s reference to it as “the mount” (1 Nephi 17:7; 18:3) must have been near enough to have allowed Nephi to “pray oft” (18:3).

9. Cliffs. The incident of Nephi’s brothers attempting to take his life by throwing him into the depths of the sea (see 1 Nephi 17:48) makes little sense without substantial cliffs overlooking the ocean. Such cliffs, which typically have rocks at their base, would constitute a real danger, whereas a sand beach would pose little threat to a young man described as being “large in stature” (2:16) and “having . . . much strength” (4:31), regardless of his swimming ability.

10. Ore and flint. Ore, from which metal could be smelted to construct tools, was available nearby (see 1 Nephi 17:9–11, 16); and although it remains possible that Nephi carried flint with him to make fire, some type of flint (see 7:11) seems to have been located near the ore source.

11. Unpopulated. 1 Nephi 17 is full of clues that Bountiful at that time likely had no resident population that could contribute tools and manpower to the shipbuilding process. For one thing, specific revelation from God was required to show Nephi where ore could be found (see 17:9–10); and Nephi expended great effort to fashion his own bellows, locate ore, smelt it, and manufacture the tools he would need. Such basic items would have been easily obtained by anyone living in, or near to, a populated seaport. In addition, Nephi would not have had to rely on his brothers to assist him had local labor been available. Lehi could easily have been directed to bring sufficient wealth from his estate in Jerusalem to purchase a ship had they been in a shipbuilding area. When the time came, the continually dissenting Laman and Lemuel seem to have left Bountiful readily enough for surely their first open-sea voyage, suggesting there was little there to entice them to remain and perhaps return to their beloved Jerusalem. It also seems unlikely that the Lord would have directed Lehi’s group, at such a critical juncture in their journey, to settle where they would be exposed to the pagan beliefs then prevalent in Arabia. Rather, Bountiful may have been intended to keep them apart from other people for that reason. However, the fact that all water sources in Arabia attract people requires us to identify reasons why such an attractive place with abundant water would remain uninhabited.

12. Ocean access. Coastal conditions had to allow access to the open ocean and to suitable winds and currents (see 1 Nephi 18:8–9) to carry the vessel seaward, most probably east toward the Pacific coast of the Americas, as Alma indicates (see Alma 22:28). Travel eastward across the Pacific against its prevailing currents and winds is problematic, however.

Such a detailed and comprehensive description of a locale is unique in the Book of Mormon narrative. While it is true that, archaeologically, only inscriptions could definitively establish that a group lived at a specific location so long ago, from a scriptural perspective the plausibility of the many specific requirements for Bountiful that are embedded in Nephi’s record has been clearly established. By describing in such precise detail a
particular location in Arabia—together with the route to get there, specific directions, and even a place-name en route—Joseph Smith put his prophetic credibility very much on the line. Could this young, untraveled farmer in rural New York State in 1830 somehow have known from maps or writings about a burial area named Nahom and a fertile site on the coast of Arabia? When the holdings of libraries that Joseph Smith and his contemporaries could have accessed before 1830 are examined, the answer is clearly no. Long after the 1830 publication of the Book of Mormon, maps of Arabia continued to show the eastern coastline and interior as mostly unknown, unexplored territory. Even quite modern maps misplace place-names and ignore or distort major terrain features. Not one of the explorers of Arabia in past centuries explored the Qamar coast west of Salalah. In fact, the location in Arabia most closely mirroring Nephi’s Bountiful remained unknown to the outside world for over 160 years after the Book of Mormon was published.


During my first visit to Oman in 1987, it soon became apparent that the 60-mile-wide Salalah bay in southern Oman failed to fully match the description of Bountiful preserved in 1 Nephi. The only previous visit to Salalah by Latter-day Saints had been the one-day visit in 1976 by Lynn and Hope Hilton, giving time enough to establish only that many of the required features were present. However, I found that these elements did not come together in any one location in Salalah and that several essential requirements—such as fruit and timber trees and a nearby mountain—were altogether absent anywhere along the coast.
Accordingly, the following year I began a program of systematic exploration of the entire eastern coast of Yemen and southern Oman, soon discovering that the Qamar Mountains west of Salalah had greater fertility than any other areas on the southern coast of Arabia.

When in April 1992 the last segment of this essential survey was completed, it was the first (and so far only) time the entire southeast coast of Arabia had been explored from Latter-day Saint perspectives, yielding objective data in relation to the location of Nephi’s Bountiful.31

Climate and Coastline Change Since Lehi’s Day

A question that naturally arises is whether the climate in this part of the world has changed

Typical verdant scene in the mountains west of Salalah.
appreciably over the 2,600 years since Nephi wrote his account. Also, could the coast be different now in ways that would mask the location of Bountiful? The short answer to both questions is no. Despite reduced rainfall, there has been no significant climate change during the last two millennia, and the ruins of coastal buildings firmly dated more than 2,000 years ago assure us that both coastline and sea levels have not changed appreciably since then.

At this point it is interesting to reflect on the situation had exploration of the Arabian coast not revealed a place matching Nephi’s description of Bountiful. Our only choice would have been to conclude that either (1) the peninsula coast has undergone significant climatic and topographical changes over the past two millennia (for which there is no evidence) or (2) Nephi’s account is not based on historical reality but is fictitious.

Nephi recorded a wealth of detail indicating that he was an eyewitness to the events and places recorded. It was not until completion of the coastal survey in 1992, however, that Latter-day Saints knew of a place on the Arabian coast that could be considered a likely candidate for Bountiful. Hidden from the outside world and largely unknown even within Oman today, this location meets all the criteria unusually well. It matches Nephi’s description detail for detail.
Making a Match

This remarkable place is Khor Kharfot (“Fort Inlet”), the most naturally fertile location on the Arabian coast, with abundant springs, timber trees up to 40 feet in circumference, and vegetation extending over several miles. Kharfot is the coastal mouth of Wadi Sayq (“River Valley”), a valley more than 16 miles long leading through the mountains from the interior desert. Wild figs, an important staple in Lehi’s world, are prolific, along with tamarinds, dates, wild honey, and a variety of edible nuts, berries, vegetables, herbs, and roots. In addition to small game and birds, the plentiful sea life may hold the key to understanding how Lehi’s group, with its limited manpower, could derive sufficient protein from the environment without diverting substantial time and energy to hunting. A sheltered sea inlet until it was closed by a sand bar in fairly recent times, Kharfot was an ideal location to build a ship.

Towering over the west side of the bay is the obvious candidate for the “mount” where Nephi retired often to pray. A small plateau at its base offers a sheltered encampment and 120-foot cliffs, providing an eminently suitable place to dispose of a troublesome younger brother.

Nephi, whose skills included metalworking, was familiar with gold, silver, and copper (he mentions their presence in the New World; see 1 Nephi 18:25); yet he says that only “ore” was smelted at Bountiful (see 17:16). Although rare, exposed surface iron deposits recently located near Wadi Sayq by BYU geologists could have yielded adequate ore for making Nephi’s tools. Just a few miles inland of Kharfot, huge quantities of chert, a form of flint, lie exposed in limestone seams and nodules over several miles. Several areas of ruins are evident,
with the oldest found at the base of the elevated mountain on the west side of the bay. Such limited remains make it seem likely that the place was uninhabited when the Lehites arrived there, thus explaining why Nephi needed revelation for such basic items as tools. When considered together, all these factors reveal a location that is completely consistent with the events that Nephi describes, conforming to every detail found in the scriptural account. No other coastal location has all the features that Nephi so clearly described.

Exploring Khor Kharfot

With the coastal survey completed, I led two FARMS- and BYU-sponsored expedition teams to Kharfot in 1993. Personnel included FARMS president Noel B. Reynolds, geologist William Christiansen, and noted Italian archaeologist Paolo M. Costa. Dr. Costa later presented a paper about the site at the prestigious annual Seminar for Arabian Studies held in London in July 1993, noting Kharfot’s abundant flora and offering a preliminary dating for the human traces. Data from those expeditions also allowed Latter-day Saint researchers to begin moving beyond the cautious stance that was prudent in the past regarding specific Book of Mormon locales. Late in 1993, for example, FARMS reported the first expeditions to Kharfot as follows:

Khor Kharfot and its environs have all the features mentioned in the Book of Mormon in connection with Old World Bountiful. It has no features that would conflict with the Book of Mormon account. A survey of alternative sites in the Arabian Peninsula has turned up no others that come close to fitting the criteria for Bountiful so well. On this analysis, Khor Kharfot emerges as the most probable site for Lehi’s Bountiful.

A 2002 assessment of Kharfot stated, “There now exists convincing evidence that an obscure location at the extreme western end of Oman’s Dhofar coast, Khor Kharfot, is the probable location of Nephi’s Bountiful.” Because Kharfot depicts so clearly what Nephi described, a photograph of the site illustrated the 1992 Encyclopedia of Mormonism entry on “First Book of Nephi” and continues to be used to portray the Old World Bountiful, sometimes in official Church materials. In 1995 Nigel Groom, the leading authority on the incense trade in early Arabia, published a major paper referring to the importance of the discovery of Kharfot and the still-emerging picture of early eastern Arabia as follows:

The recent discovery of ancient sites in the vicinity of Harfut (Kharfot) by Aston and Costa, now being investigated by a Brigham Young University team . . . raises new problems of identifying sites in Dhofar with places mentioned in the early sources.

Periodic fieldwork at the site by BYU geologists, botanists, archaeologists, and historians, sometimes working with Omani colleagues, has continued since. The identification of previously unknown surface iron deposits near Kharfot, making Nephi’s account even more credible, has been one of the most significant findings resulting from this fieldwork. Research is also under way with phytoliths (fossilized pollens) in an effort to identify plant species at the site dating back to Lehi’s day. While fieldwork at the Nahom and Bountiful sites will continue for many years to come, the body of data about both places means that their location is no longer merely conjectural. In the case of Nahom, the location is substantiated by the most powerful evidence of all—inscriptional; at Kharfot, the weight of support rests upon the way that this pristine place uniquely meets an extended, very detailed scriptural paradigm.

Significantly, several very early Maya accounts from Guatemala speak of the traditional place of their ancestors’ departure as a place of abundance, near “Babylonia” across the ocean. Some of these writings go further and also describe the Old World departure point as a “ravine” and a place of reeds, a quite specific description that closely matches Khor Kharfot. Perhaps in these writings elements of Lehi and Sariah’s epic journey are preserved.

“Towards the Promised Land”

We now turn to the resources and possibilities that awaited Lehi’s group at Bountiful.

Nephi’s Ship

The long trek from Jerusalem to Nahom took Nephi past several places where ships could be
observed, including Ezion-Geber, the major Red Sea port of his day. However, a vessel capable of carrying a group from Arabia to the Americas clearly requires better design and workmanship than one making brief fishing forays or regional trading runs. Thus the Lord told Nephi that he would be shown how to construct it (see 1 Nephi 17:8), and Nephi recorded that the Lord did “show me from time to time” (18:1) how to proceed. Nephi neither worked the timbers nor built his ship “after the manner of men” (18:2), and his choice of the phrase curious workmanship (18:1) implies that he was building something other than the ships of his day.

Regarding the kind of ship Nephi built, the text offers only three hints. First, the fact that the people went “down into” the ship (1 Nephi 18:5, 6 [twice], 8) suggests a decked vessel, as does the mention of dancing on board (see 18:9). Second, sails and at least one mast were involved since the ship was “driven forth before the wind” (18:8, 9) and “sailed again” (18:22). Third, some type of rudder system was used, because after binding him, Nephi’s angry brothers “knew not whither they should steer the ship” (18:13). As to the size of the ship, one estimate is that a 60-foot ship would be required; however, a smaller, more utilitarian ship seems likely.45

The Period of Construction

With the limited manpower available to Lehi’s group and the need to also attend to domestic concerns at Bountiful, a likely minimum period required for constructing the ship is two years. It may well have taken longer. Nephi records a period of gathering “much fruits and meat from the wilderness, and honey in abundance, and provisions” (1 Nephi 18:6, 8). The account makes it seem fairly certain that no outsiders joined the voyagers. If, as

we suppose, their journey was eastward, a minimum of 17,000 miles of ocean voyaging lay ahead of them (see 18:12, 21–22), a journey of at least a year, possibly two. Stops en route for supplies are quite possible, but rainwater, fishing, and stored supplies may have provided the basis for their diet.

Historical Seafaring in Oman

Centuries before Lehi’s day, Oman was at the forefront of Arab sea exploration and trade, building ships that operated to Africa, India, and China.46 Historians have only recently recognized this, a fact that someone in 1830 could not have appreciated.47

Did Nephi Build a Raft?

With the Iron Age technology available to Nephi, his options for building an oceangoing vessel were limited. If indeed a hulled vessel, it was likely a lashed (“sewn”) ship rather than a nailed one. Great skill is required to ensure that the timbers are shaped precisely before being lashed together, a method taking two or three times longer than using nails. Another design possibility is a raft of some sort. Because it required much more timber than other ship styles, the raft concept did not

Conjectural raft design for Nephi’s ship. Drawing by Chad D. Aston.
develop in Arabia. For anyone building at Kharfot, however—and, very significantly, only at Kharfot—availability of timber was not an issue, and a raft design, more than any other, would have been totally unfamiliar (and thus not “after the manner of men,” 1 Nephi 18:2) to anyone in Lehi’s party. Building a large oceangoing raft would still have been a significant project, but one more closely matched to the materials and labor resources at hand. Additionally, although equipped with sails and rudder like a conventional ship, a raft design offers greatly improved stability and safety at sea. With a broad keel of several layers of securely lashed logs, taking on water and sinking would never have been a concern, and only an unusually powerful storm could have presented any danger. A raft also offers greater deck space (perhaps using multiple decks) for storage, for the growing of small gardens, and for private quarters for each family—all significant factors that were exploited by other cultures that used rafts. Finally, the shallow draft of a raft would more easily allow stops and require less skill in maneuvering than would a regular ship, perhaps explaining why there is no mention in Nephi’s record of any predeparture test sailing.

Archaeologist P. J. Capelotti, referring to the 5,000-mile Kon Tiki raft voyage, makes a general point about the merits of rafts that will strike Latter-day Saint readers as significant:

By its very structure, a raft is a floating warehouse. They were therefore the perfect vessel to carry the contents of a culture across an ocean. They are not fast, but they are virtually indestructible. If a conventional sailboat gets a small hole in its hull, it sinks. By contrast, a balsa-wood raft can lose two thirds of its hull and still keep its crew and twenty tons of cargo afloat.

While it may require an adjustment to the cultural assumptions of most Latter-day Saints, a raft design not only meets the scriptural requirements of Nephi’s “ship,” but seems to be the optimal and most feasible structure that could have been constructed at the unique site of Bountiful.

**Modern Parallels to Lehi’s Voyage**

Much can be learned about Lehi’s sea voyage from more recent voyages. One Latter-day Saint attempt in the 1950s focused attention on Book of Mormon origins and the practical realities of life at sea. Since then, better-known seamen like Thor Heyerdahl have demonstrated that the oceans were highways linking different civilizations, rather than barriers separating them. The closest modern parallel to the Lehite voyage, however, was undoubtedly the seven-month voyage from northern Oman to China by the Irish writer Tim Severin in 1980–81 in an 80-foot sewn ship, the Sohar, built by 30 men without using a single nail.

While the account of the Sohar’s voyage to China is most interesting and instructive, we should exercise caution before drawing too many conclusions. For one thing, lacking a site prepared by the Lord, Severin was forced to use timber imported some 1,300 miles from India, the practice in northern Oman for thousands of years. Nephi, in southern Oman, would not have needed to do the same—the timber trees at Kharfot are very suitable for shipbuilding.

Constructing the “sewn” ship Sohar entailed lashing planks to the hull (top) and oiling the hull (bottom). Photos by Bruce Foster/Severin Archive.
Long ridiculed by establishment science, the so-called diffusionist view—captured so matter-of-factly in the Book of Mormon accounts of the Jaredite, Lehiite, and Mulekite sea voyages—is now supported by an overwhelming body of evidence, explicable only by accepting that ocean voyaging has taken place globally for thousands of years.

**Did Nephi Require Local Assistance?**

Bountiful was far more than merely a suitable port; it was also a place “prepared of the Lord” (1 Nephi 17:5). This suggests it had all the resources needed by the prophet-led group, including the guidance needed to construct a ship. Nephi plainly states that he was instructed of the Lord “from time to time” (see 18:1, 3) rather than instructed to visit with an experienced local shipbuilder, as some have speculated. Moreover, Nephi emphasizes three times that his ship was not built after “the manner of men” (18:2). Even if experienced shipbuilders had been available to instruct him, they could only have shared information about what they knew, not the long-distance craft Nephi required. To me, Nephi’s unequivocal statements effectively rule out assistance from others outside the group; it is also very unlikely that there was even a deepwater port operating in southern Oman in Lehi’s day.

**El Niño and the Sea Voyage to the New World**

As noted earlier, continuing across the Pacific in an easterly direction is difficult in the extreme because the winds and surface currents move in a westerly direction—exactly opposite of what the Lehitites needed to reach America. In recent years, however, science has begun to understand a phenomenon known as the ENSO effect. The acronym consists of El Niño (Spanish for “the [Christ] Child”)—so called because the changed weather patterns commonly reach the Americas about Christmastime—and southern oscillation, since these changes commence in the southern Pacific Ocean. An El Niño event expands the normally narrow and unreliable east-moving equatorial countercurrent (the “doldrums”) for up to a year or more, thus allowing travel in an easterly direction across the Pacific. Once again, science and time vindicate the prophetic writings by demonstrating their total plausibility. How appropriate, then, that the very means that likely allowed Lehi to sail east to the New World, carrying with him the religion of the Christ to come, is itself named after the Son of God!

**Using Nephi’s Criteria to Evaluate Two Candidates for Bountiful**

After decades of research, only two specific locations have been seriously proposed for the Old World Bountiful—Khor Rori, an ancient port east of Salalah involved in the incense trade, and Khor Kharfot, farther west near the Yemen border.

Both sites are close to being “eastward” from Nahom. Both were originally sheltered inlets accessible from the interior, and freshwater, cliffs, and an ore source are common to both. They vary considerably, however, for the remaining six criteria, as shown below. On this analysis Khor Kharfot emerges as the better match for Nephi’s Bountiful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Nephi Criteria</th>
<th>Khor Rori</th>
<th>Khor Kharfot</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surrounding area likely fertile (17:5–7)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much fruit and wild honey (17:5–6; 18:6)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipbuilding timber on hand (18:1–2)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A nearby “mount” (17:7; 18:3)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flint deposits (17:9–11, 16)</td>
<td>none known</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpopulated area (17:5–6, 8–11; 18:1–2, 6)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sunset at Wadi Sayq/Khor Kharfot.

Sacred Text, Serious History

Somewhere on the shores of the Indian Ocean, Lehi and Sariah’s long and difficult crossing of Arabia ended. Today we can stand on the beach at Khor Kharfot and gaze inland at trees and other greenery laced with freshwater streams. The air is full of insects, birds, and the sound of waves breaking on the beach. The bulky mountain on the western side of the bay looms even more prominently against the purple twilight following sunset. Perhaps the New World saga that occupies most of the Book of Mormon began long ago at this very location when a wooden ship pushed out into the vastness of the ocean. In such a place Nephi’s spare yet illuminating account comes to life as never before.

This article has summarized compelling reasons to take the Book of Mormon seriously as history. The congruence of so many logical, historical, and geographical specifics, including a uniquely fertile coast nearly eastward from a 600 BC Nahom, argues strongly that the Book of Mormon is no less than its translator claimed for it. Henceforth, only the uninformed can claim that it lacks historical and archaeological support. The discovery of ancient altars, tombs, and the geographical realities discussed in this article—coming forth literally “out of the earth”—is confirming and vindicating the record of Joseph in unprecedented ways in our own day.
Lehi’s Trail
From the Valley of Lemuel to Nephi’s Harbor

Above: Upper valley of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism (near Maqna, Saudi Arabia), the authors’ proposed site for the Valley of Lemuel. Right: The ancient port of Khor Rori, a candidate for Nephi’s harbor (today the inlet is closed by a sandbar). All photos and maps courtesy George Potter and Richard Wellington unless otherwise noted.

Richard Wellington and George Potter
Before we introduce specific locations that we believe Lehi would have visited on his journey, a brief discussion of ancient travel through Arabia is in order. By the time Lehi left Jerusalem to start his journey, the Arabian Peninsula had been inhabited for a great many generations. Indeed, according to the Bible, shortly after the flood, southern Arabia was populated by the 13 sons of Joktan, Noah’s descendant five generations removed (see Genesis 10:26–30). The few existing wells were well known by Lehi’s time, and all were owned by tribes who guarded them closely. Travel to and from these wells could not be undertaken without the permission of the Arab tribes who owned the land. We thus propose that Lehi took an existing trail that would have allowed the family protected rights of access through these dangerous lands. In Lehi’s time only one trail existed that led in a south-southeast direction to southern Arabia (see 1 Nephi 16:13–14). This trail is known as the Frankincense Trail because it was used to transport frankincense (the highly prized sap from the tree *Boswelia sacra*) from where it grew in the more fertile areas of southern Arabia to Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Israel in the north. Thus our model for Lehi’s trail departs from previous theories that Lehi traveled down the shoreline of the Red Sea—a route that would simply have been impossible since there was no trail along the coast, nor an organized string of wells, until the ninth century AD.

While George Potter and Craig Thorsted were exploring the northeast corner of Saudi Arabia in 1995, the local captain of the coast guard introduced them to a spectacular valley called Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, which contains a river that flows continually throughout the year and empties into the Gulf of Aqaba. With the discovery of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism there was finally a fully qualified candidate for the Valley of Lemuel. The discovery of the valley provided a focal point from which the authors were able to develop a new model for the route Lehi took through Arabia. Over the course of six years we were able to travel throughout the Arabian Peninsula researching the route we believe Lehi would have taken from Jerusalem to Bountiful. Our findings were published in 2003, and this article provides a brief overview of the model we propose in our book. Throughout this time we were fortunate to be able to consult the works of those who had gone before us, namely Hugh Nibley, Lynn and Hope Hilton, and Warren and Michaela Aston.
There are two main reasons why we feel that Lehi’s party would have used the Frankincense Trail (see map on facing page). First, this trail would have protected Lehi and his family from plunder. Jeremiah, a contemporary of Lehi, noted that the Arabs were notorious highway robbers (see Jeremiah 3:2). The tribes that ruled the land through which trade routes passed provided protection at the wells and on the trails. Travel was encouraged and controlled, not prohibited. Arabist Alan Keohane wrote of a period later than Lehi’s: “Traders and cultivators paid them [the local tribes] protection money, called khawah, to keep themselves safe from raids. The desert sheikhs . . . became so powerful that many were given the grander title of emir or prince. They were also fabulously wealthy.”

Second, the trail would have provided Lehi’s party water and provisions. The Roman historian Pliny the Elder (23 bc–ad 79) described the economics of the frankincense route this way: “Indeed all along the route they keep on paying, at one place for water, at another for fodder, or the charges for lodging at the halts.” The course of the Frankincense Trail can be explained in one word—water, the most precious commodity of all to the desert traveler. The Hiltons noted: “The history of Arabia is written with water, not ink.” The great oases of western Arabia—Tabuk, Hijra (Madain Saleh), Dedan (Ula), Medina, Mecca, and Najran—are all found on the Frankincense Trail or a branch thereof. Indeed, the course of the Frankincense Trail was no coincidence; it was there because it provided a reliable water supply and thus offered the traveler the best chance of surviving a crossing of the great deserts.

While we do not have texts from Lehi’s day that mention the dangers of crossing the Arabian desert (notably marauders and lack of water) or the necessity of taking the Frankincense Trail, scholars assume that the documented historical situation of later date has remained fairly constant over time and thus is an accurate indication of the challenges that Lehi’s party found in Arabia.

Some might argue that the Liahona could have directed Lehi through the desert without a trail. Even so, the party presumably would have needed to rejoin the trail at the wells. In the Ottoman period (14th–20th centuries AD), “fortified kellas or water stations, protected by iron-plated doors and garrisons of soldiers, dotted the route [of the Frankincense Trail] at long and irregular intervals. Although it might have been two or three days’ march from one to another, at least the water supplies were known and plans made accordingly.” As the Hiltons succinctly summarized, “Lehi could not have carved out a route for himself without water, and for a city dweller to discover a line of waterholes of which desert-dwellers were ignorant is an unlikely prospect.” “The family, therefore, must have traveled and survived as other travelers of their day did in the same area, going from public waterhole to public waterhole.” Supporting this view is the fact that, as Pliny pointed out, those who left the official trail were summarily executed by the Arab ruling hegemonies.

From Jerusalem Southward

Nephi tells us that Lehi left Jerusalem and “departed into the wilderness” (1 Nephi 2:4). Was there an ancient route that led from Jerusalem to Wadi Tayyib al-Ism (our candidate for the Valley of Lemuel) and that could have been described as being “in the wilderness”? It turns out that there was such a route. The northern branches of the Frankincense Trail (in Gaza, Damascus, and Babylonia) joined together at the town of Dedan (situated in modern Saudi Arabia) and from there continued south to Yemen. The Gaza branch of the trail passed within 10 miles of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, a fact that would certainly not have been lost on Lehi. The trail consisted of halts at wells, usually several days’ journey apart. The nearest halt to Wadi Tayyib al-Ism was the town of Midian (or Madyan—the former abode of Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, and the modern town of al-Bada’a). From Midian the Gaza branch wended its way in a roughly south-southeast direction inland through the mountains, eventually joining the other branches at Dedan.

Space does not allow a long argument explaining why we believe that Lehi took this route from Jerusalem south to Aqaba and then on to Wadi Tayyib al-Ism rather than any of the other possibilities. Suffice it to say, however, that to the east of Jerusalem were two major routes that ran in a north–south direction: the King’s Highway and, farther to the east, the Way of the Wilderness, so called because it passed through the desert country to the east of the Se’ir mountain range.
There would seem to be a historical precedent for the family escaping to the east toward the Way of the Wilderness and the King’s Highway. That was the preferred exit route from Jerusalem not only for those Israelites who fled when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem in 587 BC but also for King Zedekiah and his family. It would seem that if Lehi took the same route taken by most others who escaped from Jerusalem shortly after Lehi’s departure, then it would be perfectly correct to describe that course of travel as departing “into the [Way of] the Wilderness.”

Nephi’s text states that after reaching the Gulf of Aqaba, Lehi’s party traveled “by” and then “in” the “borders” (1 Nephi 2:5), which in Joseph Smith’s translation may well have meant the edge of a mountain range since in the Bible we read that Moses was commanded, with regard to Mount Sinai, that the people should “go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it” (Exodus 19:12; emphasis added). The name of the mountain range through which the party traveled runs along the eastern side of the gulf and is the called the “Hejaz” (also Hijaz), which means “barriers.” By using Nephi’s text as a guide, one passes directly from Aqaba to the fertile Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, where we found an oasis of hundreds of date palms (see 1 Nephi 8:1), wild grain (see 8:1), a river of continuously flowing water (see 2:9), and a magnificent granite canyon (see 2:10). This course took us through the entire length of Wadi Bir Marsha, which Jeffrey R. Chadwick, who has not visited the region, argued could be a candidate for the Valley of Lemuel. However, unlike the fertile Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, Bir Marsha is only a barren rocky wadi, with no grain, no fruit trees, and certainly no flowing water.

The Valley of Lemuel to Nahom

After leaving the Valley of Lemuel, the party traveled four days to a place they called “Shazer,” where they pitched their tents and hunted (see 1 Nephi 16:13–14). Regarding the place-name Shazer, Hugh Nibley wrote: “The name is intriguing. The combination shajer is quite common in Palestinian place names; it is a collective meaning ‘trees,’ and many Arabs (especially in Egypt) pronounce it shazher.” Nigel Groom uses a number of variations of the same place-name, Shajir being one of them, identical to Nibley’s Shajer. Groom’s definition of Shajir is “a valley or area abounding with trees and shrubs.”

Lehi’s first camp after the Valley of Lemuel must have been at an authorized halt along the Gaza branch of the Frankincense Trail; otherwise he would not have been allowed to stop for an extended period. And so we began to look for a caravansary in a valley with trees that would have been a four-day journey from the Valley of Lemuel.

In the early 20th century, Alois Musil traveled and made meticulous maps of the Northern Hijaz, the land between Midian and Medina where the next leg of the Gaza branch of the Frankincense Trail passed. He described his journey down Wadi Agharr, also known as Wadi Sharmah, a wadi (mountain valley) about 60 miles southeast of the
Valley of Lemuel. Musil recorded: “We . . . crossed the old Pilgrim Road of ar-Rasifije leading southward to the hills of Kos al-Hnane, where spirits abide. Date palms were still growing in parts of the valley, so that the oasis of Sarma could be extended a full twenty-five kilometers to the east.” Musil described a fertile valley with an oasis over 15 miles long. This fertile valley is approximately south-southeast from our candidate for the Valley of Lemuel and was crossed by the old pilgrim route that followed the Gaza arm of the ancient Frankincense Trail. We found Musil’s description of Agharr most interesting because on a prior trip to Midian we had been told by the police general at al-Bada’ that the best hunting in the entire area was in the mountains at Agharr. The leading expert on the trail of northwest Arabia is Abdullah al-Wohaibi of King Saud University. Al-Wohaibi noted the names and order of the halts or rest stops on the al-Mur’iqah route, another name for the old ar-Rasifije road that Musil had mentioned. He wrote that according to various medieval Arab geographers, the first rest stop after Midian was al-Aghra. Musil had previously noted the similarities in the names al-Aghra and Wadi Agharr and concluded that the rest stop was in this wadi.

In connection with the Book of Mormon locale Shazer, where Lehi’s party stopped to hunt and whose meaning in Arabic, as noted earlier, was “a valley or area abounding with trees and shrubs,” we now had evidence from independent sources that the first rest stop after Madyan on the ancient Gaza branch of the Frankincense Trail was in a fertile valley with trees, Wadi Agharr, and the surrounding mountains presented the best hunting opportunities along the trail.

Nephi informs us that after leaving Shazer, the party traveled “in the most fertile parts of the wilderness” (1 Nephi 16:14), yet the famous explorer Richard Burton described the Hijaz in these words:

Wadi Agharr, the authors’ candidate for Nephi’s Shazer, is an extensive oasis valley near both the Red Sea and the Gaza branch of the Frankincense Trail.
“Nowhere had I seen a land in which the earth’s anatomy lies so barren, or one richer in volcanic or primary formations.” If Joseph Smith, or anyone else, had made up the Book of Mormon, one has to wonder what could have possessed him to state that there were “fertile parts” in this type of landscape. Here would be an obvious place to show that the Book of Mormon was a fraud. Yet what might at first seem to be a great flaw in Nephi’s text is actually one of the most compelling witnesses for its historical accuracy, for not only were the large oasis towns mostly located on the Frankincense Trail (al-Bad‘a, al-Aghra at Wadi Agharr, Shuwaq, Shagbh, Dedan, Medina, etc.), but also each of these oases had a farming community associated with it. Yet there is a second, equally compelling argument supporting the veracity of Joseph Smith’s translation.

In pre-Islamic times there was a series of villages along a 215-mile section of the Frankincense Trail, incorporating the 12 halt settlements between Dedan and Medina. They were known anciently as the Qura ‘Arabiyyah, or the “Arab Villages.” These villages with their cultivated lands were linked together by the Frankincense Trail. Surrounded by thousands of square miles of barren terrain, the cultivated lands stood out from the surrounding desert like pearls adorning a chain along the south-southeast course of the trail. The old name for this area is interesting in light of the fact that Nephi refers to it as “the most fertile parts.”

According to the Saudi Arabian Department of Antiquities and Museums, Wadi Ula (Qura) at the northern end of the Qura ‘Arabiyyah, where the ruins of Dedan were, was called Hijr in antiquity (alternatively spelled Hājir or Mahājir), which according to Groom means, among other things, “a fertile piece of land.” In his book Tahdhib, the Islamic geographer al-Azhar explains that the Arabs who lived in the Qura ‘Arabiyyah (the villages along the Frankincense Trail) were called the Muhājirun, meaning “the fertile pieces of land” (the plural form of Hājir or Mahājir). Thus when Nephi describes that the family traveled in the most “fertile parts,” it is quite probable that he was using a real name for this area. It is interesting that the name Muhājirun, or “fertile parts,” occurs nowhere else in Arabia and is situated only on the Frankincense Trail, after the two locations that would appear to perfectly fit Nephi’s descriptions of both the Valley of Lemuel and Shazer—quite a coincidence!

As we continued south along the Frankincense Trail, we found even more evidence that Nephi’s record is an eyewitness account of one who traveled along it. Three examples of this evidence follow.

First, Nephi’s description of the trail depicts declining fertility, from “the most fertile parts” (1 Nephi 16:14) to “more fertile parts” (16:16) to an area where the party had to pitch their tents and go into the mountains to hunt for food—the camp where Nephi broke his bow (see 16:17, 30)—and finally to an area of presumably no fertility where the family was starving to death (see 16:35). This is exactly what is found along the Gaza branch of the Frankincense Trail. Using tactical pilotage charts
ant spellings are still bear the name as they did Shazer and the Valley of Lemuel. In fact, there are a number of places in Yemen that existed before Lehi’s party arrived there since the record does not say that the family named it as they did Shazer and the Valley of Lemuel. In fact, there are a number of places in Yemen that still bear the name NHM (common modern variant spellings are Naham, Nahm, Neham, Nehm, and Nihm), which many scholars believe could be identical to Nephi’s Nahom.

Yemen is divided into a number of administrative districts, one of which is situated 18 miles northeast of the modern capital San’a and is called “Nihm.” The Astons produced a map showing a cemetery named “Nehem” situated on the southern edge of Wadi Jawf, and they have suggested this could be the place where Ishmael was buried. There are three other specific locations bearing the name: Jabal Naham, Furdat Naham, and Wadi Naham, all located within 16 miles of each other. Jabal Naham is a 9,600-foot mountain 13 miles from the ancient caravan trail that ran between Ma’in and Marib. Furdat Naham, meaning “stony hills of Naham,” is located on the border between the mountain range and the plain to the east of it and is only 3 miles from the ancient trail. Wadi Naham (also called Wadi Harib Naham) is a valley situated 1.5 miles from that same ancient trail. Is there any evidence to indicate that any of these places may be the more likely candidate for the Book of Mormon Nahom?

We would suggest that the site on the southern edge of Wadi Jawf is an unlikely location. Nephi informs us that the family was starving prior to reaching Nahom (see 1 Nephi 16:35). In Lehi’s time Wadi Jawf was the home to the Minaeans, who constituted one of the two largest incense kingdoms of southern Arabia (the other kingdom was controlled by the Sabaeans, the inhabitants of Saba, or Sheba). Wadi Jawf was a large river oasis blessed with an abundance of excellent pastures and farmlands irrigated by rainwater that ran off from the mountains and was collected in dams. The Minaeans used irrigation systems for large areas of cultivation adequate for supporting a sizable population. French archaeologist Rémy Audouin stated that from the middle of the second millennium onward Wadi Jawf was cultivated and that “thus a non-migratory population could find food, [and] there were sufficient supplies for the caravans and wood for building.” Strabo visited the land of the Minaeans in 24 BC as part of the Roman invasion force of Aelius Gallus and reported that “the Minaeans have land that is fertile in palm groves and timber, and wealthy in flocks.” If Lehi’s party reached the cemetery Nehem, which is more than halfway down Wadi Jawf, they must have passed through the fertile lands of the Minaeans, where they would have
found abundant food. The fact that they were starving implies that this location does not fit the conditions Nephi describes.

While excavating the Bar’ān temple in Marib, a German archaeological team under the leadership of Burkhard Vogt unearthed a stone altar bearing the inscription of the name of the benefactor who donated it, “Būthtar, son of Sawād from the tribe Naw’, from Nihm.” Vogt dates the altar to the seventh or sixth century BC. In September 2000 a second altar bearing the name Nah’m was found in Marib in the Temple of the Moon Goddess, which dates to the seventh or eighth century BC. Here would seem to be concrete evidence that a place bearing the name Nahom (specifically NHM) existed before Lehi’s time and presumably had links to Marib, which was situated on the Frankincense Trail and controlled the trade in that area.

We do not suggest that Marib was the location of Nahom, since, like Wadi Jawf, Marib was well populated with well-established irrigation and agriculture. By 750 BC the population of Marib numbered some 50,000 inhabitants, and so it is difficult to see how the family could have been starving at Marib when the land was so fecund, producing three crops per year. There is no evidence that Marib was ever called NHM.

These findings would seem to support the idea that Nephi’s Nahom may well have been close to present-day Furdat Naham, Wadi Naham, and Jabal Naham, all of which are within 13 miles of where the ancient route turns to the east (see 1 Nephi 17:1). Furdat Naham being only 4 miles from the turn. This area is not close to any ancient population centers and presumably had no irrigation network or cultivation in place. On this route it would have been only 30 miles along that trail from Wadi Naham to the Sabaean capital of Marib, where the altars were found and where we might assume the people who inhabited Nihm made offerings in the Bar’ān temple.

With this information it is now possible to come up with a theory of where the Nahom incident took place (see 1 Nephi 16:33–39). A possible scenario would be that after the family left Shazer, they continued south along the Frankincense Trail, passing through the oasis towns of Dedan, Yathrib, Turnah, Bishah, and Tathlith to Okhdood (Najran). The area south of Okhdood is extremely desolate, with no agriculture, settlements, or opportunities for hunting. After Okhdood, the second well the family would have encountered was at Sayh. After this the trail suddenly took a number of twists and turns at Jabal al Burm. In the space of a little over 40 miles, it turned first to the north, then south, then west, and then south, skirting the edge of the sand dunes. At this point the route split into two, with a minor trail heading to the east to the well of Mushayniqah and on to al Abr. Is it possible that here the Lord chose to test and chasten the group? (see 1 Nephi 16:35). If it was here that the Liahona led them east into the edge of the Rub’al Khali, the largest sand dune desert in the world, they would have waded through the dunes and could easily have become disoriented and lost (see Alma 37:38,

The authors’ proposed route (in red) for Lehi’s group veers into the inhospitable Ramlat Dahm desert and steers clear of population centers before reaching Wadi Naham and turning eastward. The black line is the major trade route, the purple line a minor trail. Compare with other suggested routes mapped on page 77.
40–42). If they had accidentally traveled east of their intended trail and entered the Rub’al Khali, they would have been in a sand dune desert for the first time in their journey. The trail up to this point had avoided sand dunes. The text implies that this may have been the case since the party had come to a change in the landscape. Note that Nephi’s older brothers complained that he wanted to be their leader and teacher and that he wanted to “lead us away into some strange wilderness” (1 Nephi 16:38). If they were already in the wilderness, what would be a strange wilderness? They had essentially traveled the main Frankincense Trail the length of Arabia. They had described this as being in the wilderness. What could be different about this strange wilderness? If they were in the Rub’al Khali, there would be no trail, no halts, no wells, and no landmarks—all of which would have been a new and frightening experience. Here they faced starvation, but Nephi would have realized they had lost the trail (see Alma 37:41–42) and presumably knew their best chance was to turn southwest in the hope of picking it up again. If so, they would have pushed on in that direction and ended up south of Wadi Jawf in an area called Nahom. The three locations mentioned above that bear the name Naham still exist there. We suggest that Ishmael was buried somewhere in that vicinity (see 1 Nephi 16:34). By reaching Nahom and the trail, the family was able to go on to find help and food, an achievement that Nephi rightly recognizes could not have happened without the help of the Lord (see 16:39).

The Trail East from Nahom

Nephi relates that after Nahom the family traveled “nearly eastward from that time forth” (1 Nephi 17:1). Here again the Book of Mormon narrative is in total harmony with the route of the Frankincense Trail in 600 BC. The main trail ran through the capitals of the incense kingdoms of Ma’in, Saba, Qataban, and Hadramaut and ended at the port of Cana. This route followed the easiest terrain through protected valleys and the areas of greatest population concentration. The downside to this trail was that all of these kingdoms extracted a levy from the caravans as they passed. Pliny recounts that the caravan route from southern Arabia to Gaza was enormously expensive. In order to reduce the journey’s duration between these “state capitals” and to avoid the levies that would be applied, a number of shortcuts or secondary trails came into existence. Though cheaper to travel on,
these trails made for more difficult going, with only a few wells and virtually no caravansaries.

Since we place Nahom somewhere near present-day Wadi Naham, we investigated the two routes that lead nearly east from there (note that Lehi’s party would not have traveled directly east from Nahom, as that would have taken them directly into the dune desert Ramlat Sab’tayn). There is only one trail through Ramlat Sab’tayn, and that is on the northeast corner, running along Wadi Jawf to Shabwah. To reach this trail, they could have followed Wadi Naham, or any of the other wadis in the area that all drain northeast, down into Wadi Jawf. The second possible route would have been to continue on the main trail to Marib and Timna, then on the minor trail to al Bina and on to Shabwah. We will probably never know exactly which of these two routes Lehi’s party took since Nephi gives us only one compass bearing for the entire journey across southern Arabia. What we can be sure of, however, is that very close to an area still known by the name Naham, the trail that ran the entire length of Arabia in a general south-southeast direction changed bearing and turned to the east, exactly as Nephi described.

When we started researching the possible trail that the party took from Nahom to Bountiful, this eastward portion, from Shabwah to Dhofar (the generally accepted location where Bountiful is situated), was the one that had by far the least information available. Freya Stark wrote in 1936 that at that time “no European has been along this way.”

We did not know if we would be able to find any trails there since no concrete description of one existed in the literature. Fortunately, at the very time we were investigating the trail in southern Arabia, the research of Professor Juris Zarins of Southwest Missouri State University was becoming available. His investigation of the ruins at Shisur and other archaeological sites has begun to shed light on the Incense Trail and the route it took in southern Oman and Yemen. Zarins found a number of forts elsewhere in southern Arabia that provided the first concrete evidence that an overland trail existed from the ancient frankincense kingdoms of Ma’in, Saba, Qataban, and Hadramaut in Yemen and east to the frankincense groves of Dhofar.

**Bountiful**

Other Latter-day Saint authors have suggested locations for Bountiful. The Hiltons focused on the inlet bay at Salalah, the ancient al-Balid. Warren and Michaela Aston settled on Wadi Sayq (Khor Kharfot). If Lehi and his family had taken the route eastward from Yemen to Dhofar in modern Oman, they would have followed that trail until it ended on the Salalah plain, where the harbor at Khor Rori formed one of the largest ancient ports in southern Arabia. We were the first to suggest that Khor Rori was the logical place to start the search for the place Nephi called Bountiful, where the family lived and where Nephi built and launched his ship. Though al-Balid and Wadi Sayq possess features that could connect them with Bountiful, in our opinion Khor Rori offers a dimension that the other two do not, namely, the three maritime resources that would have been essential for Lehi’s party to reach the promised land: the materials needed to build an oceangoing ship, a protected harbor for building and launching the vessel, and the opportunity to learn the seamanship skills needed to sail a large ship. A growing body of evidence suggests that the ancient frankincense port of Khor Rori possessed these unique maritime resources, as well as all the other attributes mentioned in Nephi’s record.

Khor Rori is a large waterway extending over 1.5 miles inland. The khor (“inlet”) has several natural places where ships could moor, making it the likely reason that Khor Rori and Taqah (the settlement 2 miles to the west of Khor Rori) were called Merbat (“the moorings”) anciently. Today there is a sandbank across the khor, closing it off from the sea. This barrier was not always present, however. Dr. Eduard G. Rheinhardt believes that a drop in the sea level around the 14th and 15th centuries ad caused the closure of the harbor’s mouth. Radio-carbon dating establishes that there was a stable and final closure occurring around AD 1640–1690. Huge cliffs line the sea entrance to Khor Rori, forming breakwaters that allowed ancient ships to sail out 400–450 yards into the Indian Ocean proper with protection from the surf. This was the great strength of Khor Rori as a port; the natural breakwaters provided protection from both the summer southwest monsoon and the winter northeast...
monsoon winds. Thus the port could be used all year for shipping and shipbuilding.

Khor Rori was the premier port of Dhofar, which was involved in seafaring as early as the fifth and fourth millennia BC. Both Khor Rori and Taqah were settled long before Lehi’s arrival in southern Arabia. Zarins found evidence of a “large scale Bronze Age presence” as well as evidence of an Iron Age settlement there. Pollen samples from inside the buildings at Khor Rori, which date from the late fourth to the mid-second century BC, indicate that the people at Khor Rori cultivated fields and gardens of wheat (Triticum group), barley (Hordeum group), and date palms (Phoenix dactilifera); and remains show they raised sheep and goats and ate seafood extensively.

Examination of the area around Khor Rori shows that the fundamental element that gave Bountiful its name—fruit—would have been present at the shoreline exactly as Nephi described it. The shoreline of Dhofar is mainly rocky, and there are few places where ancient cultivation is found at the shoreline. Yet Nephi mentioned that when the party arrived at Bountiful, they camped on the seashore and called the place Bountiful because of its much fruit (see 1 Nephi 17:5, 6). Khor Taqah, leading to the seashore at the town of Taqah, has extensive cultivation using the freshwater from the khor to irrigate the land. Presumably, this was done anciently in order to feed the population. We note that in the United States in the early 19th century any cultivated plants could have been classified as “fruit.” Sorghum (Sorghum bicolor), millets (Eleusine sp., Pennisetum sp.), cotton (Gossypium sp.), and indigo (Indigofera sp.) were cultivated in Dhofar possibly as early as 4000 BC. It should be noted that while Nephi informs us in 1 Nephi 17:5 that the honey in Bountiful was wild, he specifically avoids saying that the fruit grew wild.

While today Khor Rori and the surrounding coastal plain appear barren, the arid condition is a recent phenomenon caused by changing rainfall levels. Local historian Ali al-Shahri writes: “It was the most important agricultural area until 40 years ago, growing corn, millet, and lots of other grains. A long time ago, this plain was watered by many streams, which flowed into the sea. Even up to 30 years ago many of them were still flowing. . . . This area was covered with forest and grass perennially. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea mentions the presences of trees and rivers on the coastal plain.” During his youth, al-Shahri watched his father’s
livestock in the valley just above Khor Rori. Al-Shahri showed us where a man came to collect wild honey in the caves just 2.5 miles from the harbor.\textsuperscript{62}

While there is no written evidence dating the use of Khor Rori as a port to 600 BC, there is evidence that the port was in use during the Iron Age, the time when Nephi was visiting there. Peter Vine is of the opinion that the port was in use prior to the time of the Hadramauti invasion of Khor Rori, which took place about the time of Christ: “It is clear that a substantial settlement existed at the site long before King Iliazzalilat instructed the builders to construct a city there.”\textsuperscript{63} Dr. Jana Owen of UCLA, director of the Transarabia Coastal Survey, made a study of the ancient ports of Dhofar in 1995. Regarding Khor Rori, she wrote: “We know about the Hadrami invasion, but I believe that it [the port] would have been used previous to that invasion. Again, around the settlement we have surveyed a good deal of Iron Age lithics; this is prior to the work that is now being done by the Italians from Pisa.\textsuperscript{64} We also did a dive survey of the lagoon, and there is evidence of modification on the northeastern edge of the lagoon, and obviously the size is indicative of large-ship docking. Doesn’t it make sense that they didn’t wait until the turn of the Common Era to figure this out?”\textsuperscript{65}

Indeed, there is significant evidence that all the other additional elements of Bountiful existed at Khor Rori at Nephi’s time: wild honey, a tall mountain (slopes of the highest peak in southern Oman are only 2 miles to the north), a Neolithic flint quarry (see 1 Nephi 17:11) below the mountain and 4.5 miles to the east,\textsuperscript{66} iron ore deposits just a mile east of the flint deposit (discovered by researchers from BYU),\textsuperscript{67} iron-smelting slag discovered among the ruins at Khor Rori (see 17:9, 10),\textsuperscript{68} a location due east of the current candidates for Nahom\textsuperscript{69} (see 16:34; 17:1), beasts for hides and meat (see 17:11; 18:6),\textsuperscript{70} and the tall cliffs directly above deep water (17:48).

Three Maritime Requirements for Bountiful

Any candidate for Bountiful must meet three essential criteria. It must be possible that the site in Nephi’s time had the resources necessary for Nephi to (1) build, (2) launch, and (3) sail a large ship. We believe that Khor Rori is the only place that could have met these criteria.

Materials to Build an Oceangoing Ship

Authors who have written about the time Lehi spent in Bountiful have invariably glossed over the details regarding the building of Nephi’s ship,\textsuperscript{71} and yet the building of the ship was an enormous undertaking that spanned many years and required massive quantities of very specific natural resources. Nephi’s voyage to the New World would have taken many months, if not years, and any feasible route

Omani shipwrights used imported teak instead of gnarly softwoods like these large fig trees that grow in Dhofar’s hills.
Nephi built his ship, King Jehoshaphat of Judah built a fleet of ships designed to sail to Tharshish in the Indian Ocean (“ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold,” 1 Kings 22:48). These ships never sailed but “were broken at Ezion-geber” (1 Kings 22:48; compare 2 Chronicles 20:36–37). Raphael Patai suggests that this was “either due to a storm or simply because they were inexpertly constructed.”

Nephi’s ship had to endure at least one storm, a “great and terrible tempest” that lasted four days (see 1 Nephi 18:13–15). Clearly, Nephi’s ship must have been as well as as any of its day—and certainly it must have been to a higher standard and from better materials than those used for the fleet that Jehoshaphat’s shipwrights built—for it to have survived such a journey.

Ore. Nephi, after the Lord told him to “get thee into the mountain” (1 Nephi 17:7), needed a source of ore from which to make tools for constructing the ship (see 17:9). Subsequently, the Lord showed him where to find ore. Researchers from Brigham Young University have discovered small quantities of iron ore in Dhofar, with their “most exciting and significant discovery” only six miles east of Khor Rori at the foot of Jabal Samhan, the largest mountain in Dhofar, known in the Old Testament as Mount Sephar (see Genesis 10:30). Nephi noted that, once in the New World, he “[d]id teach [his] people to build buildings, and to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores” (2 Nephi 5:15). BYU geologist Wm. Revell Phillips has suggested that Nephi’s skills in metallurgy “may have been learned from the local smiths of the Dhofar or from the Indian traders that passed through nearby trading ports.”

Recently excavated artifacts at the Khor Rori/Sumhuram ruins include iron axes, iron nails, an iron knife, an iron razor, iron-smelting slag, bronze nails, a bronze bell, a small bronze plaque, and seven bronze plates engraved with text.

Timber. Nephi needed hardwood to build a ship strong enough to survive an ocean crossing. The usual assumption is that he used the trees that grew in Bountiful to build his ship. This overlooks one obvious problem: nearly all of the woods native to Dhofar in southern Oman are permeable softwoods and could not be used for shipbuilding. The hard-woods that are found in Oman are short, gnarly, and unsuitable for the fabrication of the massive structural components of a large sailing vessel. Historically, hardwoods had to be imported into Arabia for shipbuilding. The first records of timber being imported into the Persian Gulf region from foreign lands date to an inscription of Urnanshe, king of Lagash in Sumer in about 2500 BC. Hardwood, or an impermeable softwood, was an absolute requirement for the building of a seaworthy ship. Indian archaeologist Shereen Ratnagar points out that “in the historic period most Indian boats were made of teak. Even Arab craft were made on the west coast of India, due to the availability of wood.”

Regarding the source of wood for ships built in Oman, Tom Vosmer, director of the Traditional Boats of Oman Project, noted, “Most, if not all, planking timber had to be imported: teak (Tectona grandis), venteak (Lythracea lanceolata), mango (Mangifera indica), as did spar timber.”

The softwoods that grow in Dhofar would never have been strong enough to survive long at sea. Hardwoods are used not only for their strength but also for their longevity. The wood used for a boat is subject to many dangers, particularly marine borers that cause it to decompose very rapidly. Some species of tropical shipworms grow to six feet in length and attain the thickness of a man’s arm.

In order to carry all of the provisions needed for a long transoceanic journey, Nephi would have needed a ship that was large by the standards of the day. The ship’s size would have been a direct function of the number of people on board and the provisions carried and would have determined the size of the port needed for construction. Maritime archaeologist Tim Severin built an 80-foot-long wooden replica of the medieval Omani ship and sailed it from Oman to China. Although the Sohar was a replica, Severin’s basic needs would have been similar to Nephi’s since wooden ships changed little in design until the 16th century AD. John L. Sorenson estimates that 43 people went aboard Nephi’s ship, more than twice as many people as were on Severin’s 80-foot vessel. John Tvedtines estimates up to 68 persons. While Severin’s vessel was probably not identical in size to Nephi’s, the list of materials Severin needed to build his ship is useful because it gives us a general idea...
of the order of magnitude of materials Nephi would have needed to construct his ship.

Severin had to find a tree suitable for the 81-foot main spar and a 65-foot log that was to be tapered into the mast. He wrote that a ship’s keel “is long, straight and massive; it is the very backbone of the vessel. . . . The keel piece to my replica needed to be 52 feet long, 12 inches by 15 inches in cross-section, and dead straight.”

Severin imported the timber for his Arab ship from India because, “historically, nearly all materials for shipbuilding in Oman have been imported from the Indian subcontinent, Oman being lacking in suitable timber for large boatbuilding.”

If good shipbuilding timber never grew in Oman, then Nephi must have used, like the Arab shipwrights, imported materials from India and the islands thereabout. The Omani Ministry of National Heritage and Culture notes of Omani shipbuilding: “Teak and coconut wood were used exclusively for building hulls. Teak had to be imported from India. . . . Indeed, the virtues of the wood would have been known in the Gulf from the earliest sea voyages to the Indus in the third millennium BC.” The Omani Ministry adds, “Coconut wood also had to be imported—mainly from the Maldive and Laccadive Islands from where it is possible that the coconut tree spread to Dhofar in the Middle Ages.” Recent discoveries in Egypt confirm that Indian teak wood was used for construction of the ancient ships that sailed the Indian Ocean.

But would this timber imported from India have been available to Nephi at Dhofar’s port of Khor Rori in the sixth century BC? The Omani Ministry of National Heritage and Culture states that Dhofar “grew from obscure beginnings before 1000 BC. . . . Its growth was the major stimulus to the re-opening and expansion of Indian Ocean maritime trade routes.” German maritime archaeologist Norbert Weismann, who specializes in Oman, writes of Dhofar, “Certainly it was involved in the traffic to India in Greco-Roman times, but there was trade with white India much earlier.” Nephi’s text alludes to the possibility that the timbers he and his brethren were working had already been cut somewhere else: “We did work timbers of curious workmanship” (1 Nephi 18:1). How could the timbers have been curious to Nephi and his workers if they had logged and cut the lumber themselves? Apparently, some of the timbers Nephi used to construct his ship were precut in an unfamiliar manner. We know that hardwoods were being imported into the Arabian Gulf since the third millennium BC and that a few centuries after the time of Christ their export from India in the form of precut beams and rafters was a common practice.

Rope. Of course, Nephi needed much more than just timbers to build his ship. A quotation attributed to Rabbi Shim’on ben Laqish, a second-century-AD Palestinian sage, noted: “A flesh and blood [i.e., mortal man], if he wants to build a ship, first he brings beams, then he brings ropes, then he brings anchors, then he places in it seamen.” The importance of ropes cannot be overemphasized. According to Arabist scholar Raphael Patai, the biblical name for a ship’s captain was rabh hahobhel, or “master roper” (Jonah 1:6). Historically, the planks of ships built in Oman were sewn together with rope. It took the husks of 50,000 coconuts to make the 400 miles of rope Severin needed to build his sewn ship, the Sohar. Even if Nephi used nails, rope would be required for riggings and anchor lines. Coconuts are not native to Dhofar, and so if Nephi made ropes from coconuts, they also had to be imported.

Fabric for sails. Oceangoing sailing ships require several sets of sails. Traditionally, the sails on Arab ships were woven from coconut or palm leaves or were made from cotton cloth. Cotton would have been available either as a locally grown product or as an import from India. According to the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, cloth was one of the products that the inhabitants of Dhofar imported in return for their frankincense.
In order to obtain large timbers and build his ship, Nephi would have needed to be somewhere with (1) established trading links with the subcontinent and (2) an established port. Though desolate today, in antiquity Khor Rori was a principal marketplace. In the year 2000 the World Heritage Committee of the United Nations’ Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated Khor Rori as a World Heritage site, noting the trade in frankincense as “one of the most important trading activities of the ancient and medieval world.”

Dhofar would also appear to have its own tradition of shipbuilding. Several kinds of ancient ships are depicted in rock art drawings found in caves in sight of Khor Rori (just 2.5 miles from the harbor). The Omani Ministry of National Heritage and Culture states that shipbuilding at Dhofar may go back into great antiquity.

While we suggest that the things Nephi needed to build his ship were available at the time at Khor Rori, could Nephi have afforded the imported goods? There would have been a number of funding options for Lehi: selling his camels, exchanging his services as a scribe and merchant, or perhaps even arranging to have his property sold in Jerusalem.

A Protected Harbor

As noted earlier, it is likely that Nephi’s ship would have been large by the standards of the day. When completed and fully laden with supplies, rigging, tons of ballast, water, and at least one anchor (often of considerable size even on a small ship), the ship could have weighed as much as 100 tons. As such, it could only have been built on “ways” (wooden rollers) above the tide line and then rolled down into the water. Saeed al-Mashori, the Omani Supervisor of Excavations at Khor Rori, showed us eight clearly defined “way-ramps” of unknown date, from which large ships were launched into and retrieved from Khor Rori. The ramps are located just south of the Sumhuram fortress built by the Hadramutis and included moorings where large ships were finished and loaded. Once the ship was moored in sheltered waters, construction could continue, adding the weight of the deck, outfitting, rigging, and tons of ballast and provision.

From time immemorial, large hulls have been launched from harbors, and Nephi’s narrative implies that his ship was no exception. The coastline of Dhofar is known for its heavy surf and consists of rocky cliffs alternating with sandy beaches. Launching a ship weighing as much as 100 tons (and having no means of power or control) from a shallow beach into breaking surf with strong currents is physically impossible and would only result in a shipwreck. Yet Nephi’s text implies a calm, orderly, and seemingly routine embarkation in which party members all boarded the ship before they “did put forth into

Freshwater stream at Khor Rori.
the sea” (1 Nephi 18:8). There is only one way that everyone could be on board the ship and then “put forth into the sea”—the ship had to be moored in a deep, calm harbor. Nephi does not describe the family pushing the ship into the sea; they are already on board.

Furthermore, when Nephi’s wooden ship set forth into the sea, it could not have been the first time the ship was in the water. The reason for this is that a ship must be placed in water in order for the hull to be tightened. Raphael Patai noted that both the Hebrew and Egyptian shipbuilders used this technique: “Under the influence of the water the planks of the ship’s hull swelled at the seams, and every seam, split, or crack became tightly closed.”

After Nephi was sure the hull was watertight, he could then load the tons of ballast into the ship and perform sea trials to make sure the ballast was of the correct weight and position for the sails. Only when all these things were done could he load the provisions on board and set forth into the ocean. Nephi not only needed a harbor, but he needed a large one where the preliminary trials could take place. Khor Rori is essentially the only harbor in Dhofar large enough and deep enough to allow this.

Are there any other inlets that Nephi could have used to build his ship? There are a number of other inlets in Dhofar, all of which are much smaller than Khor Rori. We studied each of these inlets to determine if they were year-round protected harbors in Nephi’s day, if they were large enough to accommodate oceangoing ships, and if these inlets would have had the resources Nephi needed to build a ship in the beginning of the sixth century BC. In all, we visited nine inlets besides Khor Rori. Most of the inlets were too small for large ships to enter. There is evidence that only three were used in the past. The most westerly of these is Raysut, situated some six miles west of the modern town of Salalah. While Raysut provides anchorage, it would not have provided year-round protection for the vessel that Nephi was building.

The second possibility is Khor al-Balīd, in the modern town of Salalah, which the Hiltons suggested may have been the place Nephi called Bountiful. A sandbar now closes off the inlet. It was the only other inlet that would have provided year-round protection (necessary for building a ship that would have taken longer than the period between the monsoon seasons) and would have been wide and deep enough to build and launch a large vessel. But there is no evidence that this harbor was used in Nephi’s time. The third candidate is Khor Suli, but it is very narrow and is barely wide enough to allow a ship to turn around on its axis, let alone allow any sea trials.
Because Khor Kharfot (Wadi Sayq) has been suggested as the location of Nephi’s harbor,
we discuss it briefly here. It is an isolated inlet 66 miles west of Salalah, a 70-mile journey over mountains from the ancient port where Nephi could have found shipbuilding timber, cotton, rope fiber, and other necessary resources. Nephi would have needed to haul all of these heavy imported goods to Khor Kharfot in order to build his ship. Khor Kharfot is presently closed off by a sandbar. There is no documented evidence that the inlet was open to the sea in Nephi’s time, but if it were, the inlet is very narrow and the floor is strewn with huge boulders that would have posed considerable risk to anything other than small, shallow-draft vessels attempting to use it. For these reasons, and others, we do not consider it a candidate for Bountiful.

Seamanship Skills

Nephi needed a crew, and he needed to acquire the skills to train them. It takes years to learn and practice the skills needed to control a sailing ship at sea. United States Merchant Marine officer Frank Linehan, an experienced transoceanic sailboat skipper, notes, “Even with the inspiration of the Lord, it was simply impossible for Nephi to have sailed to the New World without training.” Historian Maurizio Tosi writes of the ancient Arabian captains: “For the first navigators it was like venturing into outer space and only a body of accumulated experience, strengthened by tradition, would have ensured their survival at sea.” For Nephi the same learning experience must have taken place. Nephi could not have merely guessed how to sail the Pacific Ocean or have succeeded unless both he and his crew knew what they were doing.

The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, written in the early Christian centuries, perhaps as late as the fourth century, mentions that Khor Rori was a safe haven for ships held up in the winter: “[T]he place goes by the name of Moscha—where ships from Cana (Yemen) are customarily sent; ships come from Dimyrike (southern India) and Barygaza (modern-day Broach in India) which cruise nearby, spend the winter there due to the lateness of the season.” Undoubtedly the later Greek captains learned from the early Arabian sailors before them the advantages of mooring in the protected waters of Khor Rori during the winter northeast monsoon. Here, then, over the winter at Khor Rori were captains who knew how to sail a large ship across the open seas of the Indian Ocean, experienced seamen from whom Nephi could learn and who had idle time to spend instructing Nephi.

The specific essential items Nephi needed to build his ship would have been available to him...
only if he was at an established port. The strength of Khor Rori over other locations proposed for Bountiful is that it is the only established large port in Dhofar in Nephi’s time. One does not need to rely on a long list of miracles in order to artificially make this location fit the necessary requirements essential for building, launching, and sailing a large ship. No location other than Khor Rori has yet been able to meet these criteria.

The Case for Khor Rori

Nephi’s recollections of his time in Bountiful center on the building of an oceangoing ship. Any location that purports to be Bountiful must fulfill the requirements needed to do this. We suggest that there now exists a strong candidate—one that can stand up to the scrutiny of thorough investigation—for the place where Nephi could have built such a ship. Every resource Nephi needed to build, launch, and sail a ship to the promised land can be identified at Khor Rori. We also propose that a route existed in Nephi’s time that led from Jerusalem to Bountiful (Dhofar), and the place Bountiful, where much fruit grows at the seashore.

It took these two authors six years; thousands of hours of research and reference to many hundreds of books, articles, and maps; and 35,000 miles of personal travel to verify that what Nephi wrote in his account squares with modern scientific research as an accurate historical portrayal of a voyage along the only known trails that led from Jerusalem to Dhofar in 600 BC. And yet the poorly educated 19th-century farmboy Joseph Smith, who had never left the eastern United States nor had access to any of these resources, dictated the pages that cover this journey in just over one day.115

Lake at Wadi Darbat, a large valley a few miles above Khor Rori, is exceptional for its large trees, abundant vegetation, and wildlife.
WITH STEADY, MEASURED STEPS, students of the Book of Mormon have been pacing off a tangible framework for the journey of Lehi and Sariah through the Arabian Peninsula. Framed against endless white sands and dark craggy mountains, the spare yet sometimes vivid account of these two people leading their small group through one of the harshest climes on earth—Lehi as prophet-leader, Sariah as director of the camp—invites efforts to probe more deeply their world saturated by heat, dust, and seas of patinated rocks. Because some anchoring geographical details from their journey have emerged through recent study (the locations of their first camp, of Nahom and the eastward turn, and of the general area where the trek ended), the present challenge is whether, from ancient and modern sources, we can reliably sketch a picture of the 2,200-mile desert trek from Jerusalem to their Bountiful where Nephi built his oceangoing ship.
One initial observation is important, though perhaps obvious. In his narrative of the long trek from the first camp to Bountiful, Nephi was highly selective. He chose to feature only three significant episodes, rolling them tightly one after the other: the marriages (see 1 Nephi 16:7), the hunger crisis at the place of the broken bow (see 16:17–32), and the group’s rupture following the death of Ishmael (see 16:34–39). What do we understand from Nephi’s narrative choices? Initially, they mean that Nephi’s focus does not rest on the daily minutiae of the journey. Instead, he bends light onto the moments that significantly shaped not only the rest of the desert journey but also the distant future of the group, including its permanent splintering after reaching the New World.

3 The day-to-day matters he leaves in the rhythms of his memory, only occasionally allowing them to sound in his report: “we traveled for the space of four days,” “we did take our bows and our arrows,” “we did pitch our tents again,” “we did sojourn in the wilderness” (16:13, 14, 33; 17:3). However, we must not fall under the spell of the faint humdrum that beats throughout Nephi’s account and assume that he is voicing little. By listening and peering, we find reward.

From Jerusalem

The first pressing question ties to the route by which Lehi, Sariah, and their four sons departed Jerusalem. A number of established routes lay open to them. It is important to settle that none of the routes would have carried them south along the shorelines of the Dead Sea, except along the western shoreline from the Ein Gedi oasis south.4 At points along both the east and west sides of the Dead Sea, the terrain slopes precipitously from cliffs to water’s edge and would have blocked travelers and their pack animals.5

Further, one should grant the probability that the family generally followed or shadowed a trade route not only for this segment of the journey but for later segments too. Such routes offered an infrastructure that supplied needed food, water, and a measure of safety. Nephi hints that family members ran into others as they traveled, an aspect of following a trade route.6

Routes Southward

If family members walked south from Jerusalem toward Bethlehem, at least two routes lay open. One trade route led to Hebron, eventually bending southeast to Arad and down through the Zohar Valley into the Arabah Valley.7 This trail was the most direct to the tip of the eastern arm of the Red Sea, where the modern cities of Aqaba and Eilat now sit.

A second trail would have carried them south for a few miles, then eastward. Known as the “ascent of Ziz,” it connected the areas of Tekoa, birthplace of the prophet Amos, and Ein Gedi, an oasis that lay on the west shore of the Dead Sea (see 2 Chronicles 20:16 Revised Standard Version). From Tekoa, south and slightly east of Jerusalem, the trail descends through rugged country. At Ein Gedi the group could turn south toward the Red Sea, passing along the west shore of the Dead Sea.8

East, Then South

Two other trails would have borne the family eastward, taking them down

Rugged, dry mountains line the Red Sea in places.
into the Jordan Valley north of the Dead Sea. From either trail, the party would then have ascended into the highlands of Moab and turned south, following either the King’s Highway or a north–south road that ran farther east through Edomite territory. Of the two local routes from Jerusalem itself, the first departed from the east side of the city and skirted southward around the Mount of Olives, turning east and following the trade route that connected with the northwest shore of the Dead Sea through Wadi Mukallik (Nahal Og). In antiquity this trail was known as the “Route of Salt” because caravans used it to carry salt extracted from the Dead Sea up to Jerusalem.

At any point after descending into the Jordan Valley, the family could have aimed for the mountains of Moab, perhaps reaching the King’s Highway near Mount Nebo.

The second, more northerly local route would also have carried the family from the east side of Jerusalem on an eastward track that ascended the Mount of Olives near the modern village of At-Tur and eventually led them down through Wadi Kelt. This path, too, carried trade goods between the Jordan Valley and Jerusalem. The family would have emerged from Wadi Kelt just south of Jericho. From there it was an easy trek across the Jordan Valley to the base of the mountains of Moab. Of all these possible routes, the most direct are those that run south. But it is impossible to know which one the family followed.

**Eight Years**

Any attempt to reconstruct the journey must reckon with Nephi’s notice that his group “did sojourn . . . eight years in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 17:4). This wilderness period began the moment that Lehi and Sariah left Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 2:3–4). The desert was at their door, just past the enclosure for the animals, just beyond the field and vineyard. Hence, it seems apparent that Nephi’s reference point for marking the duration of the journey was when he, his parents, and siblings walked away from their home.

Surprisingly, Nephi introduces few notices of time in his story, perhaps because there was a timeless quality about it, because his story was one of creating a new people of God. The few chronological notations tie to important moments that are threaded somehow to Jerusalem. The first reads “in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah” (1 Nephi 1:4). If Nephi’s note matches Zedekiah’s accession to the throne and not a later ceremonial enthronement, the time is the spring of 597 BC and marks the beginning of Lehi’s ministry. The second chronological notice links both to time and ceremony: “when he [Lehi] had traveled three days in the wilderness” (2:6). The family had already reached the northeast tip of the Red Sea (see 2:5), and the specification of “three days” allows us to estimate how far the family walked from that point before putting up the first extended camp. The three days’ journey also represents a minimal distance from Jerusalem that a person had to travel before offering sacrifice away from the central sanctuary. The third chronological notation begins to measure time as the family moved farther from Jerusalem: “we traveled for the space of four days, . . . and we did pitch our tents again” (16:13). The accentuations of this passage rest
on the words *four days* and *again*. The four days are longer than the three days of 1 Nephi 2:6 and thus represent a clear break with the people’s Jerusalem-centered past. The term *again* lends a subtle touch that the group had now passed into a desert pattern of wind and sun and tents that would continue until they reached their Bountiful. Because these chronological notices all connect with Jerusalem, and life (see 1 Nephi 2:10, 14). The distance, incidentally, is relevant for estimating time at that spot. Young men, as Nephi and his siblings were, traveling on camels with little baggage could reach the city from that distance in four or five days. When the group covered that distance the first time, they took their tents, slowing them (see 1 Nephi 3:9). Authors have suggested various periods for the stay at the first camp: Lynn and Hope Hilton estimate from two to three years; Hugh Nibley gauges one to three years; George Potter and Richard Wellington suggest “for some time.”

I believe that a person has to give reasons for assigning any length of time at the camp. Were they gathering food by hunting or by tilling the ground? Early on, I surmise, Lehi had learned that he and his family were to push themselves farther into the desert. Hence, they would need as much food as possible for the journey. When the family of Ishmael joined the group, the need for food doubled, for there now were a number of teenagers and young adults who would consume much of the available food supply. The longer they camped, the more the group would have eaten. Moreover, Lehi carried the main batch of seeds specifically for planting in the promised land. He evidently planted none along the way, for after the group arrived in the promised land, Nephi recorded, “We did put all our seeds into the earth, which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 18:24; see 8:1). There is also the matter of arable land where Lehi might plant seeds. Would not local people claim such ground? In my view, there are fewer problems if we assume that the family spent no more than a few months at the first camp, perhaps up to a year. All of the activities rehearsed by Nephi, particularly the two extended trips back to Jerusalem, could have taken place within a few months. Besides, if the family had camped for a long time within reasonable reach of Jerusalem, what would have prevented the unhappy older sons Laman and Lemuel from returning to Jerusalem? After all, they thought that leaving Jerusalem had been a foolish mistake (see 7:6–7; also 17:20–22).

I also believe that the party of Lehi and Sariah spent less than one year traveling to “the place which was called Nahom” (1 Nephi 16:34). How so? The answer arises from clues in Nephi’s narrative, plus an appeal to the ancient author Strabo (ca. 64 BC–AD 19).
As published sources now show, the discovery of three votive altars at an ancient temple near Marib, Yemen, fixes the general location of Nahom.\textsuperscript{17} Lehi’s extended family traveled about 1,400 miles to reach this area. The first 250 or so miles brought them to the first extended camp. The remaining 1,150 or so miles lay between the first camp and Nahom. They then traversed approximately 700 miles to their Bountiful (see 1 Nephi 17:5, 8). The total length of their land journey was about 2,200 miles from Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{18}

We can determine the time required to walk to Nahom from the first camp. As a comparison, we know of other groups—chiefly caravanners—who rode between south Arabia and destinations on the southeast coast of the Mediterranean, the reverse of the party’s journey. Such groups required only months to traverse those long distances.\textsuperscript{19} In another example from Strabo, a Roman military force of 10,000 took six months to march down the west side of Arabia in 25–24 BC, starting from a small port called Luecē Comē (probably modern ‘Aynūnah, Saudi Arabia),\textsuperscript{20} crossing the mountains, and finally besieging a city called Marsiaba (perhaps ancient Marib). Then, because the army had lost many soldiers due to tainted water and food, they marched back hastily, taking only two months to walk between 1,000 and 1,100 miles, one way.\textsuperscript{21} Because the starting point for the Roman army—Leucē Comē—lies not far from the general area of Lehi’s first camp, the Romans’ trek almost matches that of the party of Lehi and Sariah from their first camp in terms of both distance and general route.\textsuperscript{22}

A clue in Nephi’s narrative indicates that Lehi’s party likewise took no longer than a year to reach Nahom. It is the marriages (see 1 Nephi 16:7). While we cannot be certain how long after the marriages the party stepped off from the camp, we expect that one or more of the five new brides became pregnant within the first months of marriage. If so, we should expect a report of childbirths. And we find it. Nephi presents the first births of children as he closes his record of events at Nahom, not before (see 17:1). Thus it appears that the women gave birth to their first children there, and therefore the journey from the camp to Nahom took less than a year, matching the new brides’ pregnancies. Thus the Book of Mormon report matches roughly what we know from an ancient account of soldiers trudging over similar ground.

To this point, it appears to me that the family remained at the first camp for only a few months, a year at most. In addition, the journey from that camp to Nahom took up to a year. On this view, at most only two years of the eight had passed by the time the party arrived at Nahom, where they may have remained for a period of weeks. We do not know. Of events there, Nephi drapes another crisis in few yet revealing words—“the Lord did bless us again with food, that we did not perish” (1 Nephi 16:39)—disclosing that party members had faced starvation. Nephi holds that it was the Lord’s mercy that rescued them, at least in the short run. If they indeed remained at Nahom for a season, we have to suggest how they met their need for food. The possibilities include purchasing needed stores, farming, or working for others. It seems certain that
they would not have traded pack animals for food. Farming would mean finding land that local people did not want, and it would mean planting seed that they were carrying or were willing to purchase. But Lehi carried all his seeds to the New World, as we have seen, an act of unparalleled faith on his part because by this point he and his family had faced starvation twice and he could have solved both crises by opening the bags of seed.

If they bartered for needed supplies, what would they trade? Nephi insists that his father abandoned “his gold, and his silver, and his precious things” upon departing Jerusalem (1 Nephi 2:4). While Ishmael’s family must have brought supplies with them, perhaps what Nephi calls “our provisions” (16:11), such provisions did not bear them past the starvation crisis of the broken bow (see 16:18–32). Individuals in the party may have contributed to the purchasing power of all. Indeed, both Ishmael’s wife and Sariah would have been carrying a certain amount of jewelry that each received at marriage, as was customary. It would have been an act of faith for them to part with such personal, precious gifts so that all might survive.

The possibility that party members worked for others is high. In my opinion, facing starvation twice before starting the eastward journey hints strongly that family members by now could not avoid seeking assistance from tribesmen in exchange for services, even if this led to severe difficulties either during the period of such services or when the family tried to move on. Might this activity have begun in Nahom? Perhaps. They needed food, water, and—eventually, in my view—protection. And a few pieces of jewelry would not have gone far in supplying the needs of almost 20 adults, including nursing mothers.

As they moved eastward from Nahom, they moved away from caravan routes and ventured into territory controlled by warring tribes, as studies have shown. Because southern Arabia has been known for the last 2,000 years as a place of inhospitable tribes and slave trafficking, we reasonably assume that it was so in Lehi’s time. Modern explorers have learned about the hazards of crossing from one tribal area into another. The system—and it is a loose system—is called rabī’a or rafiq. It means that travelers must be accompanied by a member of a tribe (or an authorized intermediary) while they are moving through the tribe’s territory. This is the only way that they are guaranteed safety. This also means bargaining with tribal leaders for safe passage and paying the agreed price for such protection and other services. However, when travelers reach the tribe’s boundary, they have to negotiate with the leaders of the next tribe, again paying an agreed price. The member of the first tribe generally cannot represent the interests of the second tribe. Hence, travel is precarious at best.

One can imagine that it is also most difficult for family members to extract themselves from prickly situations with self-interested tribesmen, even if the family has fulfilled its agreements.

This endlessly nettlesome situation, referred to elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, seems to lie behind language about the trek such as “enemies” (Omni 1:6; Alma 9:10), “battle” and “bondage” (Alma 9:22), and being “smitten with . . . sore afflictions” (Mosiah 1:17). If, of the eight years in the wilderness, only two had passed when the party reached Nahom, do the records themselves say that the party spent a disproportionate amount of time crossing the last 700 miles from Nahom, where they began to “travel nearly eastward” until they reached “the sea” (1 Nephi 17:1, 5)? Five important observations serve as keys for understanding the timetable of Lehi’s trek.

Nephi hands us the first informational key, which turns with the verb to sojourn. He recorded that “we did travel nearly eastward . . . and wade through much affliction. . . . [God] did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness. And we did sojourn for the space of . . . eight years in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 17:1–4). In the Bible, the term to sojourn regularly refers to servile relationships. Studies have shown that Nephi models the story of his party on the story of the Israelite slaves in Egypt. Hence, it is natural to interpret the term sojourn in Nephi’s narrative in the same way that it is used in the Exodus account: placing oneself under another person’s influence or authority by selling one’s services. In the best of situations, one becomes the employee of another. In the worst of cases, one becomes the slave or property of another so that one’s freedom has to be wrested by purchase or by escape. To be sure, Nephi’s choice of the verb to sojourn mirrors one Old Testament meaning, that of a refugee enjoying the protection of God. On another level, to sojourn may call up the biblical sense of a stranger or refugee living under the
protection of another person. Each of these senses shares in the notion of overlord and underling, pointing clearly to servility.

In this connection, we capture the following from Nephi’s compact yet intense record: “we did . . . wade through much affliction”; “our women did bear children in the wilderness”; “our women have toiled, being big with child”; “it would have been better that [our women] had died” (1 Nephi 17:1, 20). Do undocumented challenges lie within these lines? It seems obvious.

A second key, largely circumstantial, comes from Lehi. When he blessed his youngest son Joseph, he called the years of his family’s sojourn in the wilderness “the wilderness of mine affliction” and “the days of my greatest sorrow” (2 Nephi 3:1). For Lehi, it was the worst of times. Why? Although Lehi was well equipped for desert travel and thus must have known the rigors of living in such a clime, there evidently was an event—or series of events—that had soured him. As support, other indicators point to such an occurrence or situation.

When Lehi speaks to his children and grandchildren just before his death, he lifts to view the clashing concepts of captivity and freedom. In language that recalls slavery, he pleads that his sons “shake off the awful chains” by which they “are carried away captive,” being “led according to the . . . captivity of the devil” (2 Nephi 1:13, 18). He then urges them to “shake off the chains . . . and arise from the dust” (1:23). Further, Lehi’s whole concern with “redemption . . . through the Holy Messiah . . . to answer the ends of the law” borrows language from the freeing of slaves (2:6–7), declaring that the Messiah is to “redeem the children of men,” making them “free forever,” terminology associated with ending servility (2:26). One naturally asks, does not the force of these concepts gather strength at least partly from Lehi’s shared experiences with his children? In light of what we have so far reviewed, the answer seems to be yes.

A third key comes forward in recollections of King Benjamin (as abridged by Mormon), who knew the full story of the desert journey. Modern readers of the Book of Mormon are able to read only a very abbreviated record of the trek. As recent studies have shown, the fuller record was preserved elsewhere. In Mormon’s words, the party “did not . . . progress in their journey, but were driven back . . . and . . . were smitten with famine and sore afflictions” (Mosiah 1:17). While “famine and sore afflictions” occasionally characterized the family’s trip from the first camp to Nahom, their eastward route would have brought more intense troubles since they were leaving areas of population, cultivation, and moderate control of law. It was also a place of little water. We know of no specific instances of the family not progressing in their journey on the way to Nahom, except for stopping because of Nephi’s broken bow (see 1 Nephi 16:17–32). Further, at no time in his narrative of the trek from the first camp to Nahom did Nephi write of being “driven back” or suffering from a lack of water. Whatever King Benjamin or Mormon had in mind, the incident (or incidents) seems not to have been a part of the trip to Nahom.

Turning to Alma the Younger, we find a fourth key because, like Benjamin, he knew the full story. Alma recalled the kindnesses of God to Lehi and his family in the desert: “[G]od has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and he has also . . . delivered them out of bondage and captivity, from time to time even down to the present day” (Alma 36:29). The last phrase, of course, tells us that Alma had in mind all of the generations from Lehi to his own. In my reading, Alma is saying that
Lehi’s generation had also experienced “bondage and captivity.” A compelling point has to do with the parallelism set up by the prior verse, wherein Alma notes in almost identical language that the Lord had “delivered [our fathers] out of bondage and captivity from time to time,” pointing to “our fathers [in] Egypt” (Alma 36:28). Thus the phrase “from time to time” that appears in both verses 28 and 29 strengthens the observation that, as the Hebrew slaves, so the generation of Lehi had suffered “bondage and captivity.” We read:

[God] has brought our fathers out of Egypt, . . . and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time. (Alma 36:28)

[God] has also brought our fathers out of . . . Jerusalem; and he has also . . . delivered them out of bondage and captivity, from time to time. (Alma 36:29)

In another reminiscence, Alma recounted that “our father, Lehi, was brought out of Jerusalem by the hand of God . . . through the wilderness.” Immediately thereafter Alma asked: “Have ye forgotten . . . how many times he delivered our fathers out of the hands of their enemies, and preserved them from being destroyed . . . ?” (Alma 9:9–10). Enemies? Destroyed? How might these expressions fit into a picture of Lehi in the desert? To be sure, the phrase “our fathers” may point to an intermediate generation, nearer Alma’s time, who had suffered difficulties with “their enemies.” But the context also cinches down the possibility that Lehi, too, had experienced troubles with “enemies.” In fact, the notation that immediately follows—“even by the hands of their own brethren” (Alma 9:10)—opens further the possibility that the reference is to Lehi and his children since the older sons sought at least once to kill Lehi (see 1 Nephi 16:37; 17:44) and three times to kill the younger son Nephi (see 1 Nephi 7:16; 16:37; 2 Nephi 5:3–4). 

In this same speech, Alma declared that these Nephite ancestors, who were brought “out of the land of Jerusalem,” had also “been saved from famine, and from sickness, and all manner of diseases[,] . . . they having waxed strong in battle, that they might not be destroyed” (Alma 9:22). Certainly Alma had in mind more than Lehi’s party because he also spoke of those “brought out of bondage time after time . . . until now” (9:22). But the fact that the events of Lehi’s generation had triggered such reminiscences—the verb to bring out characterizes both the Israelite exodus and that of Lehi and Sariah—illuminates the likelihood that references to physical difficulties, such as “sickness” and “diseases,” as well as to “enemies” and to “battle,” point to hardships experienced in Arabia, given the a lack of food, water, and fuel and the menacing presence of unfriendly tribesmen.

The fifth and final key turns in the hands of Isaiah. Nephi’s addition of Isaiah 48–49 to the end of his first book (see 1 Nephi 20–21) has to do with his conviction that Isaiah spoke about his family’s experiences. Indeed, Nephi says that the Lord showed “unto many [prophets] concerning us” (1 Nephi 19:21), a statement made after summarizing his family’s journey to the land of promise and just before introducing these chapters from Isaiah. In a word, Nephi is saying, “Isaiah knew about us.” As an example—and this point is important—Isaiah’s words fit precisely the circumstances of the departure of Lehi’s family:

Hearken . . . all ye that are broken off and are driven out because of the wickedness of the pastors of my people; yea, all ye that are broken off, that are scattered abroad, who are of my people, O house of Israel. (1 Nephi 21:1; compare Isaiah 49:1)
Obviously, Isaiah had anticipated a time when corrupt officials would rule the city, a situation that Lehi experienced. And it seems evident that Nephi had seen the relevance of such passages to the family’s situation. 44

Without multiplying examples, we note compelling allusions to servitude in the desert. The reference to “children” born while one is “a captive” (1 Nephi 21:21; compare Isaiah 49:21) could certainly be understood as pointing to Jacob and Joseph, children born to Lehi and Sariah in the wilderness. Moreover, the remark about the one who would “deal very treacherously” but from whom the Lord will “defer [his] anger . . . that [he] cut [him] not off” could apply not only to Nephi’s older brothers but also to a desert tribesman to whom Lehi’s family owed temporary allegiance (1 Nephi 20:8–9; compare Isaiah 48:8–9). We also include reference to those whom the Lord looses from prison and darkness, whom he “shall feed in the ways” because the Lord “will . . . not forget [them] because he has ‘graven [them] upon the palms of [his] hands’” (1 Nephi 21:9, 15–16; compare Isaiah 49:9, 15–16). 45

At this juncture, we might venture a tentative reconstruction based on these five keys. Lehi’s family, finding themselves without disposable wealth when they turned “nearly eastward” at Nahom, were obliged at some point thereafter to sell their services to one or more local tribesmen for food or protection, or both. For they entered a region, particularly east of Shabwah, beset with tribal rivalries. The labor was hard on all, particularly the women—“our women have toiled . . . and suffered all things, save it were death” (1 Nephi 17:20). It was after family members tried to extract themselves from this situation that severe conflict arose—“battle” in Alma’s words—with “enemies,” whether tribal members whom they served or members of a rival tribe. 46

In my view, such difficulties arose during the eastward portion of the trek from Nahom onward because Nephi offers no hint of such experiences during the trip to Nahom.

Directions

Nephi’s notations about directions of travel—“nearly a south-southeast direction” (1 Nephi 16:13) and “nearly eastward” (17:1)—offer opportunity to test his accuracy, at least for the south-southeast bearing of the party’s trek from the first camp to Nahom. We are now secure about the location of both places. Indeed, consulting a map tells us that when the group had reached Nahom, Nephi knew

Author’s proposed route for Lehi’s 2,200-mile journey from Jerusalem to Bountiful.
where he was vis-à-vis their starting place at the Valley of Lemuel, most likely Wadi Tayyib al-Ism. That portion of the journey ran generally in a south-southeasterly direction (see 16:13, 14, 33).

Naturally, this part of the trip did not proceed in a straight line. Nephi says as much: after the crisis of the broken bow, “we did again take our journey, traveling nearly the same course as in the beginning” (1 Nephi 16:33). For example, there are hints that the family passed through the al-Sarāt mountain range, which runs along almost the entire west coast of the Arabian Peninsula and separates the coastal lowlands from the uplands of the interior. A limited number of passes and valleys offer access from one side of the range to the other. At some point the party had to cross the mountains before reaching Nahom, where the group turned “nearly eastward” (1 Nephi 16:34; 17:1). Otherwise, the mountains would have formed a major barrier to their eastward trek.

The first hint is the amazing initial success of the hunters in the party. After leaving “Shazer,” which lay four days’ journey from their first camp (see 1 Nephi 16:13), they traveled “for the space of many days, slaying food by the way” (16:15), suggesting abundant cover for hunters in mountainous terrain.

A second clue has to do with the place that they called Shazer. Nephi reports that the party stopped specifically to rest and hunt at Shazer after traveling “four days.” Shazer lay in “nearly a south-southeast direction” from the first camp (see 1 Nephi 16:13–14). Traveling this general direction would have initially kept the group near the shore of the Red Sea. But after the family left Shazer, Nephi mentions the Red Sea for the last time (see 16:14), pointing to the likelihood that the family soon traveled into the mountains.

A third clue has to do with “the most fertile parts of the wilderness” (1 Nephi 16:14). Such areas did not lie along the coastal plain immediately south of the base camp, because that region does not support much plant life. Hence, large numbers of wild animals would have been absent. Such “fertile parts” may have lain in the mountains, perhaps in a season of rain, or were more probably the oases on the eastern side of the mountain range. Thus, from hints in Nephi’s narrative, it seems that the family went into the mountains not long after leaving Shazer.

Nephi’s directional notation “south-southeast” therefore seems to carry two senses: (1) a general direction, with adjustments; (2) a direction from beginning point to ending point. In this light, we turn to Nephi’s expression “nearly eastward from that time forth” (1 Nephi 17:1). It seems to me that a person should read Nephi’s two directional notations similarly: the “eastward” bearing carries a general sense of direction, allowing adjustments, and represents the locations of Nahom on the west and Bountiful on the east, relative to each other.

Because of the rugged, fractured al-Mahrah plateau in southern Yemen, the party of Lehi may have traveled north of the tableland, as shown here in the author’s proposed route.
What does this mean for understanding the eastward part of the journey? It is possible, of course, that the party traveled more or less in a straight line from Nahom to Bountiful. A person can skirt the northern edge of the dunes of the Ramlat as-Sab‘atayn desert, reaching the upper Wadi Hadramaut, then continue across the al-Mahrah plateau to the coast. But then a traveler would face the problems of water and potentially hostile tribes. If a person trudges eastward from the south side of Wadi Jawf, the locale of Nahom, the first well is 150 miles distant. If the family swung farther north, the wells at al-‘Abr lie farther away. In addition, the al-Mahrah plateau seemingly saw little caravan travel in antiquity largely because of the lack of water. It seems improbable that people carrying infants traveled for days on end (excluding the Sabbath) without water for themselves or their animals. To be sure, the aid of the Liahona was always available. Even so, they did not escape “hunger and thirst” and “famine,” chiefly—and significantly—“because of their transgressions” (Mosiah 1:17; Alma 9:22; 37:42).

We must also remember that the desert is not empty, though it may seem so. In addition, desert people passionately claim water sources, whether springs, wells, or seasonal pools. The command that Nephi’s party not make fire also implies that the family was traveling through areas at least lightly peopled by others who were hostile (see 1 Nephi 17:12). Hence, access to water sources, particularly on the eastward portion of the journey, was both a critical need, especially for those with children, and a challenge to provide. In my mind, it was more prudent for them to follow the incense trail as long as they could. From the Marib area, this route swung south and east, missing the dunes and rocky terrain of the Ramlat as-Sab‘atayn desert, leading one through settlements in an eastward arc from Marib to Shabwah where wells were in place.

East of Shabwah, what would they have found? All paths were difficult. The al-Mahrah plateau is dangerously waterless. If they traveled as far north as al-‘Abr, turning eastward would have brought them into a desolate corridor where they could walk between the high dunes of the Empty Quarter on their north and the fractured tableland to their south. Here water was at a premium since in places it was eight days’ journey between wells. If we add to this picture the presence of combative tribesmen, the eastward journey was challenging indeed.

**Burial of Ishmael**

Nephi’s few words disclose only the general area of Ishmael’s burial, nothing more. We can infer that Ishmael died at Nahom, but he may have passed away beforehand. Nephi writes, “Ishmael died, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom” (1 Nephi 16:34). Several aspects of ancient life appear in this line. First, we know that it was common for family members or friends to carry the body of a deceased person back to the person’s homeland for burial. Although this was impossible in Ishmael’s case, it is possible that family members carried Ishmael’s remains for some distance to a suitable burial spot, if indeed he died before they reached Nahom. Second, mourning customs would have led Ishmael’s family to grieve for “many days” (Genesis 37:34; see 50:10; Daniel 10:2). Third, the deep intensity of mourning is visible: “the daughters of Ishmael did mourn exceedingly, because of the loss of their father” (1 Nephi 16:35). I suspect that the intense, unsettling emotions that these young women experienced, including Nephi’s wife, came upon them not only because of the loss of their father but also because some were awaiting the births of their first children.
Several options for burying Ishmael were available. For many people then living in that region, burials occurred next to a shrine. But for most south Arabian people, burials were in large cemeteries. Several such cemeteries have been identified in south Arabia and surveyed in recent years, including one with thousands of burials at the eastern end of Wadi Nihm where it turns north and runs toward Wadi Jawf. Whether Ishmael’s final resting place was in such a spot, we cannot know. What we also do not know is whether the party had to pay a fee for the burial.

**Bountiful**

There can be no doubt that the party of Lehi and Sariah emerged from the desert at some point along the south coast of modern Oman. The 100-mile-long maritime plain is the only region in southern Arabia that fits Nephi’s portrait of “much fruit,” “wild honey,” and “timbers” (1 Nephi 17:5; 18:1). The summer monsoon rains turn the area into a Garden of Eden, enlivening an isolated ecosystem that is bounded on the north by the desert and on the south by the sea. Driven by southwest winds, clouds envelop the coastal plain in rain from June into September.

On the question of pinpointing Lehi’s encampment at Bountiful, I believe that we lack compelling evidence and therefore need to exhibit caution until more data come to light. At this point, all is circumstantial. To be specific, no one can prove that a foreign family moved onto any particular spot at one of the proposed sites for Bountiful in the early sixth century BC because (1) there is no inscriptive evidence of the presence of such a party, and (2) archaeology cannot prove that a certain person or persons ever inhabited an area without such written proof. Under the right circumstances, an archaeologist could show, for instance, that the architecture of an area changed significantly in a certain era or that there is evidence of a sudden change in customs, such as food production, which may indicate the presence of a new people. Even so, these indicators would not prove that the newcomers were Israelites from Jerusalem. That sort of conclusion is impossible without written materials that were left behind. If one wants an indication that this sort of effort is fraught with difficulties, all one has to do is read about archaeology in the Holy Land. Every archaeological “fact” that a few decades ago seemed to point to the arrival of the Israelites under Joshua in the 13th century BC has been disputed, including the reason for the site-wide burn layer at the Canaanite city of Hazor (north of the Sea of Galilee), which the Bible says was burned by Joshua and the Israelites (see Joshua 11).

Along the south coast of Oman, there are as many as a dozen inlet bays, any one of which could have served Nephi’s shipbuilding needs. Since antiquity, virtually all such bays have been partially silted in, both their beds and their...
access to the sea. Some are better situated for building a ship away from the rush of the monsoon winds; at least one (Khor Rori) is deep and broad enough to allow Nephi and his brothers to learn to control the vessel before going to sea; others are close to timbered spots (see 1 Nephi 18:1); others lie near sources of ore; still others are near natural hunting grounds where the family could have found “meat from the wilderness” before boarding the ship (18:6). In all, the region presents a surprising abundance of resources that would have supported life for many.

That there would have been other people in the area is most likely. The abundance of game, fish, and fruit would have assured a constant presence of other clans. As a visual test, one has only to look at the well-worn, crisscrossing sheep and goat trails along the hillsides next to the seacoast to see that herdsmen and flocks have been here for millennia. In addition, an important archaeological survey has determined that people have been trading along that coast from as far east as India and as far west as the Red Sea since the third millennium BC. This indicates waterborne shipping. What is missing is clear evidence for a shipwright industry. Nephi presumably could have examined seagoing vessels that plied the coastal waters. But he may have been alone as a shipbuilder. The closest known shipbuilding centers were hundreds of miles to the west, in the Red Sea, and hundreds of miles to the north in the Persian Gulf.

To construct his ship, Nephi needed tools. One suspects that his party carried basic tools—axes, hammers, digging implements. But tools for shipbuilding were likely not among their possessions. Presumably people who lived along the shore owned tools for repairing boats. But most of the vessels that carried goods were apparently constructed from leather or consisted of hollowed-out logs. Hence, Nephi needed tools that were not readily available. But before that, he needed “ore . . . [to] make tools” (1 Nephi 17:9). Because the closest copper mines lie 700 miles to the north, they were beyond reach. He needed to find a source of ore close at hand. As was typical, Nephi prayed: “Lord, whither shall I go that I may find ore to molten . . . ? And . . . the Lord told me whither I should go” (17:9–10). Here we see no indication that Nephi traveled far. Ore was evidently nearby. And that is exactly the case. Geologists from Brigham Young University have come upon two adequate sources of iron ore very near the seacoast. Within a day or two, Nephi could have walked to one place or the other from any campsite along the coastline.

Conclusions

The reconstructions that I have set forth will differ chiefly in details from those of my distinguished friends who have given years of their lives to studying Lehi and Sariah. For me, those details spell a significant difference in interpreting the desert experience of these two people and their party. First, in a positive vein my investigation tells me that we can learn much from small indicators in the accounts. For instance, Book of Mormon authors besides Nephi appear to have preserved broad hints of what the party faced as they crossed Arabia. Second, in a negative vein my instincts tell me that one must use caution when trying to pinpoint locations where events occurred. For example, we cannot know exactly where Ishmael was buried, though we know the general region. In an important sense, of course, we agree that God led the party on an exodus that would be celebrated in story and song among their descendants for a thousand years. Fortunately for us, their saga is now known to the wider world and their experience enriches our experience.
Although most of the Book of Mormon takes place in the New World, more than 41 pages of 1 Nephi are firmly planted in an Old World setting. Linking that part of the record to actual locations in the Near East began in earnest in 1950 with the serialized publication of Hugh Nibley’s “Lehi in the Desert.” Nibley modestly called his work “little more than a general survey,” yet he broke new ground in correlating ancient documents, scholarly opinion, writings about life in Arabia, and even ancient Arabic poetry with the wilderness trek of Lehi and Sariah. Nibley proposed a map of their route through Arabia based on the assumption that Old World Bountiful had to be “in the forested sector of the Hadhramaut,” from where he simply drew a line westward until it intersected the main caravan trail. His subsequent works continued to bring Lehi’s story to life and show its unambiguous connection to life in ancient Israel and Arabia.

Nibley’s writings proved to be a catalyst for subsequent scholars and explorers, including those featured in this issue of the Journal, who have ventured into the region, studied ancient texts, examined the findings of archaeology and other fieldwork, and proposed locations for the events Nephi records. The result is that we can now place the early chapters of the Book of Mormon in a precise historical setting and can identify plausible and in some cases even precise locations for sites recorded in the text. This is quite a feat for a book that did not represent the popular understanding of Arabia when it was first published. A summary of current thinking on Lehi’s route through Arabia is captured in the articles by Warren P. Aston, S. Kent Brown, and Richard Wellington and George Potter in this issue of the Journal. Though their many themes intersect, these research-
ers also have individual opinions and interpretations of the evidence and the text. The task of this article is to review and compare these three studies using the narrative of the Book of Mormon as the chronological framework.

Jerusalem to the Valley of Lemuel (1 Nephi 2:2–15)

Nephi records that his family left Jerusalem and “departed into the wilderness,” taking with them provisions and tents (2:4). He gave no length of time for this first segment of the journey but simply said they “came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea” and “traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea” (2:5). Once in the wilderness, they “traveled three days” and camped “in a valley by the side of a river of water” (2:6). Lehi named the river after his oldest son, Laman (2:8), and the valley after his next son, Lemuel (2:14).

Wellington and Potter expand the phrase “into the wilderness” in 2:2 to “into the [Way of the] Wilderness,” implying that the family took a specific trail of that name. But the text does not seem to support such an extrapolation. The term wilderness appears prominently in Nephi’s description of every segment of the journey to Bountiful, not just in this initial part of the journey. There is no reason to suppose that Nephi’s use of wilderness in 2:2 differs from the way he uses the term elsewhere—as a general reference to the types of land through which the group passed.

Another term that Wellington and Potter examine to help determine both the path to and the location of the Valley of Lemuel is borders. They make a distinction between “the borders near the shore of the Red Sea” and “the borders which are nearer...
the Red Sea” (2:5). Concluding that borders actually means “mountains,” they surmise that Nephi is speaking of two mountain ranges, one near and the other nearer the Red Sea. There are multiple Hebrew terms translated as “borders” in the King James version of the Bible that relate to geography, the most common being gĕbûl. This is the term Wellington and Potter equate with “mountain.” But gĕbûl means “territory” or “boundary,” so Nephi has no trouble distinguishing between “borders” and “mountains” elsewhere, so there is no reason to think he means “mountains” in 2:5.

Additionally, a study of the original Book of Mormon manuscripts shows that in the phrase “traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea” (2:5), the verb are originally read was, which one could interpret as related to the singular noun wilderness and not to the plural borders. Textual analysis further suggests the term nearer might be more correct as near, removing the distinction that Wellington and Potter use to differentiate the two mountain ranges. Summarizing all the textual evidence, we conclude that Nephi is probably saying, “And he came down by the area near the Red Sea; and he traveled in the wilderness which was in the region near the Red Sea.” Thus we know the general area in which Lehi’s party was traveling, but nothing more specific.

It is difficult to know from Nephi’s brief description which trail the family followed upon leaving Jerusalem. Brown notes that there are at least four possibilities, all of them widely used trade routes through the area. Various authors have favored different routes. Based on the available evidence, there is no compelling motivation to prefer one over the other, except perhaps to choose the quickest way out.

In the Valley of Lemuel (1 Nephi 2:16–16:8)

Roughly 75 percent of the first 41 pages of 1 Nephi took place while the family was camped in the valley they named Lemuel. There Nephi had his first recorded encounter with the Lord, confirming the truthfulness of his father’s prophecies and securing an assurance from the Lord of a future land of promise (2:16–24). The sons of Lehi twice left the valley and went back to Jerusalem, first for the plates of Laban (3:1–5:22) and second for the family of Ishmael (7:1–22). Lehi experienced his “tree of life” vision in that valley (8:1–38), followed by Nephi’s own related visionary experience (11:1–14:30). The families also celebrated five weddings there (16:7).

How long they stayed in the Valley of Lemuel is not stated in the text, and opinions on the matter differ dramatically among the three articles. Aston favors a longer stay, taking up most of the eight-year period in the wilderness (17:4), while Brown inclines toward a time just long enough to encompass the experiences related by Nephi. The percentage of chapters devoted to events in the valley influences Aston to advocate a longer valley stay, but the length of the text is not a good indication of time. The events in the valley were recorded because of their significance, not their duration. Nevertheless, two items hint at a longer stay than the short time that Brown proposes.

The first hint is found in 1 Nephi 8:1, where the group “gathered together all manner of seeds,” including both grain and fruit, while in the valley. Nephi later stated that they had brought seeds from “the land of Jerusalem” (18:24), though 8:1 implies that at least some of the seed gathering happened in the valley. Gathering seeds probably indicates a stay of at least one growing season. These seeds are significant because the family resists using them until they arrive in the New World, as Brown notes.

The second hint relates to the mention of children only after the family arrived at Nahom (17:1), the basis for Brown’s argument for a short stay in the valley. From Shazer, Nephi and his brothers did “go forth into the wilderness to slay food for our families; and after we had slain food for our families we did return again to our families in the wilderness (16:14). This took place well before the arrival at Nahom. If the group took less than a year to reach Nahom and only there saw the first births of children from the marriages contracted in the Valley of Lemuel, as Brown suggests, Nephi’s use of the plural term our families at Shazer is problematic. The logical reading is that Nephi is referring to the new families, including children. If so, then the group evidently lingered in the valley for a longer time than Brown proposes, and children were born before the journey was resumed.

Yet Aston’s assertion that “much of the eight years” was in the Valley of Lemuel is perhaps an overstatement. As discussed below, Brown is persuasive that the afflictions of the journey’s last leg
(from Nahom to Bountiful) seem to indicate an extended period. What seems to fit all the evidence is that there were extended stays—or delays—at more than one location, including the Valley of Lemuel, Nahom, and the sojourn in the wilderness between Nahom and Bountiful, together adding up to eight years.

Geographically speaking, the most significant thing about the Valley of Lemuel is that there is a fully qualified candidate, first brought to our attention by Potter and Wellington. Jeffrey R. Chadwick suggests an alternative location for the Valley of Lemuel in "one of the wadis near the shore at Bir Marsha," but Potter had already visited the area and determined that the wadis there were dry. Potter and Wellington’s suggestion of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, which they have visited multiple times, satisfactorily fits the description in 1 Nephi, and no other serious candidate has been presented. With further research and exploration, including a detailed and scientific survey of the area, we may one day be certain of the location. Until then, it is a marvelous discovery that there is at least one place that qualifies as the Valley of Lemuel.

The Valley of Lemuel to Shazer (1 Nephi 16:9–14)

After Lehi was commanded by the Lord to depart the Valley of Lemuel (16:9), he found “a round ball of curious workmanship” near his tent door (16:10). This device was later called the “Liahona” (Alma 37:38) though Nephi never mentions that name. The party gathered their supplies, packed their tents, crossed the river Laman (16:11–12), and traveled “south-southeast” (16:13) for four days. After that short journey, they again pitched their tents and called the location “Shazer” (16:13), taking the opportunity to hunt for food (16:14).

Wellington and Potter are the only ones to cover this part of the story in detail. Drawing on Nibley’s suggestion that the meaning of Shazer had something to do with trees, they searched for a suitable location. They found one in Wadi Agharr. This palm tree–filled valley is about four camel-days south of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism and has mountains nearby in which to hunt game. It is also the first major “rest stop” going south along the ancient Frankincense Trail.

All parties agree that Lehi and company had to follow the Frankincense Trail, for the simple reason that it was the only way to survive the journey. The trail existed because that was where the water was, and without water in the desert, there is death. Following hints in Nephi’s text, Brown suggests that the party stayed close to the coast until Shazer, then moved higher into the mountains. Wellington and Potter mostly agree. They have Lehi follow the Gaza branch of the Frankincense Trail, just on the inland side of the coastal mountains after leaving the Valley of Lemuel, then move farther inland after Wadi Agharr/Shazer.
A note on directions: Wellington and Potter are inclined to take Nephi’s directional pronouncements literally, while Brown argues that they are more a general sense of direction. It is true that the “ball” could have provided specific directions as Wellington and Potter suggest, but there is little indication of that in Nephi’s record, only that it pointed the way. Nephi’s sense of direction surely relied on the traditional means—the sun and the stars—and was likely more general than specific, as he implies with repeated use of the term nearly (16:13, 33; 17:1).

Shazer to the Broken Bow Location
(1 Nephi 16:14–32)

Continuing in the same south-southeast direction, the party stayed in fertile areas, hunting along the way (16:14–17). At one stopping place, Nephi “did break [his] bow” and they “did obtain no food” (16:18). This resulted in much murmuring, even from Lehi. Subsequently, Nephi found suitable wood and made a new bow and arrow. Then, following “directions which were given upon the ball” (16:30) about where to hunt, he brought food back to camp.

Linguistic acrobatics aside, Wellington and Potter do a good job documenting how Nephi’s description of “most fertile parts” and “more fertile parts” (16:14, 16) demonstrates both a surprising fertility at the northern end of the Frankincense Trail and a lessening of fertility as the group moved farther south. Brown sees this as a strong indication that the group was inland now and no longer on the coastal plain, because fertile refers not only to plant life but to animals they could hunt for meat. Both lines of reasoning show the group staying east of, yet close to, the coastal mountains. At first they had little trouble getting food, but they soon experienced challenges as they moved south on the trail into less fertile lands.

As game dwindled, a new crisis confronted them: the broken bow, or more properly the loss of the use of all bows. Again, Wellington and Potter are the only ones to comment on a possible location for this incident, though it unfortunately gets only passing reference in the article. Bows can only be made from certain kinds of wood, they tell us, and one of those is the atim tree, found only in Arabia west of the Frankincense Trail and south of the fertile lands. This is right where Nephi needs wood to make his bow. What Nephi doesn’t say specifically, but which must have been the case, was that others in the group also made bows. Later they do not complain about a lack of hunting equipment, only a lack of targets (16:35). Further exploration of Arabian bow-making practices and availability of materials might help us better understand and perhaps securely establish a more specific location for this incident in Nephi’s account involving great faith.
Broken Bow Location to Nahom
(1 Nephi 16:33–39)

Continuing south-southeast, the party traveled for “many days” until they finally pitched their tents to “tarry for the space of a time” (16:33). Shortly after this, Ishmael died, which caused great mourning among the family, especially his daughters. The mourning led to murmuring and threats of death against Lehi and Nephi. Only through the direct intervention of the Lord was the group chastened, humbled, and again able to obtain food (16:34–39).

A careful reading of the passage highlights two details. First, they arrived at this camping location, and while tarrying there Ishmael died. There is nothing in Nephi’s record to indicate that Ishmael died on the trail and that his remains were carried by the group until they could bury them at Nahom, as Brown and Aston both suggest. It is true there are scriptural accounts of ancient Israelites carrying their dead to a known, traditional burial location. But it is unlikely that the group, moving through unfamiliar territory, would have been aware of Nahom as a potential burial ground and transported the body there, had Ishmael died on the open trail. Instead, Nephi indicates they buried him near their camp, where he died. This concurs with a strong cultural and scriptural mandate to bury a body quickly, preferably on the same day as death. Indeed, that is exactly the tone of Nephi’s words: “Ishmael died, and was buried” (16:34)—one event immediately following the other.

Second, Nahom is mentioned only as the burial place for Ishmael. The fact that the group camped nearby is implied because there is no mention of a long journey to bury Ishmael. But Nephi never says they camped at Nahom. The point is minor but perhaps helpful in discovering more exact point of the turn eastward—we cannot know it from Nephi’s description alone. As the articles describe, NHM is a broad area, a tribal territory rather than a single location. Nephi doesn’t give details about the campsite, though we can confidently associate the resting place and the turn east with the larger area called NHM. However, we cannot simply draw a line from the now-certain NHM burial place eastward to find Bountiful. We don’t know how close the family camped to Ishmael’s grave (and thus don’t know their starting place), and we can’t be certain of the exact path of the group, just that it was “nearly eastward” (17:1).

The marvelous fact is that there is an archaeologically confirmed NHM right where Nephi says it should be and right at the time in history described in the record. This is one of the most stunning discoveries related to Book of Mormon geography. Finding a stela in Mesoamerica reading “Zarahemla” would be no more remarkable. A series of steps led to these discoveries—Ross Christensen first observing the name on an old map, Aston’s investigations of place-names in the region, and finally the discovery by a German archaeological team of three altars bearing the tribal name NHM. The first altar was brought to the attention of the Latter-day Saint audience by Brown. Aston, in a visit to the location, found a second altar, and a third has been excavated. All three bear the NHM inscription and date to Lehi’s time, providing the single most concrete evidence of the veracity and antiquity of Nephi’s record to date.

All three articles give attention to the general location of Nahom as a tribal region, but the exact size of the region is an item of small debate. Brown and Aston are content to locate it in the area of Wadi Jawf based on the altar inscriptions. But Welington and Potter, informed by a 1970 CIA map of the region, suggest broadening the Nahom region to also include Wadi Naham, south of Wadi Jawf, and perhaps Furdat (“stony hills”) Naham. They attempt to apply very specific information about modern towns and water supplies to Lehi’s journey, including proposing that the Liahona led the group “into the edge of the Rubʾ al Khali” before leading them to Nahom. This is an interesting set of speculative assumptions, but hardly persuasive. The critical information is that NHM is an archaeologically documented tribal area at the eastern turn of the Frankincense Trail and that this area includes a traditional burial ground, just as Nephi describes in his record.

It could be that additional archaeological finds will reveal yet more details about the burial place called Nahom and its surrounding regions and history. Determining exactly where Lehi’s party stayed is likely impossible, given the few clues that Nephi provides and the near impossibility that the presence of these migrants would have left some kind of trace on the land that is identifiable today. But this is hardly necessary to appreciate and even
celebrate the tangible discoveries that link this location to specific Book of Mormon events.

As Brown observes, we do not know how long the group remained camped near Ishmael’s burial place. If they followed Hebrew mourning conventions of the day, the daughters and Ishmael’s wife (and no doubt the others in the party) would have “mourn[ed] exceedingly” (16:35) by putting on sackcloth, fasting, weeping, and perhaps tearing their hair and putting ashes on their heads. They may even have shaved their heads. This likely went on for seven days and could have been a factor in augmenting the murmuring.37

Nahom to Bountiful (1 Nephi 17:1–6)

Sometime after the Lord checked the near rebellion following Ishmael’s death (16:36–39), the group moved on from Nahom, but this time in a decidedly different direction—“nearly eastward.” They “wade[d] through much affliction” and “live[d] upon raw meat.” In spite of that, Nephi subsequently recalls, they were blessed of God. Finally, after an eight-year sojourn in the wilderness, the group arrived at the seashore, set up camp, and called the place Bountiful (17:1–6).

Wellington and Potter note that the Frankincense Trail turned east in the Nahom area, a route that matches Nephi’s change of direction. Brown agrees that Lehi and company must have followed this route, which would have taken them into the historically significant towns of Marib and Timna. Their journey apparently skirted the edge of the Empty Quarter and involved long distances between wells. Brown reminds us: “All paths were difficult.”

On this part of the route the authors of the three articles strongly disagree, at least in terms of chronology. Brown favors a long period here, Potter and Wellington locate the bulk of the eight years back in the Valley of Lemuel, and Aston surmises that this “last stage of the journey . . . was [not] much longer in duration than the earlier stages.” In light of 17:2–4, it seems evident that the group’s “sojourn in the wilderness”—the journey from Nahom to Bountiful—took them a long time, much of the eight years.38 Brown’s reasoning, built on word meanings and related comments by other Book of Mormon prophets (and explained in even more detail in other sources),39 argues compellingly for a period of servitude. At this stage, the group would have been forced to interact with others. Evidence of this can perhaps be teased out of the phrase “some strange wilderness,” used by Laman against Nephi (16:38).40 Water and food were scarce here, and it is unlikely that the group could have crossed this space without contact with those who controlled the wells. Yet, implicit in the Lord’s instruction not to “make much fire” (17:12), presumably to prevent the group from attracting attention to themselves, is that any such interaction should be—and in fact was—avoided. Nephi amazingly sees this time of severe afflictions as an indication of God’s love for the group (17:3) and offers few details except its difficulty and duration.

Lehi’s lost record surely had more to say about the hardships experienced during this part of the journey. We get that impression both from King Benjamin (Mosiah 1:17) and Alma (Alma 36:28–29). Additionally intriguing are Alma’s words to the people of Ammonihah, which invite them to remember “the tradition of [their] fathers” (Alma 9:8), meaning “our father, Lehi” who was “brought out of Jerusalem by the hand of God” (9:9). In the next breath, Alma reiterates how the Lord “deliv-
ered our fathers out of the hands of their *enemies*, and preserved them” (9:10). That “our fathers” refers to Lehi and his family seems apparent from verses 9 and 13. From Brown’s observations and these indications from the text, it appears that the family spent significant time (perhaps most or, in my reading of the text, even all of the eight years) and conceivably suffered bondage in the passage between the Nahom area and Bountiful.

The Location of Bountiful

Everything in Nephi’s narrative leads us to Bountiful, which is where the three articles converge. Not that they tell exactly the same story—in fact, there are strong disagreements—but they all make a similar point: the location of Bountiful is on the southern coast of the Arabian peninsula in modern-day Oman. The thin green band of trees, flowers, and grass along the Dhofar coast of Oman is not just the best choice for the group to locate while Nephi built his ship, it is the only choice.

As noted by the authors, though, various candidates for Bountiful in the Dhofar region have been proposed, including the two most likely locations to date, Wadi Sayq/Khor Kharfot and Khor Rori. Either site is a viable candidate with strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis the other. In a spirited if sometimes overly enthusiastic debate, Aston supports Khor Kharfot and Wellington and Potter support Khor Rori. Though the evidence appears to be leaning in favor of Khor Kharfot, Brown correctly reminds us that we must exercise caution: we have not found nor are likely to find any specific evidence of Lehi and company living in the area. The best that can be done is to continue meticulously examining the text for all its described characteristics, then continue to compare the various sites to the list. In the end, if two or more sites appear qualified, it is all the more amazing, because no one in 1830—and at least one author as late as 1985—allowed that such a place even existed.

It seems fair to say that the family was certainly not alone at Bountiful. Although the text gives no hint that their specific location was occupied when they arrived, it would have been quite impossible to avoid all contact with the thriving population in the larger Dhofar area during the two or more years it took to build the ship, as Brown notes. Even the name they give the sea, *Irreantum*, is evidence for interaction with others. If it is indeed South
Semitic, as has been suggested, they had to learn the word from someone there who already spoke that language. Wellington and Potter's notable achievement in this section of their article is to draw our attention to Nephi's many shipbuilding requirements, which they rightly note have not been adequately addressed before. Their analysis of this matter is thought provoking and worth careful consideration, and their inventory of needed shipbuilding materials extends our list of requirements for Bountiful. Nevertheless, Wellington and Potter's comments elicit two observations.

First, they write that Nephi's use of the phrase “timbers of curious workmanship” (18:1) must refer not to lumber they logged and cut themselves but to imported wood. The wood is “curious,” they suggest, because it was “precut in an unfamiliar manner.” This corresponds with their belief that the timber in Oman is inadequate to build a ship. But the rest of 18:1 and the verse following make it apparent that it is Nephi and his family who “work the timbers.” Furthermore, Nephi is quite clear that they do this work “not after the manner of men” but “after the manner which the Lord had shown unto [Nephi]” (18:2), thus relating the term curious to their own work.

Second, they state that Nephi needed a large harbor to “test” his ship and crew prior to launching the ship into the ocean. It is true that the ship needed to be in the water prior to departure, but swelling the wood to make it watertight and loading the ship in a balanced way could have been achieved near the shore, possibly just past the waves. A small boat could have been used to shuttle people and supplies back and forth to the anchored ship. Wellington and Potter use the deep-port requirement as a strong qualification for Khor Rori, but it comes across as looking for evidence to justify the decision.

Leaving Bountiful (1 Nephi 17:7–18:8)

Nephi led the family in building a ship, which everyone pronounced “good” when it was done (18:4). Per the Lord’s instructions, the party entered the ship with fruit, meat, honey, and other provisions and “put forth into the sea” toward the promised land (18:6–8). Nephi records only one incident during the voyage (18:9–22), then concludes, “After we had sailed for the space of many days we did arrive at the promised land” (18:23).

The route followed by the ship cannot be determined from the text; Nephi does not even give directions as he did with the Arabian journey. It is probable that the voyagers had to stop many times along the way, for fresh water if nothing else. This surely meant additional interactions with other people en route, details that Nephi apparently passed over in his record. Those who have studied the geography, currents, and winds of the Pacific can provide specific proposed routes, but we obviously have even less chance of confirming the sea route than we do the stopping places on land from evidences the group could have left behind.

Aston asks the intriguing question, “Did Nephi build a raft?” He provides examples from Thor Hyerdahl’s expedition and related ones. I see nothing in the description of the construction or the voyage to exclude such a possibility, though nothing to substantiate it either. It is an excellent question that challenges our preconceived notions about the crossing and causes us to reconsider the experience in new ways.

Above: Snake plant growing near the coast of southern Oman.

Right: Mountains in southern Oman rise dramatically from the seacoast. Photo courtesy Warren Aston.
Confidence in Mounting Evidence

Like the Lehite party moving through Arabia, as we “again take our journey” (16:33; 17:1) in the Book of Mormon, each step forward provides additional evidence supporting what the Spirit has taught to millions—it is a true ancient record. Hugh Nibley boldly said, “[The book of] 1 Nephi cannot possibly be explained on the grounds of mere coincidence.” He identified over a hundred “searching questions” about Lehi’s story, reminding us that “no one on earth could have answered [them] correctly” in Joseph Smith’s day. In our collective voyage of discovery since Nibley issued that challenge, we have progressed sufficiently to answer with certainty many of those questions and address the rest with high confidence. Significantly, we are steadily upgrading the level of answers from confidence to certainty with each passing year.

As a people, we owe a debt of gratitude to people like Hugh Nibley, who first tantalized us with a Near Eastern setting for the Book of Mormon, and President Ezra Taft Benson, who challenged us to make the book a part of the daily fabric of our lives. We are also grateful to Nibley’s successors, including Brown, Aston, Potter, Wellington, the Hiltons, Chadwick, and a host of others whose work and thinking are represented by the articles in this issue of the *Journal*. While more insights and evidence will surely come forth in the approaching years, we can now say with confidence that the general route of Lehi and Sariah’s journey from Jerusalem to Bountiful is sure and the many details are increasingly clear.
When I was asked to write a response to studies prepared by Warren Aston, Richard Wellington and George Potter, and Kent Brown for the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, my initial reaction was reluctance. Although I have excavated and explored in the Near East for 25 years, traveling widely in Israel, Jordan, Egypt, and the Sinai, most of Lehi’s trail lies on the Arabian Peninsula, where I have never set foot. Analyzing and responding succinctly to the data and proposals presented by these dedicated researchers, who have spent so much time and effort in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Oman, would not be an easy task.

I am also mindful of the difficulties involved in what these intrepid explorers have undertaken, their differences of approach notwithstanding. The spirit of sacrifice and adventure behind their efforts is remarkable. I am familiar with the expense and effort, the time and trial, and even the personal peril involved in travel and research “on the ground” in the Near East. Aston, Wellington and Potter, and Brown are certainly worthy of our congratulations for their work. Any difference I voice with their proposals in no way diminishes my respect for what they have accomplished.

Ultimately, I resolved to write this response because my own conviction that the Book of Mormon is both true and authentic demands it. As an active Near Eastern field archaeologist, I have never studied or unearthed anything in the last quarter century of research that has caused me to doubt that the account in 1 Nephi was originally composed by a Hebrew-speaking Jew from Jerusalem of the late seventh century BC, namely Nephi, son of Lehi. In light of everything I have learned while working with a trowel and brush in Israel, Nephi’s description of places, practices, and aspects of material culture in that period ring true.
So on with my response. Rather than move from article to article or author to author, I will proceed topically along the trail of Lehi from place to place—from Jerusalem to the Red Sea, from Shazer to Nahom, and from there to Bountiful, just as Nephi and his family colony traveled.

Lehi in the Land of Jerusalem

Jerusalem, where Nephi’s story began, is one Book of Mormon site that we can confidently identify. Additionally, we can say with virtual certainty that certain areas in Israel, often presented to Latter-day Saint tourists as having been associated with Lehi and his family, were not connected with them at all. For example, the so-called Beit Lei area, located in the Judean hills about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem, cannot have been an area where Lehi owned land or lived. The Arabic term lei is not to be confused with the Hebrew name Lehi. Beit Lei is an Arabic toponym pronounced “bait lay.” But in Hebrew the site is known as Beyt Loya, and neither place-name is equivalent to the Hebrew name Lehi. Students of the Book of Mormon should be wary of claims about a so-called Lehi Cave or an alleged City of Lehi or Beit Lehi in the hills of Judah. These claims are entirely spurious.

I have published elsewhere my views on a number of factors related to the background of 1 Nephi 1–2, including the general type and location of Lehi’s “house at Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 1:7), the “land of his inheritance” (2:4), the dates of Lehi’s ministry in Jerusalem and his departure into the wilderness, and the strong possibility that Lehi and Nephi were metal smiths. The interested reader can find a summary of my thinking on these matters along with citations for further reading in the endnotes.
The Route from Jerusalem to the Red Sea

In the three articles to which I am responding, Aston does not offer a suggestion on Lehi’s route to the Red Sea. Brown reviews four different suggestions, including two that cross the Jordan River eastward before turning south through the territory of Ammon and Moab. Wellington and Potter concentrate on a single route much farther east of the Jordan River. It seems entirely unlikely to me, however, that Lehi would have traveled a trans-Jordanian route. There are two reasons for this.

First, both Ammon and Moab, states east of the Dead Sea, were active enemies of Judah in the period prior to 595 BC. Both had been involved in attacks on Judah around 600 BC, during the reign of King Jehoiakim (see 2 Kings 24:2). For Jews to travel through Ammon and Moab at that time would have been simply unthinkable. Extreme danger (including capture, slavery, and the likelihood of deadly attack) would have awaited Lehi’s party had they made their trail through Ammonite or Moabite territory after departing Jerusalem.

Second, we have to assume that Lehi was interested in getting to the Gulf of Aqaba along the path that was not only safest but quickest and least expensive. (Remember, time is money when traveling—unnecessary days spent on a longer trail would consume more food and supplies than needful.) A trans-Jordanian route, east of the Dead Sea, would have taken Lehi’s party as much as 80 miles out of the way, which equates to about four extra days of travel (assuming that some of the party were on foot, which seems likely). Traveling from Jerusalem to Aqaba via trans-Jordanian Moab would be something like traveling from Salt Lake City to St. George via Moab in eastern Utah—it is far out of the way and makes no sense. If I put myself in Lehi’s sandals, a route from Jerusalem south through the Arabah valley to the Red Sea would be the only logical choice.

Remembering that the term wilderness refers to desert terrain, both in the Bible and in 1 Nephi, a word about Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem “into the wilderness” (1 Nephi 2:4) is in order. All of the territory east of Jerusalem is wilderness. Departure on any trail directly east, northeast, or southeast puts one immediately into the mountainous desert known as the Wilderness of Judah. Wellington and Potter’s article seems to give the impression that their trans-Jordanian “Way of the Wilderness” would be the only plausible desert route to the Gulf of Aqaba. But this is not so. And the impossibility of travel through Moab for Lehi has already been noted. A direct cis-Jordanian (west of Jordan) route from Jerusalem through the Wilderness of Judah to the Arabah valley is a far more plausible choice for Lehi’s travel.

Of the two approaches to the Arabah valley discussed by Brown, however, neither departs Jerusalem directly into the wilderness. He takes the party to Bethlehem, southwest of Jerusalem, along a five-mile path through quite fruitful country.
From there, his first option continues southwest to Hebron, 15 more miles along the fruitful and cultivated “Way of the Patriarchs.” It does not seem to me that a trail that ran 20 verdant miles from Jerusalem to Hebron (a full day’s travel) describes Lehi’s departure “into the wilderness” (1 Nephi 2:4). I could, however, envision a route from Jerusalem to Bethlehem as leading fairly directly “into the wilderness” if at Bethlehem the party turned immediately southeast from there to pass Tekoa and descend to Ein Gedi.

It seems more likely, however, that Lehi departed Jerusalem directly to the southeast, following the Kidron Valley past Ein Rogel and connecting immediately to the desert path along the Draga valley. This trail leads directly south and southeast into the Wilderness of Judah, running well east of Tekoa, and it eventually connects with the path that descends to Ein Gedi through the Arugot valley.10 I have explored this route by vehicle and on foot, tracing the trail from Jerusalem to Ein Gedi.11 The route is easily passable and by every measure would have been the most direct route for Lehi to descend to Ein Gedi and the Dead Sea. And, as Brown notes, from Ein Gedi the trail turns south along the west shore of the Dead Sea, passes Masada and Ein Bokek, and proceeds through the Arabah valley to the Red Sea gulf of Aqaba.12

The 200 miles from Jerusalem to the Red Sea via the Arabah valley are by far the most fully explored and understood miles on the trail of Lehi. At 18 to 20 miles a day, with at least some in the party traveling on foot, the trip would take about 10 days, not including the Sabbath. The ancient path from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba runs parallel to the modern Israeli highway through the Arabah, and all of the springs and oases along that wilderness road are well known. In fact, most of the ancient water spots have been developed into kibbutzim or modern service stations, complete with roadside restaurants. A few even boast hotel guest cabins and swimming pools among the tall oasis palm trees. Alas, Lehi found no such accommodations. He would have found water at Ein Bokek and Zohar along the Dead Sea’s southwest shore and in the Arabah at Ein Tamar, Ovot (“Oboth” in Numbers 33:43), Shafir (“Shapher” in Numbers 33:23), Be’er Menuhah, Yotvatah (“Jotbathah” in Numbers 33:33), and Ein Evronah (“Ebronah” in Numbers 33:34) before finally sighting the Red Sea port at Aqaba (“Ezion-gaber” in Numbers 33:35).

For reasons I will discuss later, I suspect Lehi’s party departed Jerusalem around November; thus their travel in the desert to the Red Sea would have been by day, in mild temperatures ranging from 68 to 77 degrees Fahrenheit.

The Valley of Lemuel

From a point “near the shore of the Red Sea” (1 Nephi 2:5), Lehi and family continued three days farther along a desert trail that he described as being “in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea” (1 Nephi 2:5). This suggests to me that they were walking southward, parallel to the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba but a few hundred yards inland from that shore rather than right along the beach. After about 50 miles (two full days’ walk and much of a third day), the party encamped in the desert wadi that Nephi called the “valley of Lemuel” (2:14). Aston makes no specific suggestion regarding the geography of this valley other than to locate it “in ancient Midian.” Wellington and Potter are impressed with a desert wadi called Tayyib al-Ism, which they present as the Valley of Lemuel. Brown seems to concur with this identification, not only in his article herein but also in his magnificent and highly influential video presentation Journey of Faith. For several years now the notion that Tayyib al-Ism was Lehi’s first wilderness camp has become more and more popular. Until recently, no one has seriously questioned it. But has the Valley of Lemuel really been found?

The answer, from my perspective, is simply no. The physical features of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism are quite inconsistent in several different ways with the description of the Valley of Lemuel written by Nephi.

Since Wellington and Potter do not give a description of Tayyib al-Ism in their article herein, readers may consult their 2003 book Lehi in the Wilderness, where they outline in detail their views of the wadi and its physical features.13 Readers should also consider Potter’s 1999 article in the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies entitled “A New Candidate in Arabia for the Valley of Lemuel,” which features better maps of Tayyib al-Ism than those in Lehi in the Wilderness.14 These two sources combine to present a fascinating view of the site.
In 2004 the editors of the FARMS Review asked me to read *Lehi in the Wilderness* and prepare a review of the book. It was published under the provocative title “The Wrong Place for Lehi’s Trail and the Valley of Lemuel,” and it outlined in detail the reasons why I think Tayyib al-Ism is *not* the Valley of Lemuel. Because of space limitations here, I refer readers to that review for a full consideration of the merits of Tayyib al-Ism, one way or the other. In short, I point out that the perennial stream at Tayyib al-Ism does not have a *mouth* that empties into the Red Sea, as required in Nephi’s report, nor does it feature a valley entrance that is *near a river mouth* (see 1 Nephi 2:8). It does not have any practical coastal access from dry land, and its inland access is many miles away from the coast, in a location that, to me at least, seems unlikely for Lehi to have discovered. That access is also some 75 miles from the north end of the Gulf of Aqaba, which seems impossibly far for the group to have reached in only three days’ travel (see 2:6). Furthermore, Potter and Wellington’s notion that the term *borders* means “mountains” is untenable. The sum of all the issues I explored in that review is that although Potter and Wellington describe Tayyib al-Ism as a “fully qualified candidate for the Valley of Lemuel,” it is not a candidate to my mind.

My own conjecture is that the camp was probably in the Bir Marsha area, about 50 miles south of Aqaba on the Red Sea coast. (I did not argue, as Wellington and Potter allege herein, that Wadi Bir Marsha “could be a candidate for the Valley of Lemuel”—that wadi is, as they imply, a dry gulch. I suggested, rather, that “one of the wadis near the shore at Bir Marsha would be the strongest candidate.”) I will amend that suggestion here by saying that it was likely in one of the small wadis just south of Bir Marsha, some of which have seasonal streams during the winter months.

As a postscript to this part of the discussion, it seems appropriate to point out that a perennial stream is *not* an absolute requirement for any Valley of Lemuel candidate. There are very few perennial streams anywhere in the mountains on the east coast of the Gulf of Aqaba. When Lehi likened the valley’s river to his son Laman, he used the words “continually running” (1 Nephi 2:9) rather than “continually flowing.” A wadi’s streambed may run all the way to the sea whether water happens to be flowing in it or not. And while I have no doubt that water was flowing in the streambed when Lehi made his exclamation (which was probably in late November, at the outset of the rainy season), that does not mean that water had to be flowing in that same streambed six months later. The streambed itself would have been a continually running course to the ocean for the wadi’s water, whether seasonal or perennial.

Winter rains begin in the Sinai and the Gulf of Aqaba region as early as November and continue as late as April. In any given year some seasonal streams in the region’s wadis could flow as long as...
five months. All of the travel and events narrated while Lehi’s family was at the Valley of Lemuel, from the arrival in 1 Nephi 2 to the departure in 1 Nephi 16, can be easily accommodated in a 19-week period—just over four months.20 This would include two weeks of initial camp setup; two weeks to travel back to Jerusalem to visit Laban; one week to go to the land of inheritance to obtain gold and silver and then return to Jerusalem in the attempt to buy the plates of brass; one week to be robbed by Laban, to be chased into the wilderness, and to return to Jerusalem to finally take the plates; two weeks for the return trip to the Valley of Lemuel; two weeks for Lehi to study the plates of brass; two weeks for a second return to Jerusalem to visit Ishmael; one week to convince and prepare his family to depart Jerusalem; two weeks again to return to the Valley of Lemuel; one week in which Lehi experienced his vision and related it to his family; one week in which Nephi experienced the same vision and taught his brothers; one week to prepare for and perform marriages of Lehi’s sons to Ishmael’s daughters; and one week to break camp and depart the Valley of Lemuel for good. If Lehi’s initial departure from Jerusalem had been sometime in November, they could have departed the Valley of Lemuel in late March or early April. Winter rains would have provided a small but steady flow of water in the stream (“river Laman”) during that entire time. In this regard, I think that Brown is on target to “assume that the family spent no more than a few months at the camp.”

From Shazer to Nahom

Four days’ travel south-southeast from the Valley of Lemuel brought Lehi’s party to a location that they called “Shazer” (1 Nephi 16:13). Specific models for the location and nature of Shazer are not discussed by Aston and Brown. Wellington and Potter explain that “Shazer was to prove remarkably difficult for us to find.” When I first read this, I chuckled and thought to myself, I can understand why. But upon reading their description of the location and features of the wadi Agharr, I was impressed. Their suggestion that it was Lehi’s “Shazer” seems to me remarkably plausible. If Shazer was not at Agharr, it has to have been at a place just like Agharr. Kudos to Wellington and Potter on this identification—they may just have it.

But we have to be careful in any claims we make concerning Nephi’s text. For example, Wellington and Potter claim that Shazer meant, in Arabic at least, “a valley or area abounding with trees and shrubs.” The problem is that Nephi recorded no such thing. He wrote nothing regarding the meaning of the name Shazer, in Arabic or otherwise. It is worth noting that footnote a at 1 Nephi 16:13 in our current English edition of the Book of Mormon, where the name Shazer first appears, has this entry: “HEB twisting, intertwining.” This is meant to convey the meaning of the (supposedly) Hebrew name Shazer, but the appearance of a “HEB” footnote in the Book of Mormon is somewhat puzzling since we possess no original Hebrew text of the Book of Mormon.21 We have no original Hebrew spelling for the term spelled “Shazer” in our English translation. And although I assume Nephi was using a Hebrew term, we cannot be certain what letters it contained. It probably featured the initial letter shin (the sh phoneme in Hebrew), and it probably ended with the letter resh (the Hebrew r), but the middle of the word is less secure. Was it spelled with a zayin (the soft z in Hebrew), or was it spelled with a tzadi (the hard z—pronounced “tz”)? Was there an intermediate letter aleph or ayin, representing vowel sounds between the harder consonants, or were these absent? We simply cannot know how the word was spelled in Hebrew since we do not possess any original Hebrew text from Nephi. So even though there is a Hebrew verb spelled shin-zayin-resh that means “to twist,” we cannot confidently cite Hebrew translations in footnotes to the Book of Mormon when we cannot be sure of the original spelling (and some would say language) of the text.22

One thing, however, that we can be sure of—I feel very confident about it—is that the name Nahom in 1 Nephi 16:34 is now securely represented in the historical geography and archaeology of southern Arabia by the Arabic toponym nehem, which not only appears on antique maps of Yemen but is also preserved in inscriptions on stone altars from the Bar’an temple site near Marib. These archaeological finds date to the seventh century BC, the very century in which Lehi and Nephi were born and grew to manhood. Aston’s groundbreaking research into the region and the altars, coupled with Brown’s preparatory research and careful follow-up, have solidified the legitimacy of a major
Book of Mormon–related discovery. That the toponym *nehem* is Arabic rather than Hebrew is, in this instance, not a problem. In fact, it is an indicator of authenticity because Nephi does not say his party gave the name *Nahom* to the place where Ishmael was buried; instead he says that the place “was called Nahom,” presumably by the local Arab population. When I first began teaching in the Jerusalem Center program in the early 1980s, we used to jokingly say, “There is only one Book of Mormon place whose location we know for sure, and we’re standing in it!”—meaning, of course, Jerusalem. But that joke doesn’t work anymore, because we can say with absolute surety that we know where the area of ancient Nahom was. The importance of this, in terms of demonstrating the authenticity of Nephi’s record, cannot be overstated.

**The Difficult Path Eastward**

Aston makes a suggestion that I find quite valid: “The Lehites probably attracted scant attention on their journey.” It seems to me that “the need for Lehi to pay levies and seek tribal permission en route” has been overstated. And on a related issue, contrary to the common consensus that began with Hugh Nibley, I do not think that the party’s spare use of fire was due to the danger of attracting desert marauders. Nor do I think that the avoidance of fire was at the Lord’s command. Though Aston suggests it was “the Lord’s instruction not to ‘make much fire,’” and Brown mentions “the commandment that Nephi’s party not make fire,” this language is not in the text of 1 Nephi itself. What Nephi specifically wrote is that “the Lord had not hitherto suffered that we should make much fire, as we journeyed in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 17:12). While the term *suffered* could be understood as *allowed* or *permitted*, in the context of the passage it could also be understood as Nephi attributing to the Lord the fact that, for practical reasons, they had simply not made much fire on their journey.

There are three quite practical reasons why Lehi’s group would not have made much fire. (1) The availability of firewood or other fuel was not consistent, and in some areas where few trees and shrubs grew, kindling would have been largely absent. (2) The party would often have traveled at night, particularly in the hot months, which means that their resting hours were during the daylight, when no fire would be needed for visibility. (3) They cooked very little of their food, animal meat or otherwise, which seems obvious from the Lord’s promise: “I will make thy food become sweet, that ye cook it not” (1 Nephi 17:12). Bread, for example, could be baked as infrequently as once a week, whenever the group could actually obtain grain to grind into flour. Local fruits and vegetables, when available, would need no cooking. Cheeses made from animal milk needed no cooking. And animal meat would have been cooked only directly after a hunting kill. Though the group may have had such a “barbeque” every several days, only enough meat would have been cooked to satisfy the family for a single meal. The remainder of the animal meat—and probably all of the meat from some of their hunts—would have been sun dried while raw, without cooking it. In other words, the “raw meat” that the party ate (17:2) would have been what we today call jerky. And it, too, was probably seasoned so that it was “sweet, that ye cook it not.” Jerky travels well, even in hot desert terrain, as does cheese and bread. So the party could have maintained an adequate food supply on their trail without having to “make much fire.” So again, I doubt that the paucity of fire had anything at all to do with fear of desert marauders.

When discussing the difficult path eastward, one of the more remarkable observations made by Brown—one that I had never thought of myself before reading his insightful book *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla*—is that probably no more than a year passed between the marriages of Lehi’s sons at the Valley of Lemuel (see 1 Nephi 16:7) and the party’s eastward travel where the new wives were bearing children (see 17:1). This is a key indicator of the duration of time along Lehi’s trail. The 4 to 5 months spent at the Valley of Lemuel, combined with the 9- to 12-month passage between there and the eastward turn where childbearing commenced, suggests that less than 18 months of the reported “eight years in the wilderness” (17:4) had passed when the party departed from the place called Nahom.

Of course, some researchers, like Aston, feel the party must have spent much more time at the Valley of Lemuel, perhaps even years. Like Brown, however, I think it was only a matter of months and that the great majority of the “eight years in the wilderness” is to be counted after Nahom.
But after Nahom is where I find myself preferring a different model than those proposed by Aston, Brown, and most other commentators. For one thing, I do not think there is a case for the supposed bondage of Lehi in Arabia. Eloquent arguments notwithstanding, I simply see no real evidence in the text to support the notion. Rather than bondage, the bitterness and suffering that caused Lehi so much sorrow seem in every case directly attributable to the wicked and violent actions of his older sons Laman and Lemuel and his sons-in-law, the sons of Ishmael. I doubt Lehi spent any significant time in bondage or indentured service before arriving at Bountiful.

On the contrary, it seems to me that Lehi’s party probably arrived at Bountiful within just a few months of leaving Nahom and that the entire trip from the Valley of Lemuel to Bountiful lasted no more than two years. I strongly suspect that as much as six of the eight years in the wilderness was actually time spent at Bountiful building Nephi’s ship. Of course, the first objection some might make to this model is that Bountiful was not wilderness but rather a place of “much fruit and also wild honey” (1 Nephi 17:5). Nephi noted, however, that after his ship was completed at Bountiful, his family loaded it with “much fruits and meat from the wilderness, and honey in abundance” (18:6). This suggests that he considered Bountiful to be wilderness territory, its fruit and honey notwithstanding. Nephi’s summary statement about eight years in the wilderness seems to me to include both the period of the trek (prior to 17:4) and the time at the seashore (after 17:4)—in other words, the time from the Jerusalem departure until the departure from Bountiful.

A further clue in this regard is found later in 1 Nephi 18 in the report of the rebellion against Nephi during the sea voyage. Lehi and Sariah had become ill, age having begun to take its toll. Lehi may have been in his mid-fifties by then, and Sariah in her late forties or early fifties, which was a fairly advanced age for that period, particularly given the rigors of wilderness living. Nephi reports that Jacob and Joseph, his little brothers who had been born in the wilderness (see 18:7) were still “young, having need of much nourishment” (18:19) during the voyage. This suggests to me that at least one of them, logically Joseph, had not yet been weaned by the time the party had set sail and still needed the nourishment of his mother’s milk, which Sariah was unable to give because of her illness. This probably indicates that Joseph was less than three years old. But since Joseph had been born in the wilderness, he would have to have been older than nursing age on the ship if the wilderness period had ended when the party arrived at Bountiful. Consequently, I think that Nephi counted the Bountiful period as part of the eight wilderness years and that Joseph himself was born at Bountiful, perhaps during that time of “greatest sorrow” (2 Nephi 3:1) when both the shipbuilding effort and even Nephi’s life were being threatened by Laman and Lemuel (see 1 Nephi 17:17–49). Though Jacob was a bit older, he too was still a young child at the time of

Nephi’s Ship, by Joseph Brickey
those “afflictions” and “sorrow” brought on by the “rudeness” of his brothers (2 Nephi 2:1).

**Bountiful and the Building of a Ship**

For a person who has never visited Oman, never walked around the shore at Khor Rori, and never climbed the mountain at Khor Kharfot, commenting upon the location of Nephi’s Bountiful is difficult. Wellington and Potter make some very good points in their advocacy for Khor Rori, and Aston offers a compelling case for Khor Kharfot and its land access through Wadi Sayq. From my far-away perspective, Khor Kharfot seems to match the requirements of Nephi’s textual description better than Khor Rori. Having said that, Wellington and Potter’s discussion of the challenges involved in launching a ship and the virtues of a protected port must be seriously considered. In fact, the issues they raise with regard to shipbuilding in general are a valuable contribution to our general understanding of the task Nephi confronted.

Some of the suggestions made by Wellington and Potter, however, raise questions in my mind. They suggest that Nephi’s statement “we did work timbers of curious workmanship” (1 Nephi 18:1) somehow “alludes to the possibility that the timbers he and his brethren were working had already been cut somewhere else” and were “precut in an unfamiliar manner.” But Nephi’s statement is merely a linguistic “cognate objective”—a combination, familiar in Hebrew, where the verb (work) and an aspect of the objective phrase (“timbers of curious workmanship”) are cognate terms. And the notion that lumber to build Nephi’s ship must have come from India seems unlikely. Clearly Nephi had no channel through which to import such wood by himself. And if Indian hardwood was being imported to Oman by other Arabs for shipbuilding during Nephi’s time, we would have to ask ourselves why Nephi had to make his own shipbuilding tools—for surely the other Arab builders would have such tools and Nephi could have purchased them as readily as he could have purchased their imported lumber. The logic of an “imported lumber” model does not hold up for me.

Every aspect of Nephi’s text suggests to me that his family at Bountiful was essentially isolated and alone, with no local Arab population nearby. It was absolutely necessary for Nephi to have his brothers help him in the ship’s construction—no other labor was locally available. Potter and Wellington have suggested elsewhere that after the ship was ready to sail, Nephi actually brought local Arab sailors with the family on the ship’s trans-Pacific voyage. Their article herein implies that, at the very least, Arab sailors would have to have trained Nephi in seamanship. They quote an experienced modern sailor who maintained that “even with the inspiration of the Lord, it was simply impossible for Nephi to have sailed to the New World without training.” But if this refers only to training by other humans, I must reject the notion. The same observation could be made of every prophet who ever accomplished any mighty task, including Joseph Smith, who was not a “trained” linguist or translator but who translated the Book of Mormon nonetheless. God has a proven record of training his servants, by revelation, to accomplish his instructions in ways that defy the understanding of experts. Nephi was no exception. Local Arab sailors were not, in my mind, at all a necessity.

Again, however, the points made by Wellington and Potter regarding the challenge of preparing not only suitable lumber but also sufficient quantities of rope and fabric for the ship’s lines and sails are important issues we must consider when reconstructing the activities of Lehi’s colony at Bountiful. No wonder it took some six years (according to my model) to complete the project. And the challenges of launching the ship, guiding it safely from the shore or harbor to deep water, and of course actually sailing the vessel across the Pacific demand similar consideration.

The publications of both Warren Aston and Kent Brown have enhanced the depth of my appreciation for all that occurred on the journey along the trail of Lehi. And Richard Wellington and George Potter, both in their article herein and in their book *Lehi in the Wilderness*, have greatly increased my appreciation for the remarkable accomplishments of Nephi and his family at Bountiful and on the sea, as well as the adventure of arriving in the New World.
Proposed Route from Jerusalem to Bountiful—Three Viewpoints

Most differences arise in views of the eastward journey. One has Lehi’s group traveling almost directly east; another shows modest variation, with a stop at the watering hole of Shisur; the last holds to a route between the dunes of the Empty Quarter on the north and the al-Mahrah plateau.

Current Political Boundaries of the Arabian Peninsula
OVER THE LAST CENTURY several Latter-day Saint scholars have examined the geographical details in 1 Nephi in order to correlate them with specific sites in the Middle East. Propositions have varied, though not greatly since Nephi provided some fairly explicit pointers, aided by a number of other clues. Hugh Nibley opened the investigation in 1950 with a series of articles titled “Lehi in the Desert,” initially published in the Improvement Era.¹ In 1976 Lynn and Hope Hilton traveled across the Arabian Peninsula in an effort to determine the route of Lehi and Sariah’s journey. Their conclusions were published in a two-part series, “In Search of Lehi’s Trail,” in the September and October 1976 issues of the Ensign magazine,² and a book on their journey appeared that same year.³ Warren and Michaela Aston took several trips to the region in the early 1990s, resulting in two FARMS preliminary reports and a book in 1994, In the Footsteps of Lehi.⁴ Warren Aston published an article on his candidate for Bountiful in the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies in 1998.⁵ George Potter described his proposed site for the Valley of Lemuel in a 1999 JBMS article,⁶ and he and Richard Wellington published Lehi in the Wilderness in 2003.⁷

Other researchers through the years have contributed additional suggestions about sites along Lehi’s trail. There seems to be general agreement among these investigators that Lehi’s party, for most of the journey, traveled on or near the Frankincense Trail, which was a pathway for carrying goods from southern Arabia to the Mediterranean region.
The Valley of Lemuel

Nephi tells us that after his family left Jerusalem, they traveled “by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea” for three days and pitched their tents in a location that Lehi called the “valley of Lemuel” (1 Nephi 2:5,14). Guided by Nephi’s comment that the river Laman “emptied into the fountain of the Red Sea” (v. 9) and “near the mouth thereof” (v. 8), Nibley guessed that the first camp was at “the Gulf of Aqaba at a point not far above the Straits of Tiran.” Lehi may have been standing on “the sides of Mt. Musafa or Mt. Mendisha” when he beheld the river flowing into the Red Sea. The Hiltons concluded that the Valley of Lemuel was an oasis, “Al Beda [or al-Badʿ] in the Wadi El Afal [or al-Ifal], Saudi Arabia.” This would be approximately 75 miles south and east of Aqaba. There are springs in this valley, but streams run seasonally after torrential rains. Potter proposed that the Valley of Lemuel was south of Aqaba at Wadi Tayyib al-Ism (“Valley of the Good Name”), between Bir Marsha and al-Badʿ, near the “Waters of Moses.” It empties into the Gulf of Aqaba on its east shore and is almost 75 miles south of Aqaba. There is a stream there that flows all year long.

Shazer

The location of Shazer is not definite. According to the account, after Lehi had spent a period of time in the Valley of Lemuel, the group traveled four days in a south-southeast direction along the Red Sea. Assuming that their movement covered about 100 miles, the Hiltons concluded that they stopped at “the oasis of Azlan in the Wadi Azlan.” Potter and Wellington believe that Lehi traveled 18 miles from the Valley of Lemuel to al-Badʿ, where he would have had to pay tribute to pass. They suggest that Shazer was 60 miles south-southeast at Wadi Agharr, where there is a delightful oasis—“a valley with trees.” The group stayed there long enough to slay animals, and then they carried on their journey.

Where Nephi’s Bow Broke

This locale presents a challenge for the researcher. As the Hiltons traveled along the coast of the Red Sea, they judged that Nephi broke his bow somewhere in the vicinity of Jiddah, in Saudi Arabia. They noted that there “the weather is a merciless combination of heat, humidity, sand, and salt—a force strong enough to destroy steel.” They saw car...
fenders that had rusted out within a few months. Potter and Wellington sought for a location near Bisha that was on the east side of the al-Sarāt mountains and that had trees with the kind of wood that would have been particularly suitable for Nephi to make a durable bow. Through contact with local experts and written research, they learned that the olive tree exactly fits the requirements. They concluded that the high wadis between al-Qadim and Jabal Azzah northwest of Bisha present the general area where Nephi constructed his bow.¹⁴

Nahom

In 1976 the Hiltons estimated that Nahom was on the 19th parallel, which passes near Najran, and can be identified with al-Qunfudhah in Saudi Arabia. Two years later, Brigham Young University archaeologist Ross Christensen, in a letter to the Ensign, stated that he understood that Nahom can mean “mourning” as well as “comfort” or “consolation” and that these words might have been connected to a burial ground.¹⁵ He noted that Nephi implied that Nahom was an established place-name, not one that Lehi himself had chosen, that the place was likely peopled, and that there might be some linguistic remnant of the name that has survived to our day. He referred to a map made by Carsten Niebuhr in 1763 that featured the place “Nehhm,” located 100 miles east of Luhaiya and about 25 miles north of Sana’a (the name on the map is south of the line the Hiltons drew for their suggested route to Bountiful). In 1991 the Astons confirmed that there was a burial ground in a place called Nehem, which was located just about where one would expect to find it from Nephi’s directions.¹⁶ In 1994 the Astons proposed that the site is near a large valley, Wadi Jawf, in Yemen.¹⁷ In the 2005 FARMS documentary Journey of Faith, Yemeni archaeologist Abdurahman Alghaleb reports his discovery in 1994 of a large burial ground in Wadi Nihm that belongs to the Nihm tribe.

The decisive connection to a tribal area in Yemen by the name of Nahom came to light in 1999 when S. Kent Brown published a short article in JBMS detailing the discovery of an inscribed altar bearing the tribal name NHM, or Nihm/Nahom.¹⁸ The excavators, a German archaeological team working at the Bar'ān temple in Marib (in Yemen), date the altar to the 7th–6th centuries BC, the very time that Lehi and
Sariah were journeying. In 2001 Aston reported on two more 7th–6th century altars from the same site that preserve the tribal name NHM, further cementing this name as a designation contemporary with Lehi and Sariah. It is now clear that the tribal area of Nahom lay on the south edge of Wadi Jawf, the largest drainage in this part of Arabia.19

**Bountiful**

A botanically rich swath of coastal area spans the southern coast of Oman and stretches a short distance into Yemen. Along this coastline several sites are candidates (some stronger than others) for the land of Bountiful where Lehi’s family stopped to camp and to construct a ship. In 1950 Nibley designated the maritime plain south of the Qara mountain range in general as the shore where Lehi’s party camped. The Hiltons in 1976 narrowed the site to “a tiny sickle of land curved around a little bay, about 28 miles long and only 7 miles wide, backed by the Qara Mountains.”20 That location is now called Salalah. Eugene England agreed with this conclusion in an article titled “Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land: Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?”21 The Astons challenged this conclusion in 1994, convinced that the site of Lehi’s camp was Wadi Sayq on the Qamar coast of Oman. The coastal mouth of the valley is Khor Khafrot. It lies almost exactly eastward of Nahom in Yemen and west of Salalah.22 Warren Aston provided further arguments for this view in 1998. Looking in a different place, Potter and Wellington in 2003 designated an area east of Salalah, the deep bay of Khor Rori, as the place where Nephi likely built and launched his ship. In February 2000 a team of BYU geologists located two surface deposits of iron ore on the coast of Dhofar from which Nephi could have obtained ore for making tools to build his ship. One was a few kilometers east of Wadi Sayq, the other 10 kilometers east of Khor Rori, close to Mirbat. Wm. Revell Phillips reported these discoveries in a JBMS article in 2000.24

In summary, what impresses a student of the Book of Mormon is the presence of iron ore, a rich variety of vegetation, and large number of inlet bays (about 12)—all concentrated along the southern coast of Oman, making the area a good fit for Nephi’s description of the place where he built his ship.25
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Birds
ALONG
LEHI’S TRAIL
STEPHEN L. CARR
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD WELLINGTON
THE OPPORTUNITY TO OBSERVE birds of the Middle East came to me in September 2000 as a member of a small group of Latter-day Saints traveling in areas thought to mark the route of Lehi and Sariah’s wilderness trek—from Jerusalem, Israel, to Aqaba, Jordan; and from Sana’a, Yemen, to Dhofar, Oman. Another opportunity came in October 2004 with a second visit to southern Oman, one that included the leading candidates for Nephi’s Bountiful: Khor Kharfot, Khor Rori, and Salalah. For me, an amateur ornithologist, the excitement of these trips was multiplied because I was able to identify numerous birds along the way, most of which might have been present in those regions in 600 BC. Some birds, of course, were forbidden as food for ancient Israelites because of proscriptions in the law of Moses. For Lehi’s people, other birds may have served as food sources in areas where they were plentiful and could be snared.

In Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, Moses outlined many specific birds that were not to be eaten. Some Jewish authorities state one or two reasons for the prohibition, such as to prevent diseases stemming from consuming carrion-eating birds. Others state that the only reason not to eat certain birds was that the Lord wished to try his chosen people. Whatever the case, the majority of proscribed birds are scavengers and carrion eaters, with other birds eating a variety of lower vertebrate animal life that may be disease carriers or poisonous to humans.

The King James translators apparently experienced difficulty in knowing exactly which Middle Eastern birds were meant in certain passages of the Hebrew Bible. Obvious mistranslations of bird names in the King James Version of the Bible have been noted, as in several corrective footnotes in the 1979 Latter-day Saint edition of the KJV. A recent Jewish translation of the Bible makes similar delineations and issues this caveat: “A number of these birds cannot be identified with certainty.”

According to Deuteronomy 14:11 and 14:20, all clean birds could be eaten. Only the “unclean” ones listed in sidebar 1 were prohibited. Mosaic law allowed the majority of the class Aves to be used for food, but because many birds are small and difficult to catch, it naturally follows that only larger birds, such as geese, partridges, and grouse, would have been hunted. Even then, according to the Mosaic law, the birds had to be ritually slaughtered and/or ritually prepared. Lehi, holding the Melchizedek Priesthood, would have been qualified, in the absence of Aaronic Priesthood–holding Levites in his party, to perform the required rituals for food preparation.

The color and activity of bird life undoubtedly did much to offset the tedium of life along the trail to Bountiful. In addition, most land birds are attracted to water sources and may have helped desert travelers like Lehi’s caravan to locate water pockets.

Facing page: The Common Kingfisher is a regular seasonal migrant along the eastern Arabian coast. The Malachite Kingfisher is an inch smaller (5”), with a brilliant blue back and an oversized bright red bill. Both of these birds generally frequent small lakes and water courses that support small fish and surface invertebrates.
If Lehi owned an estate outside the walls of Jerusalem (elevation 2,500 feet above sea level),
his gardens would have been populated with a variety of colorful and interesting birds, with others flying
overhead (see sidebar 2). Birds are attracted to water sources as well as to trees, bushes, and gardens.
Although some fruit-eating birds are considered a nuisance because they ruin much good fruit, they
also eat many fruit- and tree-injuring insects.

Upon leaving Jerusalem, the Lehite colony may have traveled essentially due east to the Jericho area,
crossed the Jordan River near there, continued up into Moabite lands, then taken the King’s Highway
southward in what is now the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Or they could have headed southward
through the Hebron area, then descended to the level of the Dead Sea (elevation 1,200 feet below sea
level) south of the sea itself. On the way they would have seen some of the familiar dry-country birds as
well as a few new ones in the desolate Arabah Valley and in the long gradual climb from the Dead
Sea to sea level at the now-ancient ghost town of Ezion-geber, situated between present-day Eilat,
Israel, and Aqaba, Jordan. Most of these birds live in excessively dry habitats and subsist on seeds and
insects. After three days of travel since encountering the Red Sea, Lehi’s group came to a valley that Lehi
named after Lemuel. During their prolonged stay there, they would have seen many more bird species
than those mentioned in sidebar 3.

When Lehi and his party (which now included Ishmael’s family and Zoram) left the Valley of Lem-
uel, they may have journeyed southeastward, paralleling the eastern shore of the Red Sea for some 50
to 100 miles before crossing the Al-Sarāt Mountains and then traveling on the east side of that range.
Surprisingly, we saw relatively few waterbirds near the coast, although there are presently fishing vil-
lages at intervals along the way. These few birds are listed in sidebar 4.

The higher elevations around Nahom would have brought new varieties of bird life. Then, as the
caravan turned eastward from Nahom (a short dis-
tance east and north of present day Sana’a, Yemen),
it may have first passed by the ancient Marib Dam,
whose construction had begun almost a century
earlier. This dam impounded water from several
nearby canyons (wadis) following heavy rains.
Numerous marsh and freshwater birds would have
been detected in the swampy lands around the res-
ervoir. The group may not have spent much time
there, however, because most of the waterbirds they
would have seen (e.g., herons, egrets, and storks)
were not permitted as food, despite their large size.
Although the ancient dam was breached sometime
after the beginning of the Christian era, the water-
courses and springs still exist today, and a new dam
has been erected to hold water for irrigation. For
several miles east of Marib, the country is quite
green and fertile, with numerous birds flying about
and catching reptiles and amphibians near the edges
of the reservoir and adjacent canals. Near the ruins
of the Temple of the Moon Goddess, a monument
that the Queen of Sheba possibly contributed to,
I watched several birds of the species Little Green
Bee-eater. This rather unimposing light green bird
flashes a bright, almost neon-like iridescent coppery
orange color from the underside of its wings when
it flies out from a branch to catch an errant bee. I
would like to think that some members of the Lehite
party would have been interested and intrigued by this bird since it does not inhabit their native Jerusalem.

After leaving the area of ancient Marib, the party traveled in extreme desert habitat—far from the Red or Arabian seas, along the southern edge of the vast Rub’ al-Khali, the Empty Quarter of the Arabian Peninsula, where only the hardiest of animals have adapted to survive. As expected, we saw very few birds as we traversed this harsh terrain devoid of the two most likely food sources for most land birds—plants with seeds that birds can extract and plants with insects. I did identify three insectivorous species that flew in, landed in the rocks, and tried to locate some morsel of food; but I could not tell how successful they were. One of them, a Long-tailed Shrike, came up to the hubcap of one of our vehicles and pecked and hammered at its reflection. Apparently it injured itself in so doing, because two minutes after I picked it up, it died in my hand.

Judging from the scriptural account, this hostile desert area was probably where the Lord did not allow the families to “make much fire,” saying, “I will make thy food become sweet, that ye cook it not” (1 Nephi 17:12). Before entering this bewildering desert, Lehi’s people could have harvested a number of mammals—ibex, wild goats, and ground fowl such as partridges and sandgrouse, to name a few. They then could have prepared the meat by smoking or drying it so it would be sweet and edible and require no further cooking during the next stage of their journey (see sidebar 5).

The Lord specified that animals that had cloven hooves and chewed their cud were clean and could

The Western Reef Heron occurs in two forms—one dark blue and the other white. Although large and imposing, it was an unclean bird according to the Mosaic law and therefore could not have been used for food. It is found along the shores of the Red Sea and the Arabian Peninsula.
be eaten (see Leviticus 11:3). This category included cattle, sheep, goats, deer, ibex, and antelope. Specifically mentioned as being unclean were camels, swine, and two small rodent-like mammals—the coney and the hare (11:4–7). The prohibition was then extended to virtually all other mammals that walked on four paws (11:27). This would include the dog, cat, weasel, rabbit, and rodent families. Bats were also included, though listed with the unclean birds (11:19). Also deemed unclean were animals that “creepeth upon the earth”—reptiles such as tortoises, lizards, chameleons, and presumably snakes and amphibians (11:29–30, 41; see Acts 10:11–14). Perhaps the Lord would not allow birds of prey to be used as food because they live almost entirely on small mammals and reptiles. The hawk and falcon families were proscribed (even if they never ate carrion as do vultures and some eagles) because they ate food that was not permitted for human consumption. Even though several of the smaller falcons and small owls subsist mainly on insects that were considered clean (e.g., the locust, bald locust [solpugid], cricket, and grasshopper family), they occasionally eat mice and voles and thus were also unclean.

At numerous places along the trail, particularly in the Aqaba area north of Sana’a and in the plateau country at the head of Wadi Sayq, we saw large hawks and eagles soaring in the air, searching the ground for prey. The number of such resident raptors usually indicates the types and quantity of animals (or carrion) available in the area. We never actually saw any of these birds swoop and dive down to catch prey, but there probably were numerous rodents and reptiles in the territory.

Eventually the Lehite colony, including the children born in the previous years, continued roughly due eastward from Nahom. As they emerged from the desert—whether at Wadi Sayq, at the wadis reaching the coast at Khor Rori or Salalah, or even at another site—looking ahead they could probably see fog and mist, large and abundant trees, and increased bird activity. As our expedition descended Wadi Sayq, vegetation increased to jungle proportions near the mouth, with numerous date and other palm trees, wild fig trees, and several other hardwood trees within a few hundred feet of the beach. We observed many birds in the wadi, as well as in the freshwater lagoon and marsh at Khor Kharfot. This water is produced by a permanently running spring, supporting a variety of grasses, reeds, and other plants.

A pair of brilliantly colored turquoise blue and orange Malachite Kingfishers, very small for kingfishers at barely 4.5 inches in length, repeatedly dived off
a reed to capture small minnowlike fish in the pool. This bird is so tiny that it appears to be a fat hummingbird with a large, bright red bill. This species is not known to breed outside of Africa; in fact, there are only two previous records of a single bird each on the Arabian Peninsula, both in Yemen. I have officially reported this sighting because it represents the farthest north and east record of this species. (See sidebar 6 for birds identified in Wadi Sayq/Khor Kharfot.)

Since it is possible that the Lehites descended from the plateau to the coast at Salalah, we evaluated that site as well. There is a freshwater pond and a large sea inlet with many marshy areas, and the avian activity was superb. The coastal area around Salalah is more extensive than at Khor Kharfot, with much human activity, which is completely lacking at Khor Kharfot. Despite the large number of people near the shores, the beach-combing sandpipers and plovers were quite numerous, allowing people to come fairly close to them before they moved away. (See sidebar 7 for birds at Salalah.)

Even relatively small birds like sandpipers could produce quite a stewpot if enough of them were caught at one time, such as during migration. During the spring and autumn months, the coasts of Arabia experience huge numbers of birds migrating from Europe and Asia to Africa. (We happened to be in the land Bountiful area in September and October.) It is certainly conceivable that the older people of Lehi’s party taught the younger ones how to make traps and snares to capture shorebirds as they landed in large numbers on the beaches to feed before resuming their flights. In addition, some of the larger edible birds, such as geese and swans, could have been taken with a throwing stick or arrow if a hunter crept up close enough or hid in a reed-enclosed blind. And the eggs and young of clean birds could have been harvested during breeding season.

In our two and a half weeks along the proposed Lehi trail, plus another week in and around Salalah and Khor Kharfot, we were able to identify a large number of birds. Of course, there were many more that we did not see because of the scarcity of certain species, migration patterns, food availability, and habitat differences. During their eight years in the wilderness, Lehi’s people probably would have become quite proficient in identifying which edible birds could be captured with the least effort. We can imagine that after a day of shipbuilding in the land Bountiful, the more introspective members of the group found time to enjoy watching the various birds flitting from tree to tree or the little kingfishers flying down from an overhanging reed to pluck a tiny fish from the pond, then flying back to the reed and juggling the fish so it could be swallowed headfirst.

The sidebars that follow list the birds spotted along the proposed Lehi trail by Stephen L. Carr in 2000 and 2004. Bird names appear in standard taxonomic order, as found in Birds of the World: A Checklist, by James F. Clements. Regional field guides were consulted to identify birds and determine their geographical distribution. In most cases, each listed bird represents multiple sightings. Asterisks identify unclean (prohibited) birds, and question marks identify possibly unclean birds.
**SIDEBAR 1**

**UNCLEAN BIRDS**
(see Leviticus 11:13–19 and Deuteronomy 14:11–20)

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**SIDEBAR 2**

**BIRDS OF JERUSALEM AND ENVIRONS**

- Eurasian Kestrel*
- Sooty Falcon*
- Oriental Turtle-Dove
- Palm (Laughing) Dove
- Eurasian Swift
- Eurasian Crag-Martin
- Common House-Martin

White-spectacled Bulbul (a common songbird that essentially takes the place of the American Robin of North America and that has a similar melodious song)

- Eurasian Blackbird
- Streaked Scrub-Warbler
- Wood Warbler
- Spotted Flycatcher
- Isabelline Wheatear

Palestine Sunbird (there are no hummingbirds in the Eastern Hemisphere; the Sunbird family replaces them, although they are in no way related)

- Arabian Babbler
- Eurasian Jackdaw*
- House Crow*
- Hooded (Carrion) Crow*

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**SIDEBAR 3**

**BIRDS SEEN BETWEEN JERUSALEM AND AQABA, JORDAN**

- Long-legged Buzzard*
- African Rock-Martin
- White-tailed Wheatear
- Blackstart
- Brown-necked Raven*
- Tristram’s Starling
- Dead Sea Sparrow
**SIDEBAR 4**

**Birds along the Coast of the Red Sea**

White-eyed Gull*
Sooty Gull*
Caspian Tern ? (of the same family as gulls, terns belong to a different subfamily, one that does not scavenge as gulls do but rather dives into the water to catch fish)
Great Crested Tern ?

**SIDEBAR 5**

**Birds in the Deserts Eastward from Nahom and the Marshes around Marib**

Gray Heron*
Black Kite*
Spotted Thick-knee
Namaqua Dove
Little Swift
Little Green Bee-eater
Eurasian Hoopoe*
Yellow Wagtail
Shining Sunbird
Long-tailed Shrike
Fan-tailed Raven*
Yellowhammer
Cinereous Bunting

**SIDEBAR 6**

**Birds in Wadi Sayq from the Plateau to the Coast**

**Upper Reaches of the Wadi**
Verreaux’s Eagle*
Short-toed Eagle*
Bonelli’s Eagle*
Booted Eagle*
Eurasian Buzzard*
Eurasian Sparrowhawk*
Eurasian Kestrel*
Barbary Falcon*
Oriental Turtle-Dove
Bruce’s Green Pigeon
Pied Kingfisher
Gray-headed Kingfisher
Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark
Singing Bush-Lark
Fan-tailed Raven*
White-spectacled Bulbul
White Wagtail
Hooded Wheatear
Hume’s Wheatear
Desert Wheatear
Variable Wheatear
Common Redstart
Dark-throated Thrush
Savi’s Warbler
Arabian Warbler
Palestine Sunbird
Rufous-tailed Shrike
Tristram’s Starling
Cinnamon-breasted Bunting

**On the Coast and Out into the Ocean**
Socotra Cormorant*
Masked Booby
Gray Heron*
Western Reef Heron*
Little Egret*
Greater Flamingo? (probably was prohibited because it belongs to the general stork family)

Mallard
Eurasian Wigeon
Eurasian Buzzard*
Eurasian Kestrel*
Kentish (Snowy) Plover? (see no. 22 in sidebar 1)
Common Ringed Plover? (ditto)
Red-wattled Lapwing? (ditto)
White-tailed Lapwing? (ditto)
Common Sandpiper
Eurasian Curlew
Common Redshank
Common Greenshank
Terek Sandpiper
Ruddy Turnstone
Common Moorhen
Sooty Gull*
Herring Gull*
Lesser Black-backed Gull*
Slender-billed Gull*
Bridled Tern?
Great Crested (Swift) Tern?
Brown Noddy? (this is a type of tern)
Palm (Laughing) Dove
Malachite Kingfisher
Gray-headed Kingfisher
Common Kingfisher
Eurasian Roller
Eurasian Hoopoe*
Rock Pigeon
African Rock Martin
Desert Wheatear
Blackstart
Spotted Flycatcher
Rufous-tailed Shrike
Tristram's Starling
Rueppell's Weaver

SIDEBAR 7

BIRDS SEEN IN THE COASTAL AREA OF SALALAH

Gray Heron*
Little Egret*
Western Reef Heron*
Striated Heron*
Great (Eurasian) Bittern*
White Stork*
African Spoonbill? (probably was prohibited because it belongs to the general stork family)
Greater Flamingo? (ditto)
Bateleur* (a large eagle)
Osprey*
Western Marsh Harrier*
Eurasian Kestrel*
Arabian Partridge
Eurasian Coot
Common Moorhen
Eurasian Oystercatcher
Black-winged Stilt
Lesser Sand-Plover
Bar-tailed Godwit
Eurasian Curlew
Marsh Sandpiper
Common Sandpiper
Little Stint
Terek Sandpiper
Common Snipe
Common Redshank
Spotted Redshank
Common Greenshank
Sooty Gull*
Herring Gull*
Great Crested Tern?
Saunders's Tern?
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Palm (Laughing) Dove
Common Swift
Pallid Swift
Gray-headed Kingfisher
Eurasian Roller
Crested Lark
Barn Swallow
Spotted Flycatcher
White-spectacled Bulbul
White Wagtail
Yellow Wagtail
Citrine Wagtail
Fan-tailed Raven*

Rufous-tailed Shrike
Palestine Sunbird
Graceful Prinia
Upcher's Warbler
Plain Leaf-Warbler
Tristram's Starling
Rueppell's Weaver
African Silverbill
House Bunting
Black-headed Bunting

Wagtails are birds of the open ground and are named because they constantly flick their tails sideways and occasionally up and down. This Yellow Wagtail would have been seen in substantial numbers during spring and fall migration. The Lehites in Bountiful would have been charmed by their presence.
WEATHER REPORT from the Valley of Lemuel, by Joseph Brickey
His eight-year, 2,000-mile journey took him the length of a subcontinent, often on or parallel to well-worn trails of trade caravans that could cover the same distance in a few months. Arabia is well known as a land of drifting sand, scorching heat, and few water sources, and those who chose to live there endured a marginal subsistence, subject to drought, famine, and forced migration. They were nomads by necessity. But was it always so? Did Lehi face the same harsh environment and the seemingly impossible task that such a journey would present today?

The Arabian Peninsula and the Sahara of Africa lie in the zone of tropical deserts, defined by the horse latitudes (about 30 degrees north latitude) on the north and the equatorial jungle on the south, where prevailing trade winds blow toward the equator, allowing felucca boats to sail upstream against the current of the Nile. Moving south, the trade winds become warmer, their ability to hold moisture increases, and they surrender very little rain to the deserts below. Near the equator, trade winds coming from the north meet corresponding trade winds coming from the south and rise into the upper atmosphere where the air cools and gives up its moisture as torrential rains along the equatorial jungle belt. North of the horse latitudes, the prevailing westerlies blow north, cooling as they go and yielding a more or less uniform blanket of rainfall over the zone of temperate climate and the croplands of the world. These climate zones explain the existence of a jungle belt through central Africa, a desert zone from the jungle to the southern margin of the Mediterranean, and a temperate zone through all of Europe and Asia Minor. Ancient climates have been extensively studied in Arabia and the Near East because these climate patterns are apparent there and because extensive historical and archaeological records are available.

This simple picture is complicated by local topography and by superimposed monsoonal wind patterns. The rainfall in southwestern Arabia depends largely on monsoonal winds that deposit rain in the late summer on the incense-growing coastal highlands, leaving the interior regions dry. In northern Arabia, rains come mostly in the winter, and in central Arabia, the wind patterns may overlap. In prehistory the monsoonal rains extended much farther north.
Climate Changes of Prehistory

In the late Pleistocene (about 15,000 years ago), the world climate was generally colder and dryer than it is now. Precipitation was considerably less, and much of it was in the form of snow. Evaporation was minimal, however, so what fell endured, much like the polar zones of today. The oceans were 328 to 410 feet below present levels, and the Red Sea was a freshwater marsh isolated from the Indian Ocean.\(^3\) As the glaciers melted after 10,000 BC, the sea level rose rapidly and northern Arabia and the Sahara became open grassy steppe land with numerous lakes. Grasslands attracted game animals and birds, followed by hunter-gatherer populations. Human occupation in northern Arabia was extensive, reaching a maximum population shortly after 4000 BC.\(^4\) Maximum moisture appeared about 5000–4000 BC, lakes were abundant, and agricultural settlements and population density were concentrated in the subhumid, lightly wooded areas of the Fertile Crescent.

Climate Changes of the Historical Period

About 3000 BC, rainfall declined over the entire Near East, and Arabia became warm and dry from about 2400 to 800 BC (except for a wetter spell about 1200 BC).\(^5\) During this early period, the Dead Sea dropped almost 328 feet and withdrew from the Jordan Valley. Nomads abandoned settlements in the Negev (southern Israel), and both men and animals were concentrated in oases around shrinking lakes and drying springs. Populations were forced to migrate to the fringes of the deserts or to the valleys of the Tigris-Euphrates or the Nile, where water sources were dependable. Arad, in the northern Negev, was deserted about 2600 BC and Subir, in the Tigris-Euphrates valley, about 2200 BC.\(^6\) Collapse of the large Mesopotamian civilizations about 2000 BC has been attributed to Semitic invaders and poor irrigation procedures, resulting in salination of agricultural soil. Records show increased barley production in preference to wheat, which is less salt tolerant. But surely the drying climate was also a factor in the demise of those civilizations.

The Middle Bronze Age (1500 BC) began as a warm, dry period, with high sea levels in the Mediterranean and Red seas and low lake levels in the Dead Sea.\(^7\) But about 1400 BC, not long before the Israelites fled from Egypt, there was a trend toward increased precipitation that continued almost to 1000 BC. The Dead Sea rose, and settlements of seminomadic tribes appeared along the desert margins of the Negev. The Tigris-Euphrates reached its peak flow between 1350 and 1250 BC.\(^8\)

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\(^3\) As the glaciers melted after 10,000 BC, the sea level rose rapidly and northern Arabia and the Sahara became open grassy steppe land with numerous lakes. Grasslands attracted game animals and birds, followed by hunter-gatherer populations. Human occupation in northern Arabia was extensive, reaching a maximum population shortly after 4000 BC.\(^4\) Maximum moisture appeared about 5000–4000 BC, lakes were abundant, and agricultural settlements and population density were concentrated in the subhumid, lightly wooded areas of the Fertile Crescent.

Fig. 1. World climate zones. The Northern and Southern Hemispheres display three distinct climate zones: (1) the tropic zone, at 0º–30º latitude, where trade winds blow toward the equator from north and south, heavy rainfall produces a jungle climate near the equator as trade winds rise into the upper atmosphere, and little rainfall and desert conditions prevail between the horse latitudes (30º) and the jungle belt; (2) the temperate zone, at 30º–60º latitude, where the prevailing westerlies, which blow away from the horse latitudes toward the poles and away from the equator, cool as the air moves toward the poles and drops rain more or less uniformly over the world’s agricultural lands; and (3) the polar zone, at 60º–90º latitude, where the polar easterlies blow away from the poles and drop little moisture above 60º, creating a frozen desert.
The brief wet period about 1200 BC was followed by increasing dryness coincident with a period of great turmoil in the Mediterranean region. The indeterminate “Peoples of the Sea” and the Hebrews were new to Palestine. Hebrew tribes settled along the desert margins where the Canaanite population was sparse, especially in the mountainous areas near springs. Lybians and the Peoples of the Sea invaded Egypt but were repelled, the Hittite kingdom collapsed and disappeared, and big city-states along the Syrian coast (Ugarit and Alalach) were suddenly destroyed and never reoccupied. Cyprus was ravaged, and important cities in Canaan like Hazor, Lachish, Beth Shean, Megiddo, and others were destroyed. Trade routes were disrupted. Tin, which alloyed with copper to make bronze, ceased to reach the eastern Mediterranean, and the Middle East was forced into the Iron Age. A more favorable climate accompanied the transition from the Late Bronze to the Iron Age.10

A return to aridity at the end of the 13th century may have prompted the Canaanites to introduce the concept of cisterns, which allowed small independent settlements to survive in the desert regions and in the mountains of the Negev and Sinai. For the first time, settlements could be established far from springs and watercourses.11 Desert settlements of the Early Iron Age were unwalled farms, but they had become a complex of walled fortifications and agricultural lands by the time of the Israelite kings. David and Solomon built fortresses in the Negev to control commercial routes to Aqaba-Eilat and as a defense system in the southern part of the Israelite kingdom. The Old Testament speaks of a drought during the reign of King Ahab (869–850 BC) that was brought to an end by the prophet Elijah (see 1 Kings 18:41–45).

Arabia Felix

The name Arabia Felix (“Fortunate Arabia”) suggests a favorable land, and ancient writers displayed
their ignorance by describing in glowing terms a land they had never seen. Theophrastus wrote of frankincense growing in mountains that were “lofty, forest-covered and subject to snow, and rivers from them flow down into the plain.”

Eratosthenes spoke of a fertile land with rivers leading to lakes and an abundance of domestic animals, and Photius (quoting Agatharchides) described the Arabian Red Sea coast as “an extensive and exceedingly well watered shore.” Pliny’s frankincense-producing district, called Sariba, was said to have hills with “natural forests on them running right down to the level ground.” These classical writers undoubtedly relied on the faulty reports conceived and exchanged among themselves as they described a land foreign to what Lehi and Sariah would experience.

The Climate of Lehi’s Journey

Studies in recent decades shed light on general climatic conditions in the Mediterranean and in Arabia around the time of Lehi. For example, Nigel Groom reports a wetter period in Arabia from 700 to 250 BC, and J. Neumann notes a cool, wet climate in Italy after 800 BC. Temperature curves of Mebus Geyh and Arie Issar show a minor temperature decline about 600 BC or slightly later (see figure 2).

Thus in their wilderness travels upon fleeing Jerusalem, Lehi and Sariah may have enjoyed slightly cooler temperatures, greater-than-average rainfall, and elevated sea levels resulting from the earlier warm periods that lasted for several hundred years. Hugh Nibley concluded, however, “Though some observers think the area enjoyed a little more rainfall in antiquity than it does today, all are agreed that the change of climate has not been considerable since prehistoric times—it was at best almost as bad then as it is now.” There is scarce evidence, indeed, to believe that Lehi and Sariah faced a climate or an environment greatly different from what we see in western Arabia today.

The River of Laman and the Valley of Lemuel

Nephi records that Lehi “came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea; and he traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea; and . . . when he had traveled three days in the wilderness, he pitched his tent in a valley by the side of a river of water” (1 Nephi 2:5, 6). Nephi describes that “river of water” as “continually running,” flowing through a valley that is “firm and steadfast, and immovable,” and emptying “into the fountain of the Red Sea” (2:9, 10).

One of the few rivers that run all year in Yemen. Photo courtesy Kim Clark.

Smooth rocks and a flat gravel floor witness that a sizable stream once flowed through Wadi Tayyib al-Ism’s lower canyon. Photo courtesy George Potter.
In recent years, George D. Potter and Richard Wellington located and described what appears to be the only perennial watercourse flowing from the Arabian Peninsula into the Red Sea, making Wadi Tayyib al-Ism and its tiny stream the leading candidates for the Valley of Lemuel and the River of Laman.\textsuperscript{17} In the Near East, words for “river” could mean a large river, as we understand the word, a small stream, or even a dry wadi that may contain water only after a rainstorm.\textsuperscript{18} The River of Laman was certainly not a large river; if it were, it would have been well known and named, and a settlement would have arisen near its banks. In Arabia no water source goes unnoticed, and every water source is claimed by someone.\textsuperscript{19} Lehi must have obtained permission from some local tribal chief to camp on his land and use water from his “river,” and he may well have paid for the privilege. Nephi’s use of the term \textit{wilder-ness} in connection with his three-day journey from where he reached the “Red Sea” (Aqaba?) to the “river of Laman” implies that the group had little contact with other people. Indeed, the proposed Valley of Lemuel is without settlement today although it is certainly not without visitors, lost and forgotten. Several ancient encampments can be recognized in the upper valley 3½ miles from the coast, and one or more appear to be Iron Age sites possibly related to Nephi’s account.

Potter and Wellington describe the upper valley (above the springs that give rise to the “river”) as an oasis of about one square mile with 12 wells and several hundred palm trees lying at the low end of a 12-mile-long wadi. Potter quotes geologist Wes Gardner, who estimates a watershed drainage basin of over 100 square miles, providing water for the wells Reaching much higher than seen here, the towering walls of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism’s lower canyon dwarf the vehicle on the canyon floor. Photo courtesy George Potter.
and the “river.” At Qurayya, about 78 miles east of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, are a good sandstone aquifer (underlain by a layer of kaolin clay) and a complex network of irrigation channels that brought abundant water from a large natural spring to the surrounding cultivated fields. If the same geological conditions exist in the upper valley of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, or if the granite body exposed in the canyon underlies the drainage basin, the upper valley may have a perched water table with a collection basin of 100 square miles. This seems likely because Potter reports that the springs at the source of the “river” break out 600 feet down the narrow canyon below the upper valley floor, presumably at the impermeable interface.

Today rainfall does not completely recharge the groundwater basin, and gasoline-driven pumps further lower the water table. Lehi may have enjoyed somewhat greater rainfall and a fully charged water table.

After establishing an extensive camp in a desirable location and forging favorable relations with local bedouin leaders, Lehi may well have remained at the oasis for a long time, perhaps several years. He was far enough from Jerusalem to be beyond the reach of those who perhaps wished him harm, and he was well off the main north–south trade route, the well-used spice and incense trail that led east through the Midian mountains.

Lehi’s oasis had arable land and water for irrigation, and a reconnaissance survey of the northwestern province of Saudi Arabia would seem to open endless possibilities for ancient agriculture. In addition to irrigation channels at Qurayya, “possible evidence of ancient irrigation in the Al-Bad area suggests that agricultural methods similar to those at Qurayya may have been used at this time [Iron Age].” Lehi may have paused in several places along the way to cultivate land and harvest crops. He had brought from Jerusalem “all manner of seeds of every kind” (1 Nephi 8:1) intended for the fertile soil of the “promised land” (see 18:24).

Potter and Wellington identify the canyon of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism as the probable Valley of Lemuel. It is only one of several wadis along the northern Aqaba coast that were cut through the granitic basement rock of the coastal highlands by streams flowing several million years ago in the Pliocene epoch, which was the last major humid period in the Hijaz. The modern topography is largely the result of this period of erosion. The valley is a deep, narrow canyon with granite sidewalls rising to 2,000 feet in places and is unique by virtue of the tiny stream that flows south from the oasis and veers west through the canyon into the Red Sea. At the mouth of the wadi is a beautiful cove with palm trees, and here the surface water disappears into the gravel of a narrow beach, flowing through the gravel into the open sea.

In light of all the above, what might Lehi and Sariah have encountered in the Valley of Lemuel on their remarkable journey of faith? Surely the shape and character of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism and the general topography of the Red Sea coast have changed little, and studies of earlier climates allow for only a little more rainfall and slightly cooler temperatures. Historically, however, slight changes in climate in Arabia have brought about mass migrations of indigenous peoples to and from the desert regions and have spelled the difference between cultivated green fields and desert sand, between life and death. Even a little more rain meant more water for the River of Laman and for Lehi’s crops and more vegetation for pack animals and game animals. Perhaps Arabia was a little kinder to Lehi and his party than to those who wander the trails of Arabia today. It would not be the first or the last time that God smoothed the way for those in his service.
With Real Intent

Out of Judaism
Nancy Goldberg Hilton

My Jewish Heritage

I remember sitting in a synagogue as a child, listening to the cantor sing the ancient songs of my people. His tone was melodious and reassuring, his words inspiring. Then I would listen to the rabbi speak words of praise to the one eternal God. We would arise and sing together the sacred prayer of the Jewish people, the Shema:

Shema Yisrael Adonai
Eloheinu Adonai Echad
Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One.
Barukh Shem kvod mal-khuto le’olam va’ed
Praised be his name whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever.

Then we would all say together in Hebrew and then in English:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

As a young child, I felt close to God every time I said these words. I would look around the synagogue. In the front of the room stood our rabbi. Behind him, covered with a curtain, were the Torah scrolls. I would sit quietly, feeling reassured and at peace with my surroundings.

As a young girl, I went to Hebrew school and was taught the stories of my ancient Jewish faith in a God who opened the Red Sea and brought my people out of Egypt. I learned about a powerful God who established temple worship, provided miracles for my people, and made a covenant with Father Abraham (see Genesis 22:15–18). Ours was a God who gave instructions to ancient prophets who in turn led and guided the Jewish nation.

Although I loved to learn and sing the traditional Jewish prayers in the synagogue, I always felt there had to be more than this, more to know about this God whom we worshipped. What happened to this God? Where is he now? The God I learned about was an ancient God, and all of his actions and miracles happened a long time ago.

I was also taught that God had no form or substance, that prophets had ceased to exist on the earth, that our counsel should now come from our rabbis, and that Jewish life centered in the synagogue, not the temple. I was taught that if I followed the laws of God and our traditions, I would maintain my connection with God. But what was this connection? Why did I need it? What was the meaning of Judaism?

As I grew older, my need for God faded and thoughts of boyfriends, parties, and schoolwork occupied my time. After all, who was God anyway? I realized that
this God had abandoned us in our greatest times of national trial (the Holocaust during World War II). Because of this perception, I lost hope that there was a true and living God who could help me in this life. I came to believe that God’s promises were hollow and his covenant meaningless. He was not a living God that I could depend on. He was not real. So I abandoned my belief in him and turned my back on thinking about him or relying on him. After all, there were no more miracles.

I eventually graduated from college and married a Jewish man. I became a successful businesswoman and had all the trappings of worldly success. I kept the traditions of my Jewish heritage and went to High Holy Day services (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) and Passover. But these were mainly family gatherings and traditions. I did not understand the need for God, nor did I understand his purpose.

The year 1992 was pivotal for me. I had achieved success in business, but I felt a deep emptiness inside of me. I wondered if there was more to life than the success I had achieved or the things I had acquired. I went searching for help from the spiritual realm. I still did not believe in God and definitely did not believe in Jesus Christ. I actually feared the name of Jesus Christ, for it meant persecution to me and Judah.

For some reason I began to pray each night saying the Shema, the sacred Jewish prayer. I did not understand why I did this, but I felt better doing it. I did not realize how God would eventually answer my prayer.

My Burning Bush Experience

My quest for spiritual assistance resulted in a miracle that occurred in 1992 at a place called Rainbow Bridge, located on Lake Powell in Utah. I had accepted an invitation from my parents to accompany them on a vacation to Lake Powell and to see the natural sandstone bridge located there. I had always wanted to see Rainbow Bridge. For some reason, I was anxious to get there. In fact, I felt a sense of urgency.

It had been raining that day, and I found myself all alone. As I walked under the bridge, I heard one loud clap of thunder! It shook the earth. The sound of the thunder coursed through me, and I felt a great change enter my whole being. My mind was instantly opened to understand the things of God. All my feelings of darkness and evil left me. I instantly accepted the reality of God’s being. I knew that Jesus Christ was his Son, a person whose love extended to me at this time of personal crisis. He was truly my Savior at that moment when all thoughts of my past trials faded and my heart was filled with wonder, compassion, peace, and love. This experience was brief, but its effect on my life will last forever.

I stood in the rain not feeling cold or wet, but feeling free from darkness and at peace. I was filled with a spirit of joy that words cannot describe. I felt a strong and powerful connection to God and his Son Jesus Christ. I remember feeling at one with them and everything around me. It was as if the world were in perfect unison, everything in order. I knew God was at the helm.
But knowing that God and Jesus Christ were real was not enough for me. I wanted to know their doctrine and the purpose of Jesus Christ.

My Quest to Understand Jesus Christ

After this miracle, I set out on a journey of inquiry to see if I could bring together my ancient Judaism with information I would receive from the Christian community about God and Jesus Christ. When I experienced my miracle, I knew that God’s plan was perfect, so there should be some way to learn about this plan.

The first thing I did was to purchase a Bible containing both the Old and New Testaments. As a child in Hebrew school, I had read parts of the five books of Moses, but that was the extent of my scripture study.

I was surprised to discover that the New Testament was also written by Jews. Peter, James, John, Matthew, Mark, and Paul were all Jewish. I never knew this before because I had never read or owned a New Testament. Jesus Christ was also Jewish, and now I had the book that gave the details of his life. This was important information.

I kept reading the New Testament but still did not have a clear understanding of Jesus Christ and what he did for us. Why did he die? What was the meaning of his atoning sacrifice? Why was it important that he overcame death? What did all this have to do with me?

Over the next four years, many wonderful and caring people who truly believe in Jesus Christ invited me to visit their churches; but I did not feel that any of their churches were right for me. Everywhere I went I felt uncomfortable. I was a Jew walking in a Christian world that could not relate to me nor I to it. Why was this so?

They were silent about the contributions of the Jews to Christianity. It was totally ignored and actually forgotten. I found each church was separate and apart. But I knew that we should all be one. Paul taught, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5). Where was this oneness, this feeling of unity of purpose with our God and his Son Jesus Christ?

After my experiences with the many forms of Christian religion that I encountered over four years, I finally decided to give up. No one had the answers that I sought. None of them expressed a belief in a living, powerful God—a God of miracles. They did not believe in inspiration or revelation. After my incredible experience at Rainbow Bridge, I knew God was real and that Jesus Christ was his Son. That should be enough for me.

My quest had failed. I did not feel, not once, in any of the churches I visited the same kind of spirit that I felt at Rainbow Bridge. Shouldn’t I have felt that same feeling if I were in the right church?

The Book of Mormon

In 1995 I had my own title insurance business in Dallas, Texas. While in Houston, for a meeting, I told my business contact about my belief in Jesus Christ. He asked if I would accept a book to read, and when I responded affirmatively, he handed me a copy of the Book of Mormon. He said he was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, known as the Mormons. He briefly explained the nature of this book and marked a few passages he thought I would like to read. I felt a new window of spirituality beginning to open.

On the airplane back to Dallas, I read in the book’s introduction: “The Book of Mormon is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible. It is a record of God’s dealings with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains, as does the Bible, the fulness of the everlasting gospel.”

A sense of peace and love filled my heart again. Tears came to my eyes. I recognized the same spiritual force I felt at Rainbow Bridge. This book was fascinating. I read with great interest the title page: “Written to . . . Jew and Gentile—Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation— . . . To come forth by the gift and power of God . . . that they [the remnants of the House of Israel] may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ.”

Then I started to read the first chapter of the Book of Mormon, entitled “The First Book of Nephi.” To me, reading this book was like looking at the history of the Jewish nation in a new light, one that revealed the inspiration of a living God who continued to strive with his people and communicate through prophets even in the
New World. The life of Lehi and his family is described in detail as he preached to the people in Jerusalem and then fled for his life to a promised land in America.

I was interested to learn that Lehi carried with him to the New World the “plates of brass,” containing “the five books of Moses, which gave an account of the creation of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents; and also a record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah; and also the prophecies of the holy prophets, from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah; and also many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah” (1 Nephi 5:11–13).

Lehi, his family, and many of his descendants kept the law of Moses in America, and they offered sacrifices and built synagogues and temples. As I read further, my mind started to open to a new truth, one that would consume my thoughts: this book described the history of the Jews; linked it to Jesus Christ, the Messiah; and then brought it forward in time to a glorious gathering in the last days.

I had heard the term Messiah in my Jewish religion but never understood who this should be or what he should do for us. Could it be that our prophets through the ages actually preached of the coming of Jesus Christ as our Messiah who would come to earth as the Son of God and overcome death and sin as the Book of Mormon says? Was what Lehi preached in Jerusalem and in America the same as what other prophets preached from the beginning? Was that why Lehi was threatened and had to flee Jerusalem for his life? Nephi, the son of Lehi, said that the Messiah would come 600 years from the time that his father left Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 10:4). That would be the time that Jesus Christ was born in Jerusalem. So was the fulness of the gospel preached in Jerusalem as Lehi said it was?

Why had this information been lost? What happened to it? Is this why the Book of Mormon was preserved—so that we, as Jews, could understand what information had been lost from our Old Testament? Was Isaiah referring to the Book of Mormon when he wrote of a sealed book delivered to “him that is not learned” and then foresaw the day when “the deaf [shall] hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness”? (Isaiah 29:11–12, 18).

Maybe this Book of Mormon was the link I was looking for to bridge the Old and New Testaments, linking Judaism and Jesus Christ.

Gospel Questions Answered

The Houston business associate came to Dallas the following week. I had so many questions to ask him. I will never forget that day! I asked him, “Who was Jesus Christ? What was his purpose? Do I have a purpose on the earth? What happens after I die?” This kindly man said, “I know the answers.” Then he explained, over several hours, the answers to my questions. When I asked how he knew his answers were true, he said he knew they were true through the Holy Spirit of God. He said he would have some missionaries come and teach me if I wanted to learn more. I felt a strong connection to God as I listened to him—the same kind of feeling I had experienced at Rainbow Bridge. I decided to investigate his church.

I continued to read the Book of Mormon with increasing interest. I also read the story of Joseph Smith, a modern prophet. When he was a young man he wanted to know which church to join, which one had the true doctrine of Jesus Christ. Early in the spring of the year 1820, Joseph Smith, after prayer, received a glorious vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son.

I could certainly relate to his story. Like young Joseph, I too had been on a quest to learn the truth of the gospel and had gone to many churches. I had also experienced a spiritual battle and a glorious miracle of God. In my case, I did not see the physical presence of God or his Son, but the impression left on my mind was clear and personal. Now I also knew that God and Jesus Christ have tangible bodies. What rejoicing I felt in my soul! I believed that Joseph Smith told the truth.

Learning the Restored Gospel

Two weeks later I received a telephone call from two 20-year-old missionaries who said they could teach me some lessons about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We set a date and time to meet at their church building. When I
saw their church building, there was no cross on the roof. In fact, it was a plain building with no pretense or adornments. It was the same inside—no crucifixes to emphasize the death of Christ, no candles, no bells, no incense, no money boxes, no icons on the walls. I liked that.

The missionaries explained that there were six lessons and gave me an outline of what they covered. I remember that the fourth one taught about the plan of salvation and life after death. I asked them to teach me that one first. But they refused, saying that all the knowledge I would receive would be built line upon line and that I had to start at the beginning.

I would see if what I learned from this church would clear up the questions I had during my four-year search. The missionaries certainly had my attention for two reasons. One was the Book of Mormon (which I was reading), and the other was the spiritual feeling I had while reading this book and while listening to the doctrines the missionaries taught.

The basic message from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the restoration in modern times of the ancient gospel of Jesus Christ. I was told that I would learn the true gospel, revealed anew in its fulness. The restored Church has a living prophet and twelve apostles who have the power and authority of the priesthood, both Aaronic and Melchizedek. I was eager to start learning.

But I also had another goal. To me, any knowledge I received about God and Jesus Christ had to include Jesus Christ as the Messiah and connect on some level with ancient Judaism as I understood it. I felt that Judaism had just stopped in its progression and that maybe I would discover that it was completed in the Latter-day Saint restoration.

I knew that the elements or links to Judaism I was searching for must include a true and living God, Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Son of God, priesthood power and authority, temples, miracles, the Holy Spirit, and repentance and baptism. I was excited to be finding all these in my Book of Mormon reading!

Though overwhelmed with all my questions, the missionaries were encouraged by my enthusiasm. I was invited to receive the gospel lessons in the home of some members. I soon learned there were more books of scripture to read than the Bible and the Book of Mormon. There were also the Doctrine and Covenants, the Book of Moses, and the Book of Abraham. If I read from all of these sources, I might eventually understand the big picture of the gospel that I was seeking. The missionaries explained to me that many plain and precious things had been lost or omitted from the Bible and that through the restoration of the gospel many of these truths were revealed anew.

Before they taught me the first lesson, the missionaries asked permission to say a prayer. I was astonished that the missionary’s prayer was not memorized but came from his heart. The words were beautiful, personal, and specific. This was something so new to me—that we could actually ask God questions and receive answers. The missionaries taught me how to pray. The key to my receiving a spiritual witness of the restored gospel, they said, was that I had to ask. Then I should wait for an answer or be aware later how God would answer me.

The question I needed answered was whether Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon by the power of God and was truly a prophet who had received the fulness of the gospel of Christ. I know that I felt a connection to God when I read the Book of Mormon, but I had not yet asked him if the book was true. I wanted to learn more before I asked God.

As the missionaries continued to teach me, I could see a link between my ancient Jewish religion and revealed religion in subsequent ages. God revealed his gospel to an ancient prophet who taught it to the people. Later the people apostatized and lost the true faith. Then God appointed another prophet who again taught the true faith but who was rejected and perhaps killed. This cycle continued over and over again. I now could see God revealing his gospel to Father Adam, followed by apostasy; then to Noah, Abraham, and Moses, with each dispensation followed by apostasy; then to Jesus Christ, followed by universal apostasy. The gospel was finally given, for these last days, to the Prophet Joseph Smith. I also learned other truths that increased my knowledge and faith.

**Truth Revealed**

I finally decided to put to the test the statement in Moroni 10:3–5. I wanted the truth, and I was ready to receive an answer.
I talked to God in a way that I had never done before. This time I was asking the right questions and seeking answers. I now knew how to communicate with him through personal, heartfelt prayer.

I prayed, “Dear Heavenly Father, I want the truth about this church. I am ready to hear the truth from Thee. There is a promise in the Book of Mormon that if I ask in faith, I will receive an answer by the Holy Ghost. I want an answer to my questions.” So I asked, “Should I be baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? Is the Book of Mormon true? Is Joseph Smith a prophet of God? Are the teachings that I have learned from this church true?” I asked many other questions and then ended my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ.

After my prayer, I waited for an answer. Time passed, and finally, feeling exhausted, I went to sleep without having received an answer. I was awakened at 3:00 AM. I felt a powerful spiritual presence and connection to God. I realized that what I felt was the Holy Ghost. I heard a quiet voice inside my mind say that I was to be baptized immediately into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Book of Mormon was true, and Joseph Smith was a prophet of God.

I asked more questions and received answers. I was so happy. I knew I was on the right course this time and that the answers to my prayer did not come from anyone on this earth, but from my Father in Heaven.

A New Beginning

Four days later, on May 30, 1996, I was baptized and confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by proper authority. I remember the words that coursed through my mind as I received the gift of the Holy Ghost—“I am home.” I knew this was true. I felt so clean and pure now that my sins were forgiven. What a great blessing repentance followed by a cleansing baptism was in my life. I put my old life behind me and started a new life from that moment on. I was determined to keep the commandments of God and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

How I rejoice in the words in the Book of Mormon. I read this book every day and ponder the miracle of its preservation and its message. I am particularly moved by its witness of Jesus Christ’s central role in the latter-day gathering of Israel and the personal meaning that this reality holds for me as a Jewish convert to the Church.

And I will remember the covenant which I made with my people; and I have covenanted with them that I would gather them together in mine own due time, that I would give unto them again the land of their fathers for their inheritance, which is the land of Jerusalem, which is the promised land unto them forever, saith the Father. And it shall come to pass that the time cometh, when the fulness of my gospel shall be preached unto them; and they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name. . . . Then will the Father gather them together again, and give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance. Then shall they break forth into joy—Sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Father hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

I believe that God’s ancient covenant people (Jewish people) will someday know him. Their minds will open like a flower that blossoms and continues to bloom. The paths of their minds will be unlocked, and pure knowledge will flow into them and remind them of their true God. They will all have a burning bush experience like mine. They will hear his voice and feel his presence through the Holy Ghost and awaken to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

I pray that, when this glorious day of promise comes, they will accept the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ so they will become the children of God—repentant, redeemed, and eventually exalted—and the power of God will be manifest once again in the ancient land of Israel.

The Book of Mormon was the key that unlocked my understanding of the truth of God’s perfect plan. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the kingdom of God on the earth in its purity, perfection, and truth.
Steel in Early Metallurgy

John L. Sorenson

In the Book of Mormon, Nephi reports that Laban’s sword had a blade “of the most precious steel” (1 Nephi 4:9). He also says that his bow “was made [in part, at least] of fine steel” (1 Nephi 16:18). In America, Nephi taught some of his people to work in iron and steel (see 2 Nephi 5:15). A couple of centuries later, the Nephites were still making objects of iron and steel (see Jarom 1:8), although nothing more is told of those metals during the final 800 years of Nephite history. Moreover, Ether 7:9 reports that even the Jaredites “made swords out of steel.”

The credibility of these statements was quickly challenged by 19th-century critics, and the charge has been echoed almost up to the present. The complaint was twofold: (1) “steel” was not known in the Near East in Nephi’s day, and (2) neither iron nor steel was known in ancient America at any time. Both criticisms are now out of date in the light of scientific and historical research done over recent decades.

“The first smelting of iron [ore] may have taken place as early as 5000 BCE at Samarra, Mesopotamia, but more commonly early iron was recovered from fallen meteors (yielding iron with a characteristic 4+% nickel content). By the middle of the fourth millennium BC, “both texts and objects reveal the presence of iron” in Mesopotamia, from where the Jaredites departed. Just possibly they brought with them to the New World technical knowledge of that metallurgy. Sporadically throughout the Bronze Age (about 3500 BCE–1000 BCE) in the Near East, wrought (non-meteoric) iron objects were being produced, along with continued use of the meteoric type. Yet details of the history at that time are poorly known. The find of an iron artifact from Slovakia dated to the 17th century BCE leads one researcher to lament “how little we actually know about the use of iron during the second millennium BCE.”

Steel is “iron that has been combined with carbon atoms through a controlled treatment of heating and cooling.” Yet “the ancients possessed in the natural (meteoric) nickel-iron alloy a type of steel that was not manufactured by mankind before 1890.” (It has been estimated that 50,000 tons of meteoritic material falls on the earth each day, although only a fraction of that is recoverable.) By 1400 BCE, smiths in Armenia had discovered how to carburize iron by prolonged heating in contact with carbon (derived from the charcoal in their forges). This produced martensite, which forms a thin layer of steel on the exterior of the object (commonly a sword) being manufactured. Iron/steel jewelry, weapons, and tools (including tempered steel) were definitely made as early as 1300 BCE (and perhaps earlier), as attested by excavations in present-day Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Iran, Israel, and Jordan. “Smiths were carburizing [i.e., making steel] intentionally on a fairly large scale by at least 1000 BCE in the Eastern Mediterranean area.”
From this history, incomplete as it necessarily is, we see that the blade on the “sword of Laban” (1 Nephi 4:9; 2 Nephi 5:14) was an outcome of a long process of technological development and is historically credible as steel. However it was that Nephi became schooled in making steel, he knew enough to be a transfer agent through which that technology moved to the New World.

In America there is little archaeological evidence for metallurgy in the Book of Mormon period. Fragmentary evidence is available for certain metallurgical activities in Peru as early as 1700 BC, but it took many centuries there before the craft noticeably flourished. It may be that that area was an intermediate source for some of Mesoamerica’s metallurgy. Orthodox archaeologists insist that no metals were used in Mesoamerica before about AD 900. However, scores of specimens have been identified that seem to date earlier.14

Decisive data for an earlier date come from words for metal (or for bell)15 that appear in five proto-languages that have been reconstructed from surviving daughter tongues:

Proto-Mayan. Descended from Proto-Mayan (estimated at 2200 BC), Proto-Tzeltal-Tzotzil, with a word for metal, dates to about AD 500.16 Yet Huastecan, a Mayan language, also has such a word17 and is considered to have split from the main Mayan group by 2000 BC.

Proto-Mixtecan. A reconstructed Proto-Mixtecan word for metal, or bell, has been dated to about 1500 BC.18

Proto-Mixe-Zoquean. A widely cited study identifies Proto-Mixe-Zoquean as probably a (or the) tongue spoken by inhabitants of the Olmec area before 1000 BC,19 and this proto-language included a word for metal.

Proto-Huavean and Proto-Otomanguean. Words for metal in these two proto-languages are of uncertain date but in any case date to before AD 900.20

In recent decades, the continued discovery and analysis of metal artifacts both in the Near East and in Mesoamerica have changed our picture of technological history. The expectation that the history will change further in years to come is entirely realistic. Those who try to relate the Nephite record to archaeological and historical facts with regard to metals have improved the strength of their position with recent finds. It will be important to clarify that relationship as the years go on by being critically and reliably informed about new discoveries. Incomplete scholarship will not help those who love truth.
In Search of Lehi’s Trail—30 Years Later
Lynn M. Hilton

1. Lynn M. and Hope A. Hilton, In Search of Lehi’s Trail (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976). This book grew out of a discovery trip sponsored by the Ensign magazine, and before going, we were set apart by a General Authority for the task. Our effort resulted in the book that was based on our two articles titled “In Search of Lehi’s Trail,” Ensign, September and October 1976, 32–54 and 34–63, respectively. Since then, we have published our further research in Discovering Lehi: New Evidence of Lehi and Nephil in Arabia (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1996).


6. David R. Seely has shown that the “three days” (1 Nephi 2:6) was a distance required if a person wanted to offer sacrifice away from the Jerusalem temple; see his “Lehi’s Altar and Sacrifice in the Wilderness,” JBMS 10/1 (2001): 62–69.


Across Arabia with Lehi and Sariah: “Truth Shall Spring out of the Earth”
Warren P. Ashton

Much of the material for this article is taken from my book Lehi in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon (forthcom- ing, 2007).


2. Those whose roots lie in Near Eastern rather than Western culture have an immediate and instinctive appreciation of the details recorded by Nephi. See, for example, the response by an Arab member of the LDS Church, Ehab Abunuwara, “Into the Desert: An Arab View of the Book of Mormon,” JBMS 11/1 (2002): 60–65.


5. On the need for Lehi to pay levies and seek tribal permission en route, see Emanuel Marx, “Back to the Problem of Tribe,” American Anthropologist 81/1 (1979): 124, high- lighting reasons why a small, noncommercial family group would have presented little threat to local tribes, who often allowed travelers the use of water and pasture. Along- side caravans of hundreds or even thousands of camels, the Leihites would have seemed insignificant.

8. For a discussion of the types of sacrifices offered, see


11. See for example G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 602. The name is rare enough that some other listings of pre-Islamic place-names in Arabia, such as Nigel Groom’s *A Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Place Names* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban and London: Longman, 1983), do not list NHM at all.


14. See Ross T. Christensen, “The Place Called Nahom,” *Ensign*, August 1978, 73, referring to the map by Carsten Niebuhr. This map is published in Thorkild Hansen, *Arabia Felix: The Danish Expedition of 1761–1767*, trans. James and Kathleen McFarlane (London: Collins, 1964), 232–33. The expedition (of which Niebuhr was the sole survivor) was initiated in part by a desire to complete the gaps on an earlier map, specifically *J. B. d’Anville’s Premier Partie de la Carte d’Asie*. This map also showed “NEHEM” and was published in Paris in 1751. None of these works, nor Robert Heron’s translation of Carsten Niebuhr’s *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East* (Edinburgh: R. Morrison and Son, 1792), which includes a map and account in 2:46–47, 62–63, was available to Joseph Smith or his associates. See a summary of sources in S. Kent Brown, “‘New Light from Arabia on Lehi’s Trail’ in Parry, Peterson, and Welch, *Echoes and Evidences*, 69–75.


23. The welcome contrast of abundant greenery after desert travel has been noted in this area by others since Nephí. Compare the elation and relief expressed by Joseph Smith at the Dhochar coast from the desert after only a few weeks of travel (Arabia Felix: Across the “Empty Quarter” of Arabia [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932], 48–49). Evidence for more luxurious vegetation in the area anciently is examined in Margaretta Tengberg, *Wood Exploitation and Degradation of the Vegetation Cover in Eastern Arabia from the Bronze Age until Early Islamic Times,* paper presented 21 July 2005 at the Seminar for Arabian Studies, London.


33. For a discussion of evidence indicative of Nephi’s trade(s), see John A. Tvedtines, “Was Lehi a Caravaneer?” in his The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1999). After weighing the evidence, Tvedtines concludes that the most likely occupation for Nephi was that of “metalworker.”

34. Although some iron exists, copper was the primary metal mined in Oman anciently. See G. Goettler, N. Firth, and C. Huston, “A Preliminary Discussion of Ancient Mining in the Sultanate of Oman,” Journal of Oman Studies 2 (1976): 43–56. This fact makes the recent discovery of two iron ore sites in Dhofar, one of them near Wadi Sayq, so significant. See the study by geologist Wm. Revell Phillips, “Metals of Oman” (unpublished manuscript, 2000): 36–41.


36. See note 37 for details on Dr. Costa’s published findings.


40. See, for example, Book of Mormon: Seminary Student Study Guide (Salt Lake City: Church Education System, 2000), 28; and John W. Welch, ed., Reexploring the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 52. The findings regarding Nahom and Bountiful were referenced in an article that offered the general membership of the Church the most comprehensive summary yet of current Book of Mormon research; see Daniel C. Peterson, “Mounting Evidence for the Book of Mormon,” Ensign, January 2000, 18–24. Photographs of Kharfot continues to be used to the present: see, for example, Welch, Seely, and Seely, Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem, 77, and the presentation to BYU faculty and staff by Noel B. Reynolds in March 2004, as reported in Insights 24/2 (2002). Fall 2005 saw the release of the BYU and FARMS documentary film Journey of Faith. Despite the inclusion of what I see as some highly speculative material dealing with the final stage of Lehi’s land journey, the film presented both Khor Rori and Khor Kharfot as potential Bountiful sites, with the latter clearly favored in both the location filming and in the commentary by Noel B. Reynolds. Kharfot as “Bountiful” has even entered Latter-day Saint popular culture; see Keith Terry, Into the Light (American Fork, UT: Deseret, 2004), which recounts the discovery of Kharfot in chapter 2.


42. See Terry Ball et al., “Phytoliths Produced by the Vegetation of the Sub-Tropical Coastal Region of Dhofar, Oman,” available at www.phytolithsoc.org but not otherwise available in scholarly or popular formats.

43. See Terry Ball et al., “Phytoliths Produced by the Vegetation of the Sub-Tropical Coastal Region of Dhofar, Oman,” accessible at www.phytolithsoc.org but not otherwise available in scholarly or popular formats.

44. Milton R. Hunter and Thomas S. Ferguson, in Ancient America and the Book of Mormon (Oakland: Kolob Book, 1950), 81, 84, first noted that the pre-Classic Nahuaatl (central Mexican) term Tulan—literally “place of reeds”—included the concept of abundance. Hunter also authored an article titled “Book of Mormon Evidences” containing the same material, which appeared in the Improvement Era (December 1954, 914). The original reference to the term Tulan is taken from Martínez Hernández, Diccionario de Motu (Merida, Yucatan, 1930), 824.


Reports, no. 59, 1986). More general treatments such as Paul Lunde’s “The Middle East and the Age of Discovery,” Aramco World 43/3 (1992), and “The Indian Ocean and Global Trade,” Saudi Aramco World 56/4 (2005)—at www.saudiaramcoworld.com—also provide valuable context and insights into aspects of early Arabian seafaring that illuminate Nephi’s account.


48. Capelotti, senior lecturer in anthropology and American studies at Penn State University and author of Sea Drift: Rafting Adventures in the Wake of Kon-Tiki (Long Beach, CA: Whitehorn Publishing, 1959), made this comment (emphasis added) about rafts, accessible at http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu/acatalog/Capelotti_interview.html. Sincere appreciation is expressed to Steven L. Carr, MD, of Salt Lake City, for his pioneering efforts, based on two visits to Dhofar, to resolve the practical realities of how Nephi’s ship may have been constructed and how it functioned. From this has come a new look at the merits of a raft as a possible design for Nephi’s ship.


51. Sycamore fig and tamarind

52. See John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper, “Before DNA,” JBMS 12/1 (2003): 13. An expanded and more focused examination is John L. Sorenson’S Ancient Voyages Across the Ocean to America: From ‘Impossible’ to ‘Certain,’” JBMS 14/1 (2005): 4–17. The article’s endnotes provide a useful index of other material related to Inca canoe voyaging. As orthodox science accepts ancient intercontinental sea voyaging, we can expect further insights into this longest, yet least known, stage of Lehi’s odyssey to emerge.

53. Alessandra Avanzini, in Khor Roni Report 1 (Pisa: University of Pisa, Arabica Antica Series, 2002), gives a date of circa 300 BC for the earliest development at the Khor Roni site, reaching its peak hundreds of years later. See also Alessandra Avanzini and Alexander V. Sedov, “The stratigraphy of Sumhurum: new evidence,” in Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 35 (2005): 11–17. These dates effectively rule out any notion that the established seaport existed in Dhofar in Nephi’s day or that he could have drawn upon local knowledge.


58. In medieval times a second route came into being that ran along the Arabian coast. This was built at great expense to provide protection from bedouin raiders who were attacking Muslim pilgrims traveling along the old Frank- incense Trail on their way to perform Haj and Umra in the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina. This route came into being approximately 1,400 years after Lehi traveled through Arabia. See Abdul- lah al-Wohaibi, The Northern Hijaz: In the Writings of the Arab Geographers [trans.] 800–1500 (Beirut: Al-Risalah, 1973), 324, 325, and map in back of book.

59. Thus we agree with Hugh Nibley’s proposal that the route Lehi took was inland, east of the Hijaz mountains. See Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 112; and Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A. Hilton, Discovering Lehi (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1996), 34 (map). The Hiltons drove down the west coast of Arabia and suggested that this was the route Lehi took, and a map of this route was placed on the FARMS Web site for many years. This map was removed a few years ago, and S. Kent Brown produced a map that essentially mirrors the route we proposed to FARMS in 1998 (see Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon [Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002], 58.

60. See Al-Wohaibi, The Northern Hijaz, 325.


63. Hilton and Hilton, In Search of Lehi’s Trail, 36.

64. Andrew Taylor, Travelling the Sands (Dubai: Motivate, 1995), 18.

65. Hilton and Hilton, In Search of Lehi’s Trail, 33.


67. See Taylor, Traveling the Sands, 12.


69. See Al-Wohaibi, The Northern Hijaz, 204; and map in back of book.

70. For a more complete discussion of this subject see Potter and Wellington, “Jerusalem and the Way of the Wilderness,” in Lehi in the Wilderness, 15–29.

71. The “Judeans fled to east of the Jordan River when Nebu- chadnezzar captured Jerusa- lem in 587 B.C.” and scattered themselves among the lands of Ammon, Moab, and Edom (Burton MacDonald, Ammon, Moab and Edom: Early States/ Nations of Jordan in the Biblical Period [Amman: Al-Kutba Publishers, 1994], 46; see G. Lankester Harding, The Antiquities of Jordan [New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967], 46). According to the book of Obadiah, which is generally believed to have been written shortly after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, the Edomites, through whose lands the road to Aqabah ran, participated in the capture of escaping Judeans and the finding and handing over to the Babylon- nians of those who remained in Edom. “Neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress” (Obadiah 1:14).

72. As the walls were being breached. King Zedekiah and his sons made their escape through the king’s garden by the gate between the two walls near Siloam pool (see 2 Kings 25:4). But Zedekiah’s party was captured when they
reached the plains of Jericho (see Jeremiah 32:8). In other words, Zedeckiah was heading east to cross the river Jordan as he tried to escape.

20. For a more complete description of Nephi’s directions of the journey from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Valley of Lemuel, see Potter, “New Candidate in Arabia for the Valley of Lemuel,” 54–63.


22. Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 78–79.


30. In Arabic, vowels are not written down, so a written word is made up of the consonants and the reader fills in the vowels through his knowledge of the pronunciation of the word. Thus the fact that NHM does not have the same emphasis on the second syllable that Nahom does may not be significant. At a conference held at Brigham Young University on 23 May 1903, President Joseph F. Smith approved appointments to a committee charged with the task of producing a guide to pronunciation of Book of Mormon names. The following day Charles W. Penrose, one of the committee members, presented the rules of pronunciation recommended by the committee. In these rules, words of two syllables are accentuated on the first syllable (see Deseret Evening News, 25 May 1903, 7; 26 May 1903, 4). These rules, while providing uniformity of pronunciation and euphony in English, do not necessarily guarantee that this was the original pronunciation (see Mary Jane Woodger, “How the Guide to English Pronunciation of Book of Mormon Names Came About,” JBMS, 9/1 [2000]: 52–57).

31. This area was first suggested as a location for the Book of Mormon Nahom by Ross T. Christensen. See his article “The Place Called Nahom,” Ensign, August 1978, 73.

32. See Aston and Aston, In the Footsteps of Lehi, 13. According to the legend, this map was “reproduced from a Sketch Map of South West Arabia, general compiled by Nigel Groom and published by the Royal Geographical Society, London, in 1976”; however, the copy of Groom’s original map that we obtained does not contain the cemetery “Nehem” marked on it. We can only assume that either there is more than one version of this map available or this was an addition made by the Astons. If the latter is the case, one would have to question the antiquity of this name in this location. S. Kent Brown places Nahom “in the highlands that rise to the north of Wadi Jawf.” There is no specific reason given for this location, but we assume it is based on the Astons’ map. See S. Kent Brown, “The Place That Was Called Nahom.” New Light from Ancient Yehud, JBMS 8/1 (1999): 66–68.

33. Located at 15°37’ N, 44°36’ E.

34. Groom, A Dictionary of Arabic Topography, 89. Furdat Naham is marked on the U.S. CIA map of Yemen of 1970 at 15°49’ N, 44°42’ E.


38. Strabo, as quoted in Brian Doe, Southern Arabia (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 68.


41. Dr. Lynn Hilton, personal communication to the authors. The date of the temple was given by Professor Yusuf M. Abdullah, president of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, General Organization of Antiquities, Museums and Manuscripts, Sana’a, Yemen.


43. The modern road that runs into Marib follows the same route as the caravan route known as Darb El Ashraf. See Ahmed Fakhry, An Archaeological Journey to Yemen (March–May 1947) (Cairo: Government Press, 1952), 1:40. This route is the same as the old Incense Trail, according to the map in Michael Jemer, Yemen Reiscoverd (London: Longman Group, 1983), 16.


45. See Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 109–13; and Hilton and Hilt, Discovering Lehi, 150.


50. These resources include an abundant and wide variety of fruits (1 Nephi 17:5; 18:6), fruit orchards on a beach, wild honey (1 Nephi 17:5), a mountain nearby (1 Nephi 177), ore available locally (1 Nephi 17:9; see Wm. Revell Phillips, “Metals of the Book of Mormon,” JBMS 9/2 [2000]: 38), flint, evidence of smelting, a location due east from the current candidates for Nahom (Khor Rori is seven degrees east of Wadi Harib Nahom), beasts for hides and meat, and tall cliffs directly above deep water (see Potter and Wellington, Lehi in the Wilderness, 121–36).

51. Dr. Eduard G. Rheinhardt (assistant professor, School of Geography and Geology, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario), personal communication to the authors, 12 April 1999.

52. Measured by Doug Esplin using Google Earth software tools.


55. Ceramic typology suggests that Taqah’s occupation dates to the late phase of the Bronze Age, and this is supported by carbon 14 dates averaging 1800 bc. Zarins concludes: “All the evidence placed together then suggests Moscha [a port known to the Greeks] was Sumhuram/Khor Rori. The last suggestion is that Khor Rori/Sumhuram was Ptolemy’s Abissa town (Van Wissman 1977: 32–33, Groom 1994: 207) based on the name “Mountains at Wadi Darbat upstream” (Zarins, The Land of Incense, 72, 88, 139).


58. Noah Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary defines fruit as “[1] In a general sense, whatever the earth produces for the nourishment of animals or for clothing or profit. Among the fruits of the earth are included not only corn of all kinds, but grass, cotton, flax, grapes and all cultivated plants.” This comprehensive sense, the word is generally used in the plural. [2] In a more limited sense, the produce of a tree or other plant; the last production for the propagation or multiplication of its kind; the seed of plants, or the part that contains the seeds; as, wheat, rye, oats, apples, quinces, pears, cherries, acorns, etc.” Noah Webster, An American Dictionary of the English Language, facsimile edition (San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1993), s.v. “fruit”; emphasis added.

59. Zarins, Land of Incense, 60.

60. See Periplus of the Erythraean Sea by an Unknown Author with Some Extracts from Agatharkides “On The Erythraean Sea,” trans. and ed. G. W. B. Huntingford (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1980), chap. 32. The Greek word periplus literally means “round-trip,” and the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea is an account of a trading journey between Egypt and India made by an unknown merchant or ship’s master. The date of authorship is not known and we must assume that the author is somewhere between 40 and the early third century.


62. On 22 September 2006, Ali al-Shahri showed George Potter and 14 other Latter-day Saints the cave where wild honey was collected.


64. The Italian Mission to Oman (IMTO), headed by Professor Alessandra Avanzini, Dipartimento del Scienze Storiche di Mondo Antico, Università degli studi di Pisa, Italy.

65. Dr. Jana Owen, UCLA. Personal communication with the authors, 14 August 2000.

66. See Zarins, Land of Incense, 37. Site TA 95:227 is on the west side of Wadi Simur (see fig. 28, “Archaeological sites located on the Salalah Plain (1992–1995).” The distance to Khor Rori is 4.5 miles.


68. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw (senior research scientist, Institute for Human and Machine Cognition, Pensacola, Florida), personal communication to the authors. Dr. Bradshaw showed us photographs of copper- and iron-smelting slag found in the ruins of Sumhuram as well as the remains of a smelt- ing furnace inside the city dating to the Sumhuram I period (ca. 300–150 BC). Saeed al-Mashhadi, the Khor Rori excavation for the Al-Balid Archaeological Park, Salalah, Oman, showed the aforementioned slag and furnace to Dr. Bradshaw on 30 May 2006. Regarding the Sumhuram I period, “the dating of phases is based on the preliminary analyses of the pottery assemblages and on the number of radiocarbon dates of charcoal samples revealed in different strata. The 1st phase could be placed between the late fourth/early third and the mid-2nd century BC” (Alessandra Avanzini and Alexander V. Sedov, Stratigraphy of Sumhuram: New Evidence (London: British Museum, 2004), 1.

69. Wadi Nahom is 16 degrees north; Khor Rori is 17 degrees north (to the nearest degree).

70. Both wild and domesticated animals were present in Dhofar. “The fauna collected in the excavation of Sumhuram (Wilkins 2002) indicate that the subsistence of the town was based mainly on sea resources. However, the 17.8% of the faunal composition is constituted of land mammals. They consist mainly of domestic animals: bovines (Bos taurus, 27.02%), capriviodes (71.47%; ovis aries 5.09%, capra hircus 7.2%, ovis vel capra 59.18%), an episodic occurrence of pig (0.05%), dromedary (0.66%) and a very little wild animal by a gazelle (gazella sp. 0.51%).” Cremaschi and Perego, “Land Use and Settlement Pattern,” 23.

71. See Nibley, Lehi in the Desert; Hilton and Hilton, In Search of Lehi’s Trail and Discovering Lehi; Aston and Aston, “The Place Which Was Called Nahom” (FARMS paper 1991) and In the Footsteps of Lehi; and Warren P. Aston, “The Arabian Bountifully Discovered.”


76. “Excavations and Restoration of the Complex of Khor Rori, Interim Report,” October 2000–April 2001 (Pisa: Università di Pisa, 2001), 12–15. In a conversation with George Potter on 23 September 2006, local Dhofar historian Ali al-Shahri said that during the first excavation of Sumhuram in the early 1950s, the American archaeologist Wendlall Phillips discovered seven bronze plates engraved with text. Four of the metal plates had Thamudic script etched on them, while the three remaining plates were written in the yet-to-be deciphered South Arabian language, generally referred to as the Dhofar dialect, which may possibly be part of the group known as the non-Sayyadic languages (see M. C. A. MacDonald, “Reflections on the Linguistic Map of Pre-Islamic Arabia,” Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy 11 [2000]: 30, 32).

77. Softwoods and hardwoods can be differentiated by the material that fills the cells of each. The cellular structure of softwoods, with a few exceptions, is filled with water. Hardwoods, on the other hand, have solid material inside the cells. Softwoods make poor building materials when exposed to the weather because water passes easily through the cell wall. On the other hand, the solid material in the cells of hardwoods resists the transfer of water through the material. The exceptions to this rule are the softwoods cedar, cypress, and California redwood, which have cells filled with a resinous material that provides the same type of resistance to water transfer as do the hardwoods. For reference, see R. Bruce Hoadley, Understand- ing Wood: A Craftsman’s Guide to Wood Technology, (Newton, CT: Taunton Press, 2000), 17–23.


84. See Hilton and Hilton, Discovering Lehi, 143.


91. MNHC, Oman, a Seafaring Nation, 20, 22.
92. Norbert Weismann, personal communications to authors, 17 May 2000.
93. See MNHC, Oman, a Seafaring Nation, 107–8. Solomon had a fleet of ships built to sail to Opheir. When they returned from their three-year round-trip journey, they brought peacocks, which are found in India, not Africa (The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary [1993], s.v. "peafowl"). The ships must have either been to India or traded with merchants from India. The ships also returned carrying almug wood, a hardwood that was used in the construction of the temple and was previously not native to Dhofar but imported from India. It should be noted that almug (1 Kings 10:11, 12; spelled alqum in 2 Chronicles 2:8; 9:10, 11) appears only in the plural form almuggim in the Hebrew, which biblical scholars have taken to mean that the wood was delivered in planks (see M. G. Easton, Easton's Bible Dictionary [1897], s.v. "almug"); accessible online at www.ccel.org/ei/easton/ebd/ebd/T0000100.html#T0000182).
94. As cited in Patai, Jewish Seafaring in Ancient Times, 37.
95. Patai, Jewish Seafaring in Ancient Times, 47.
97. See MNHC, Oman, a Seafaring Nation, 113.
98. Cotton was introduced in southern Arabia in antiquity, possibly as early as 4000 bc (see Zarins, The Land of Incense, 60).
99. See Huntingford, Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, chap. 32.
102. See MNHC, Oman, a Seafaring Nation, 146.
103. Frank Linehan, the Western Region Marine Surveyor for United States Maritime Administration, an authority on the performance and construction of deepwater sailing vessels, estimated that Nephi's ship would have been of a "light tonnage of no less than 100 tons" (personal communications with the authors, June 1999). These dimensions are similar to the larger wooden sailing vessels still found in Oman, called bughas. These ships traded with Bombay, the Gulf of Bengal, and the Red Sea. The largest of this class of ships, called the batel, has an average weight of 100–200 tons, with some as large as 500 tons and were at approximately 60–70 feet long (José María Martínez-Hidalgo, Columbus' Ships, ed. Howard I. Chapelle [Barre, MA: Barre Publishers, 1966], 93).
104. See MNHC, Oman, a Seafaring Nation, 146.
106. There are a number of khors (inlets) in Dhofar. Khor Salalah is the third largest after Khor Rori and Khor al-Balid. Khor Salalah is a modern bird sanctuary. It is a large khor and appears quite deep, but it has, in common with all of the khors discussed, directly onto the beach, a relatively narrow opening, which would have made it difficult to guide a large ship through, not to mention the breakers. Dr. Jana Owen of UCLA was not able to dive in Khor Salalah because it is a protected area. Regarding its suitability as a port in Lehi’s time, she noted in a personal communication to the authors, “Possible but is very small and we cannot be sure about the depth in antiquity” (personal correspondence to the authors, 14 August 2000).
107. The khors, or inlet bays, include Kharfot, Raysut, Quran al-Kabere, Awqad, al-Balid, Dhaahiraz, Suli, Taqah, Rori, and Mirbat.
108. Jana Owen wrote of Raysut, "We believe from surface collection and the obvious suitability of the area that there would have been an ancient docking area there” (personal communication to the authors, 14 August 2000). The harbor at Raysut faces east and so provided protection from the southwest monsoon, which blows in summer but provides no protection from the winter northeast monsoon.
109. See Hilton and Hilton, Discovering Lehi, 166.
110. The khor was associated with a city of the same name, which was built around the 10th century AD by Persian conquerors who moved the capital to al-Balid from Khor Rori, some 15 miles to the east. It would appear that the harbor was in use only much later than Lehi’s time. Owen states: "We believe that this harbor functioned around the turn of the Common Era. This is based on lithics and a small amount of ceramics" (Jana Owen, personal communications to the authors, 14 August 2000).
111. See Aston, "The Arabian Bountifully Discovred?" 5–11.
112. Frank Linehan, personal communications with the authors, June 1999.
114. Refining the Spotlight on Lehi and Sariah S. Kent Brown
4. It is hard, for instance, to understand a map that shows an ancient route running along the impassable west shore of the Dead Sea; see The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1982), s.v. “Lehi.” We should be more careful in interpreting and using maps. New maps of the Middle East are now available, such as the AVM series (available from Specialty Maps, www.specialty-maps.com). They are far more accurate than previous maps.
5. The family must have taken pack animals—very probably camels—to carry tents and other essentials (see 1 Nephi 2:4). The sections of the tents would have weighed more than 100 pounds each. But even camels cannot carry such burdens if they are underfed. Possibly camels (see Bertram Thomas, Arabia Felix [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932], 164–65) That camels were more suited to desert travel than other animals can be seen in the oft-remarked fact of Ahmed Fahkry, who on a trip to Yemen from March to May 1947 traveled through southwestern Arabia with camels and mules: “It is impossible for laden mules...
to walk in that loose sand, and so we had to ride camels" (An Archaeological Journey to Yemen [Cairo: Government Press, 1952], 1:12).

Charles M. Doughty adds that donkeys "must drink every second day" (Travels in Arabia Deserta, with an introduction by T. E. Lawrence [New York: Random House, 1936], I:325).

6. The passive-voice expression "the place which was called Nahom" indicates that the family learned the name Nahom from others (see 1 Nephi 16:34). In addition, when family members were about 1,400 miles from home at Nahom, some knew that it was prophesied to return (see 16:36), even though they had run out of food twice (see 16:17–19, 39). Further, Doctrine and Covenants 33:8 hints that Nephi may have preached to people in Arabia.

7. For information about the three trade routes that brought goods to Jerusalem from the south and the east, see M. Har-El, "The Route of Salt, Sugar and Balsam Caravans in the Judean Desert," Geojournal 2/6 (1978): 549–56.

8. This route is favored by D. Kelly Ogden, "Answering the Lord’s Call (1 Nephi 1–7)," in Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven: 1 Nephi to Alma 29, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 17–33, especially 23. Har-El also draws attention to this route that ascends from Ein Gedii ("Crossed the Salt," S5; also "Israelite and Roman Roads in the Judean Desert," Israel Exploration Journal 17/1 [1967]: 18–25, especially 19 [map], 21, and 25).

9. For the routes running east from Jerusalem, see Har-El, "Route of Salt," 549–56. Nelson Glueck describes a series of forts that would have protected travelers on the eastern desert road, though they were not in use in Lehi’s era (The Other Side of the Jordan [New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1940], 128–34). For the route of the King’s Highway, see Barry J. Beitzel, Roads and Highways (Pre-Roman), Anchor Bible Dictionary, 5:779 and accompanying maps.

10. One further question begs for an answer. What about the so-called Lehi cave that lies southwest of Jerusalem? Might Lehi and Sariah, or their sons, have stopped there as they fled the city? It is highly unlikely. The fact that the cave was used as a burial chamber whose bones were found undisturbed stands against accepting it as a place of refuge. And the two inscribed ships on the wall of one chamber seem to have been created at an era later than Lehi’s, therefore not hinting at the ocean crossing that lay ahead of the group. Moreover, the distance and direction are problems. The cave lies 20 miles from paths that would have taken the family to northwest Arabia. See LaMar C. Berrett, "The So-Called Lehi Cave," JBMS 8/1 (1999): 64–66. Lehi seems to have known where he was going before fleeing the city. On connections with Arabia, see my study "Jerusalem Connections to Arabia in 600 BC," in Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem, ed. John W. Welch, David Ralph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seeley (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 625–46.


13. According to Charles Doughty, the riders of the dromedary or riding camel, without baggage, can make 130 miles in "three journeys," or days (Travels in Arabia Deserta, 1:169).


15. I initially suggested this abbreviated stay at the first camp in "A Case for Lehi’s Bondage in Arabia," 206. If a person holds that Lehi stayed a long time at his first camp, how long before local people noticed that this family was hunting in other people’s traditional hunting grounds? It does not do to say that no one else lived there. Studies have shown that northwest Arabia was substantially populated in antiquity. See Michael Lloyd Ingraham et al., "Saudi Arabian Comprehensive Survey Program: Preliminary Report on a Reconnaissance Survey of the Northwestern Province (With a Note on a Brief Survey of the Northern Province)," ATLAL: The Journal of Saudi Arabian Archaeology 5 (1981): 59–84; and M. C. A. MacDonald, "Along the Red Sea," Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, ed. Jack M. Sassoan et al. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1995), 2:1350.


18. Nigel Groom estimates that the entire trip by land from the Dhofar region of modern Oman to Gaza on the Mediterranean Sea covered about 2,110 miles (Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade [London: Longman Group Ltd., 1981], 213 [chart]). Proposing a slightly different route, the Hiltins estimate a distance of 2,156 miles (Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A. Hilton, Discovering Lehi [Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1996], 30).

19. According to Groom the entire trip from Dhofar in southern Oman to Gaza took no more than four months (see Frankincense and Myrrh, chart on p. 213). Walter W. Müller estimates that caravans starting from southwest Arabia (a different starting place) required at least two months to reach the Mediterranean area (see Werner Daum, ed., Yemen: 3000 Years of Art and Civilization in Arabia Felix [Jena: Vehmecke, 1957], 49–50).


21. Strabo, Geography 16.4.23–24; summarized briefly in Pliny, Natural History 6.32 (1610). Some scholars accept the identity of Marib with Strabo’s Marsiaba (see Groom’s review in Frankincense and Myrrh, 75–76). Strabo writes that the Roman army broke off its siege at Marsiaba because of lack of water—a detail that would seem to argue against identifying Marib with Marsiaba since the Marib dam, which stored water in its reservoir, would have been only a few kilometers away. However, its water was brackish and therefore not potable.

22. ‘Aynunah lies only 30 or so miles south of al-Bad’i oasis and 40 or so miles from Wadi Tayyib al-ism. As Lehi’s party, so the Romans would have crossed the desert and traveled south-southeast along the incense trail because there were wells and fodder.

23. This point was made by Camille Fronk, "Desert Epiphany," 8; also The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, ed. George A. Buttrick et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), s.v. "Marriage;" consult Genesis 24:22, 47, 53; Isaiah 61:10.

24. The complaint of the two older sons, which Nephi kept in his account, speaks of the general suffering of all members of the party: "we have suffered in the wilderness" (1 Nephi 17:21; compare the complaints of Ishmael’s daughters in 16:35).

25. On the number of persons, see John L. Sorenson, "The Composition of Lehi’s Family," in By Study and Also by

26. The Peripilus of the Erythraean Sea, an anonymous work dated to about AD 150, describes places and peoples of Arabia, chiefly those near the coastline, and calls the people of the northwest coastal area, where Lehi’s family first camped, “rascally men” who “plundered” ships and took “for slaves” those who survived shipwrecks. The south coast was characterized “by traffic in “slaves,” including “female slaves,” and its “inhabitants are a treacherous lot, very little civilized” (cited in Groom, Frankincense, 90, 93, 94, quoting the translation of W. H. Schoff). From the Islamic period, the Qur’an refers often to slaves, both in terms of booty (Sûrah 33:50) and in terms of manumission (e.g., Sûrah 4:82; 5:89). In modern times, Bertram Thomas spoke of slaves in the south of Oman in the 1920s and 1930s, noting the remarkable, continuing phenomenon that the entire Shihara tribe lived “in groups among their Qara overlords, hewing their wood and drawing their water.” Referring to tribes of south Arabia, Thomas observed that “instability is the chief characteristic of any regime in trabea Arabia” (Arabia Felix, 15, 22–35, 47). Thirty years later, Wendell Phillips wrote of the extreme difficulties of moving from one tribal area to another in southern Arabia because some tribes were living in a state of perpetual war with others (see his Unknown Oman [New York: David McKay, 1966], 230–31).

27. Currently, such tribal interests are not as intense as they were less than a century ago because of the long presence of the Soviet Union in southern Yemen. As an illustration of earlier tribal interests in this region, “[Harold] Ingrams most notable achievement was to bring peace [in 1937] to an area [the Hadhramaut] whose social life, trade and agriculture had been bedevilled for centuries by tribal warfare. His drive for peace culminated in a three-year truce, later extended for ten years, which was signed by 1400 tribal leaders—an indication of the scope of his task” (J. G. T. Shipman, “The Hadhramaut,” Asian Affairs: Journal of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs 15/2 [June 1984]: 159).

28. See Wilfred Thesiger, Arabian Sands (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1959), 155–56, 179–80; Eduard Glaser, My Journey through Arhab and Hâbid, trans. David Warburton (Westbury, New York: American Institute for Yemeni Studies, 1993), 5; and Bertram Thomas, Alarms and Excursions in Arabia (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1931), 289–90. Thomas, in Arabia Felix, makes these typical observations: “lack of rain and the merciless heat of the Arabian desert permit of but scattered and semi-barbarous nomad societies, which are at such perpetual war that, even for themselves, life is insecure”; “Tribal tradition is one of anarchy—of long inter-necine strife”; “Instability is the chief characteristic of any régime in trabea Arabia”; “The land ever surges with tribal unrest” (xxiv, 9, 15, 36; see also 82–83, 149–50, 172–74).

29. I first assembled the evidence in “A Case for Lehi’s Bondage in Arabia,” 205–17. Although one cannot consult the original ancient text of the Book of Mormon from which Joseph Smith translated the text, it is enough to assume—correctly, in my view—that the English text represents a reasonably accurate translation. For the biblical text, David Daube sets out ser-vile connections of the verb to sojourn in The Exodus Pattern in the Bible (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 24–26. See also my study in From Jerusalem to Zarathemla, 55–74.


32. Nephi’s meaning would not be that of one sense of the biblical noun sojourner (Hebrew ger), which in the later books of the Old Testament means “protected citizen,” because the family of Lehi seems not to have sought citizenship during its journey. See Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, 2:448; and Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1:309.

33. As one gauge of the severe impact of the desert experi-ence, Jacob, who had been living in the desert to Lehi and Sariah, seems to have remained a sober, serious person all of his life (see Jacob 7:26). Lehi was equipped with “nets” and other means for desert living and was able to leave his home without delay (see, for example, 1 Nephi 2:4; 3:9; 16:12). See Nibley’s discussion in Lehi in the Desert, 46–49.

34. It is also important to note how Lehi speaks of the promis-ed land, calling it “a land of liberty” whose inhabitants “shall never be brought down into captivity” and “shall dwell safely forever,” except for the cause “of iniquity” (2 Nephi 1:7, 9).

35. For the Israelite exodus, see Daube, Exodus Pattern in the Bible, 24, 31–34; for Lehi and Sariah, consult 1 Nephi 17:14, 40; 2 Nephi 1:9; Alma 9:9.

36. The Roman geographer Strabo, writing of an ill-fated military expedition to western Arabia in 25–24 BC, said that a majority of the original army of 10,000 died from “hunger and fatigue and diseases,” a tragedy that he attributed to the “waterless region” (Geography 16.4.23– 24). Referring to the area inland and along the southern coast of Arabia almost 200 years later, the author of the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea recorded that “these places are very unhealthy, and pestilential even to those sailing along the coast; but almost always fatal to those wandering there, who also perish often from want of food” (cited in Groom, Frankincense, 92).

37. For other summaries in the Book of Mormon of Lehi’s journey through Arabia, as well as aspects of experiences there, see 1 Nephi 17:1–2, 12; 2 Nephi 1:24; 2:2; 3:3; Alma 18:37–38; 36:29; 37:38–42. This era is characterized as one of “sore afflictions” (Mosiah 1:17), an expression linked somewhere to “bondage” (Mosiah 7:28; 12:2–4), though not in all its other occurrences (see Mosiah 9:3; Alma 61:4; 62:37). The documentation for hostilities against people outside a person’s Arabian tribe is hefty. See, for instance, Thomas, Arabia Felix, 13, 15, 28, 32, 40, 47. For other references, see Brown, “New Light from Arabia on Lehi’s ‘Tarl,’” 125–21; and note 53 below.

38. Nephi’s assertion that the Lord “did show unto many [prophets] concerning us” (1 Nephi 19:21) must also have included Zenock, Neum, and Zenos, whose words he had just quoted (see 19:10–17). Nephi then introduces Isaiah 48–49 by instructing his peo-ple not only to “hear . . . the words of the prophet [Isaiah]” but also to “ liken [Isaiah’s
words) unto yourselves” (19:24; compare Jacob’s observation in 2 Nephi 6:5).

43. The passage quoted here stands neither in the Hebrew nor in the Greek text of Isaiah 48:1–2.

44. One finds further possible reference to the corruption and iniquity in the city that met Lehi when he began his preaching. Of such a day, Isaiah holds that the citizens of Jerusalem will “swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, yet they swear not in truth nor in righteousness. Nevertheless, they call themselves of the holy city, but they do not stand in the fear of the Lord.” (2 Nephi 20:1–2; Isaiah 48:1–2). Of such wickedness among persons in Jerusalem, Nephi will later say that “their works were works of darkness, and their doings were doings of abominations” (2 Nephi 25:2). The Book of Mormon text of Isaiah 48:1–2, by the way, differs in important ways from that of the Hebrew text underlying the King James Version.

45. Another strong statement on difficulties in the desert has to do with the refining process in “the furnace of affliction,” which of course can allude to the heat that one experiences either in the desert or a place of trial. I “do this,” the Lord says, because “I will not suffer my name to be polluted” (see 1 Nephi 20:10–11; Isaiah 48:10–11). I follow here the reading of 1 Nephi, not that of the King James Version.

46. The note about “enemies” arises both in Omni 1:6 and Alma 9:10.

47. See George Rentz, who says that the average elevation of the peaks in the mountain chain is less than 2,000 meters (about 6,500 feet) and that the highest in the south is about 3,760 meters (about 12,300 feet). He also writes that “passes across al-Sarāt...are few and far between, and are usually difficult of transit” (“Thea’zirat, Al-‘Arab,” The Encyclopaedia of Islam [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–], 1:536). Adolf Grohmann and Emeric van Donzel note that “there are only a few gaps in the al-Sarāt chain (of mountains)” (“Al-Sarāt,” Encyclopaedia of Islam, 9:39). Importantly, Joseph Smith’s only known statement about the geography of Arabia and the route of Lehi and Sariah shows no knowledge of the mountain chain, or other geographical features for that matter. He simply said that the party traveled from “the Red Sea to the great Southern Ocean,” a rather singular statement when compared to Nephi’s complex narrative (“Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938], 267).

48. I have dealt with this aspect of the trek in “New Light from Arabia on Lehi’s Trail,” 77–79, 108–11.

49. The Hiltons suggest that Shazer was an oasis at Wadi al-Aṣān near the Red Sea that lay about 100 miles south of the al-Bad’ oasis (In Search of Lehi’s Trail, 77). This site lies about midway between the modern coastal towns of al-Muwaylah and al-Wajh, which serve Muslim pilgrims traveling from Egypt to Mecca and Medina. From my reconstruction, the Hiltons’ identification seems possible but not the only possibility. A person could travel through the mountains from both al-Muwaylah and al-Wajh. In an era later than that of Lehi and Sariah, a spur of the incense trail connected the al-Bad’ eastward and southward to the main road near Dedan (modern al-Ṭa‘lā). See Groom, Frankincense and Myrrh, 192 (map) and 206.

50. The only classical source to describe this area in any detail notes the presence of “eaters of fish” (the translation of al-Muhūqdīn in Huntington’s rendition) and “nomadic encampments.” The same source pointedly omits any mention of markets along the west coast of Arabia until one reaches Mouza, almost at the southern end of the Red Sea. See G. W. B. Huntington, The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea (London: Hakluyt Society, 1980), 31–34, §§20–24.

51. The mountains of the west generally receive rain during two periods each year, in March and April and again from June through September (see Grohmann and van Donzel, “Al-Sarāt,” Encyclopaedia of Islam, 9:39). Those in the southeast see rain usually only during the summer monsoons (see, for example, Brian Doe, Southern Arabia [London: Thames and Hudson, 1971], 18–21).

52. Strabo, quoting Eratosthenes of Cyrene, who lived about 275–194 B.C., wrote that “farmers” inhabited the northern parts of Arabia. In the central region were “tent-dwellers and camel-herds,” and water was obtained “by digging.” In the “extreme parts towards the south” one finds “fertile” lands (Geography 16.2). The suggestion that the “fertile parts” described by Nephi lay east of the mountains is that of Potter and Wellington (Lehi in the Wilderness, 53–93). Presumably, the expression “fertile parts” meant on one level that there was adequate fodder and water.

53. There is a problem here. It has to do with how far the extended family continued southward along the coastline. If they did not continue far, how did Nephi know that the mountain—the “borders”—continued to run near the Red Sea farther south? For Nephi wrote that, after leaving Shazer, his party followed “the same direction” and traveled “in the borders [mountains?]” near the Red Sea” (1 Nephi 16:14). But in my view, family members apparently turned into the mountains rather soon, near Shazer, leaving the Red Sea behind. My hypothesis is that the party met others along their trail, and these people evidently knew something about the geography of the coast of the Red Sea. Party members could not have avoided such contact.


55. Dusty Wright of the “hostile and incessant life of the Bedu” who “devour one another” and go for days without water and food. He wrote of others who were known as “desert fiends” and who endure “intolerable hardships” and attack others, leaving none alive. Consult Travels in Arabia Deserta, 1:164, 322; see also 166, 174, 179, 308, and 387–93 for accounts of raiding, robbing, killing, and restoring property. Thomas paints a similar picture of life in south Arabia (see Arabia Felix, xxiv, 9, 13, 36, 149–50, 165, 173–74). Nibley suggested that the Lord commanded members of Lehi’s party not to “make much fire” (1 Nephi 17:12) in order to conceal them from marauders (see Lehi in the Desert, 63–67).

56. About this vast landbend in south Yemen we read, “[W]ords cannot express the desolate aspect of this vast landbend...” It is as if the landscape had been sprinkled with some corrosive liquid, which, having eaten through the top protective layer, was able to bite deeply into the soft core underneath. The result is a maze of narrow gorges, some 1000 feet or more deep, winding and twisting around buttresses of rock” (Shipman, “The Hadhramaut,” 156–57, quoting at first Mabel and Theodore Bent). See also the photo of Shibam and surrounding area in National Geographic 168/4 (October 1985): 476–77.

57. See Phillips, Unknown Oman, 220; and Groom, Frankincense and Myrrh, 165–66.

58. “Some bodies were placed in tombs in a mass of disarticulated bones, indicating nomadic groups, who carried with them in bags or clay coffins those who died during seasonal migrations, burying them in tombs only when the tribe returned to its traditional burial place. It is also possible that, if the person was killed somewhere far away from his traditional burial place, what was left of him was carried in a container (clay coffin) to the traditional burial place, since the bones of those found were very incomplete.” The third possibility is that the bodies were first exposed at a designated spot until the flesh had decayed. The bones were then gathered up and placed in a container (clay coffin, anthropoid coffin, wide mouthed storage jars, or bags).” Khair


91. See Brown, Voices from the Dust, 35–37.

92. About a temple to the moon god Wadd between Marib and Sirwah, was Ibait and dated to 700 BC, Jürgen Schmidt writes that "the area surrounding the temple contains a large number of memorials, possibly graves; it appears that the custom of burying the dead within the sphere of influence of a holy shrine is a time-hallowed one. . . . [The shrine] stands far away from any human settlements . . . [and] may be termed to be the prototype of the Sabean temple" (Daum, Yemen, 81).

93. The tombs consist of a rect- angle of stones with long flat stones laid on top to hold the corpse. A mound of stones that marked the burial was then placed over the corpse.

94. Presumably, foreigners could be buried in these cemeteries. Groom notes an extensive burial area between Shabwah and Wadi Jawf that may point to earlier settlement (before 2500 BC). The burial chambers are circular in shape, differing from the rectangular forms of the south Arabian kingdoms. There are also "similar graves and grave mounds in other places near Nagrá" (Frankincense and Myrrh, 224–25).


96. The clouds appear as mists, recalling the mist of Lehi’s dream (see 1 Nephi 8:23). For connections between Lehi’s dream and features of Arabia, see Brown, “New Light from Arabia on Lehi’s Trail,” 64–69; and “The Queen of Sheba, Skyscraper Architecture, and Lehi’s Dream,” JBMS 11 (2002): 102–3.

97. One exception is that “the results of a cyclone in the mid-19th century were said to have been that ‘the [coastal] plain had been flooded, sweeping camels, goats and cattle out to the sea and scouring the creek and clearing away the [sand] bar’” (Jazan, Nomads in the Sultanate of Oman, 29–30, citing Miles, 1919).

98. Wind is a concern. Janzen writes that the monsoon winds average “20–25 knots between June and September” while the weaker trade winds from the north and east prevailed until the remainder of the year.” Moreover, there are “frequent sandstorms during these [lat- ter] months, particularly in the Salalah plain” (Jazan, Nomads in the Sultanate of Oman, 30, 22).


101. The lack of local shipbuilding may explain the brothers’ skepticism (see 1 Nephi 17:7). Of other shipbuilding centers, in the “mart of Persis called Ommana” one finds “local sewn boats called madarat [which] are exported to Ara- bia” (Huntingford, Periplus, 40, §36; see appendix 4 for Huntingford’s notes on boats and ships in Arabia). On the east African coast at a place called “Rhaptia” (exact locale unknown), and on an island called “Menouthias” (Pembia or Zanzibar), one finds the manufacture of sewn boats and, possibly, boats made from one log (Huntingford, Periplus, 29–30, §515–16, also 96–101 [three maps]). “Sume- rian and Akkadian inscrip- tions of the third millennium BC . . . [mention] Magan . . . [and] Uman. Timber and copper are said to be found there, and there is mention of ‘the shipwrights of Magan’” (George F. Hourani, Arab Sea- faring (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 6).

102. Shipbuilding is noted only in two locales along the Ara- bian shores, one in “Mouza” near the southern end of the Red Sea and the other in the northeast at a “mart of Persis called Ommana.” None are noted along the south shore (see Huntingford, Periplus, 32, 621, and 40, §36). Potter and Wellington argue for a ship- building industry in southern Oman (see Lehi in the Wilderness, 148–50).

103. Hourani says that the earliest boats were made “of skins, hallowed tree trunks” and the “earliest sailing ships . . . were not nailed but stitched” (Arab Seafaring, 3–4).


“We Did Again Take Our Journey”
David A. LeFevre

The title quotes 1 Nephi 16:133; 17:1.

3. Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 110, 112 (map). Nibley’s map is remarkably similar to the most current ones suggested by Brown, Aston, and Wellington, and Potter, whose lat- est views appear in this issue of JBMS.

4. Nibley’s additional writings about the early chapters of the Book of Mormon appeared in 1957 in An Approach to the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988); in 1967 in Since Cumorah (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988); and over the course of nearly four decades in other Book of Mormon writings since 1953, collected in The Prophetic Book of Mon- mon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989).


8. For mention of this phrase in the Old Testament, see Exodus 15:18; Deuteronomy 2:8; Joshua 8:15; Judges 20:12; and 2 Samuel 2:24; 15:23. Note that this trail is not mentioned again in scripture after 2 Samuel 15 (the time of David), and there it refers to a trail near Jerusalem, not on the other side of the Dead Sea. Bible atlases confirm that there was something called “The Way of the Wilderness of Edom” and “The Way of
the Wilderness of Moab” before and during the Israelite conquest of Canaan but that after that period the trail called “The Way of the Wilderness” went from Bethel to Jericho, well east and north of the Dead Sea and Jerusalem; thus it would not have been a trail that Lehi would have taken. See Yehonah Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1993), maps 10 (p. 17), 52 (p. 48), 54 (p. 49), and 81 (p. 66); also James B. Pritchard, ed., *HarperCollins Atlas of the Bible* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 58.

9. See, for example, 1 Nephi 2:4–6; 3:4, 9, 14–15, 27; 5:22; 7:1–3, 5–6; 8:2; 16:9–12, 14, 35; 17:1–4, 44, all of which use the term wilderness in the sense conveyed by the Hebrew word midabor, “used to describe three types of country in general: pastureland (Josh 2:22; Ps 65:12; Jer 23:10), uninhabited land (Deut 32:10; Job 28:26; Prov 21:19; Jer 9:1), and large areas of land in which oases or cities and towns exist here and there. . . . The largest tracts called midabor are Sinai, the Negeb, the Jordan Valley, and the Arabian desert.” See R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), entry 400.

10. See also Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 81, where he observes that “there is no expression common in the East than ‘into the wilderness’ and discounts the assumption that ‘into the wilderness’ has anything to do with the ‘Wilderness Way.’”

11. See Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 3–5, 25–27. Though the “borders” argument is not specifically mentioned in the JBMS article, the reader is referred to the book for details and it is a key point in the authors’ location of the Valley of Lemuel.

12. See Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 147. Despite the fact that in one or two cases in the Hebrew Bible géléal could potentially be rendered as “mountain” or “height” (see Psalm 78:15 in the NRSV, for example), that mountains make great borders, and that the later Arabic cognate jabal means “mountain,” the word géléal is predominantly used in the Hebrew Bible to indicate the border(s) of a territory or the area of the territory itself. Other Hebrew words translated “borders” or “coasts” in the KJV do not mean “mountain” either. The weight of this evidence is simply too great, without additional information in Nephi’s record, to automatically accept Wellington and Potter’s notion that “borders” in 1 Nephi 2:5 and 8 are mountain chains. They could be, but that is not clear in the text.

13. For examples of borders, see 1 Nephi 2:5, 8, and 16:14. For mountains, see 1 Nephi 11:1; 16:30; and 17:7. See also Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “The Wrong Place for Lehi’s Trail and the Valley of Lemuel,” *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 206–9.

14. See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One: Title Page, Witness Statements, 1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 10* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 69–70. The original and printer’s manuscripts both originally read was, but Joseph Smith later edited was to were in the printer’s manuscript. The typesetter perhaps misread Joseph’s were (possibly written as were) as are. See also Skousen’s discussion of the dialectal was used in place of were (*Analysis of Textual Variants, Part One*, 101–5, under 1 Nephi 4:4).


16. See endnote 8 of S. Kent Brown’s article here in “Refining the Spotlight on Lehi and Sariah.”


18. Besides the opinions in this *Journal*, Lynn and Hope Hilton suggested four years at the valley (*Discovering Lehi* [Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1996], 32); and Hugh Nibley estimated that the party took between one and three years to reach the location of the broken bow (many days after leaving Shazer, 16:12–18), based on how long bows typically lasted (see *Lehi in the Desert*, 60).

19. The Hiltons point out that “[the Valley of Lemuel] could have been considered by Nephi, especially from the perspective of the New World, as being in the ‘land of Jerusalem’ (Hilton and Hilton, *Discovering Lehi*, 57).

20. The gathering of seeds could also indicate extremely good timing—that is, if the family arrived at the valley just as the seeds were ready to harvest.

21. To be sure, Nephi could be referring to his father’s family and those of the sons of Ishmael as “our families,” or he could possibly view each married couple as a “family” to account for the plural. But that is contrary to the Hebrew word that was surely behind Nephi’s text—mil‘îthâh, meaning a clan or tribe, which has the sense of a group and not a man or even a couple with no offspring (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1046–47). For an example that contrasts a single man with a clan, see Judges 18:19.

22. See Chadwick, “The Wrong Place for Lehi’s Trail,” 202, 210–14; the quotation is from p. 214.


25. This is evidence of Alma’s access to Lehi’s record, the translation of which was lost when Martin Harris failed to return to Joseph Smith the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon translation. Alma gives the name as the one Lehi and Nephi used, though the name is nowhere recorded in our translation of Nephi’s small plates.

26. For example, see 1 Nephi 16:26–29, which shows that the writing on the ball was instructional, not geographic. But see also 16:30, where it is possible to infer that the ball gave geographic instructions to Nephi about where to hunt.

27. Wellington and Potter’s efforts to show that Nephi’s terminology in 1 Nephi 16:14–16 might be linked to an ancient name for the region require several tentative conclusions to be strung together, including a thesaurus entry in Microsoft Word—interesting, but hardly compelling. However, their use of Tactical Pilotage Charts and their tracking of cultivation density exhibit commendable research and logic.

28. Such fertility is surprising, perhaps, on the one hand, like Joseph Smith, have not visited the region. The typical image of Arabia does not include hundreds of miles of farmland.


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32. Such fertility is surprising, perhaps, on the one hand, like Joseph Smith, have not visited the region. The typical image of Arabia does not include hundreds of miles of farmland.
32. Genesis contains what is probably the most detailed account of carrying a body to a known location. Knowing he was near death, Jacob carefully instructed Joseph to take his remains back to the family burial grounds (Genesis 47:29–30). Joseph did as his father asked and transported Jacob’s embalmed body back to the cave Machpelah in Canaan, where Abraham and Sarah were laid (Genesis 50:5–7). Jacob’s burial is an example of exactly what Brown cites in an endnote (a body being “returned to its original place”), but this was certainly not the case with Ishmael, who was far from home when he died, with no traditional Israelite burial site nearby.

33. Scriptural examples show people being buried near where they died, including Rachel’s nurse, Deborah (Genesis 35:8); Rachel herself (Genesis 35:19–20); Miriam (Numbers 20:1); and Saul and his sons (1 Samuel 31:12–13).

34. Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, Life in Biblical Israel (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 364. The practical matter is that carrying Ishmael’s body around in the hot desert for any period of time would have presented a challenge in terms of body decay and odor.

35. It could be that the family camped at a place among the modern names Wadi Jawf, Furdat Naham, Wadi Naham, or even Marib, where they would have found much water and food. See the Nahom map in Wellington and Potter’s article or the maps on pages 114 and 117 in Lehi in the Wilderness. There may even have been more than one camp, one in a harsher place before Ishmael’s death and another later, since it was not until after the murmuring ceased that Nephi reports they were able to get food (1 Nephi 16:39).

36. For a discussion of these discoveries, see Warren P. Aston’s article in this issue of JBMS, titled “Across Arabia in the Footsteps of Lehi and Sariah.”

37. See King and Stager, Life in Biblical Israel, 372–73.

38. Given Nephi’s precise wording in 17:3–4, it is possible that the journey from Jerusalem could actually have taken more than eight years. The only use of the term sojourn in the entire Book of Mormon is in these verses, which discuss the journey between Nahom and Bountiful. Thus one way to read 17:4 is that the “sojourn” itself was eight years. If true, then the total journey from Jerusalem to Bountiful could have been nine years or more.


40. Since strange in Hebrew (nēkān) has the sense of “that which is foreign” or “of another family, tribe, or nation” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon, 648), Laman could be accusing Nephi of taking them into a wilderness inhabited or controlled by strangers.

41. Alma clearly employs the same limited meaning when “our fathers” in Alma 37:38.

42. An engaging fictional representation of this concept is found in H. B. Moore, A Light in the Wilderness (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2005), 173–239.

43. The Aston’s carefully documented six potential sites before lobbying for their favorite, Wadi Sayy/Khor Kharafot; see Aston and Aston, In the Footsteps of Lehi, 11, 37–59. Brown comments that there are “as many as a dozen inlet bays, any one of which could have served Nephi’s shipbuilding needs.”

44. Both parties disqualify the other’s candidate site with vigor. In the process, however, they disagree on basic facts, such as the availability of ore or timber at each site. Continued neutral investigations will doubtless provide clarity on how all sites meet the requisite criteria.

45. In his article herein, Aston thoroughly documents the advantages of his favorite candidate, Khor Kharafot, though not without dispute from Wellington and Potter, who claim a “growing body of evidence” supporting their preferred location, Khor Rori. The most persuasive factor is that Khor Rori was well populated at the time, while Khor Kharafot appears to have been sparsely populated, if at all, when Lehi arrived.

46. The 1985 author is cited in Aston and Aston, In the Footsteps of Lehi, 28.

47. A clue is that they give the place a name of their choosing, instead of adopting the established local name as they did at Nahom.


49. This further evidence for the longer sojourn and bondage in southern Arabia after Nahom, for Lehi’s people arrive in Bountiful seemingly already familiar enough with the language to easily use a noun from it instead of their own Hebrew word for sea, yam.

50. It is interesting to note that the word curious had several common meanings besides the ones most used today (“inquisitive” or “highly unusual”), which are the meanings Wellington and Potter expect. Other definitions include “made or prepared skillfully,” “done with painstaking accuracy or attention to detail,” and “careful; fastidious” (Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, s.v. “curious”). Nephi’s meaning is likely that they worked the timbers in a careful, skillful manner. This is the same meaning Nephi intends when he refers to the Liahona as a “round ball of curious workmanship” (1 Nephi 16:10), demonstrating his appreciation for and knowledge of fine metalworking. On the meaning of curious, see Richard L. Anderson, “Attempts to Redefine the Experience of the Eight Witnesses,” JBMS 14/1 (2005): 125n11; and Lagery et al., Book of Mormon Reference Companion, 830. For Nephi as metallurgist, see “Vikings, Iron, and the Book of Mormon,” Insights 13/1 (January 1990): 2; and Brown and Johnson, Journey of Faith, 61–65.

51. Brown, Voices from the Dust, 56.


53. The only possibly troubling phrase is when the people “go down into the ship” (18:6), though the language is sufficiently vague that they could be “going down” from the higher land to the water.


55. Figure Lehi Connected with the Land, BYU Studies 6/2 (1997): 205–17.


An Archaeologist’s View
Jeffrey R. Chadwick

1. Specific reasons why Lehi could not have lived or possessed land in the hills of Judah, such as at the Beit Lehi site, are given in my study “Lehi’s House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance,” in Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004): 105–6.

2. On the lack of connection between the Arabic toponym lei and the Hebrew term lehi, see the remarks of Professor Frank Moore Cross in the response by Hershel Shanks (editors), “Is the Mormon Figure Lehi Connected with a Prophetic Inscription Near Jerusalem?” in Biblical Archaeology Review 14/6 (November/December 1988): 19.


4. The most recent effort of Latter-day Saint tourists trying to connect Lehi to the Beit Lehi (Beyt Loya) area is known as the “Beit-Lehi Excavations,”...
and information about their effort is available online at www.beitlehi.com. These tourists have volunteered labor at the excavation of a Byzantine-era Christian church at Beit Loya. In 2006 the Web site referred to the area as the "City of Lehi," but as of 2007 that name has been deleted, and the Web site uses only the term Beit-Lehi. But there are no professional archaeologists who agree with the tourists on this naming or who think the Byzantine site has any connection to the era in which Lehi lived (seventh–sixth century B.C.).

Lehi’s house was probably a typical Jericho dwelling, a small single-story structure, the type Israeli archaeologists call a "four-room house." It was very likely located in the ancient city quarter known in Hebrew as the Mishnah (oddly rendered as "the college" in the King James version of 2 Kings 22:14 and 2 Chronicles 34:22). The Mishnah neighborhood lay just inside the "middle gate" (Jeremiah 39:3) in the northern city wall, on land that is currently the Jewish Quarter in today’s Old City of Jerusalem. See my discussion of the architecture and location of Lehi’s residence, including maps and drawings, in "Lehi’s House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance," 81–130.

The "land of [Lehi’s] inheritance" was probably a tract located somewhere north of Jerusalem, in the ancient territory of the tribe of Manasseh. Although Lehi and his sons had access to that land tract, they maintained no residence there. For a thorough discussion of the issues surrounding Lehi’s land of inheritance, see my study "Lehi’s House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance," 81–130.

The exact dates of Lehi’s residence in that year. Brown and Seely, however, note that Zedekiah came to the throne in 597 B.C. and suggest that Lehi’s departure occurred some time after that year (see S. Kent Brown and David R. Seely, “Jeremiah’s Imprisonment and the Date of Lehi’s Departure,” The Religious Educator 2/1 [2001]: 16–17). For quite some time I have maintained that Lehi departed Jerusalem years earlier, in 605 B.C. (probably around November).

I first suggested this dating scheme in print in my article "Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?" JBM 12/2 (2003): 117–18n24: "It is historically certain that Nebuchadnezzar’s 21-year-old Zedekiah upon the Judean throne in the year we know as 597 B.C. (see 2 Kings 24:17–18). Some Latter-day Saints will wonder how this can be, in view of the prophecy that Jesus would be born 600 years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 10:4). Based on the dating model of Elder James E. Talmage, who placed Jesus’s birth on April 6, 1 B.C., the year 600 B.C has appeared as an extratextual footnote to 1 Nephi 2:4 (the passage where Lehi departed Jerusalem) in all editions of the Book of Mormon since 1920 (the 1920 edition was edited by Elder Talmage). Therefore, some Latter-day Saints have assumed that 600 B.C must have been the ‘first year of the reign of Zedekiah’ (1 Nephi 1:4). A number of dating models have been proposed (different from Talmage’s model) to explain how the historical date of Zedekiah’s first year (597 B.C.) can be reconciled with Lehi’s 600-year prophecy, but space prevents exploring them here [see, for example, David Rolph Seely, “Chronology, Book of Mormon,” in Book of Mormon Reference Companion, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 198–99]. I will, however, offer a very brief outline of my own solution, which is that Jesus was most likely born in the winter of 5 B.C./4 A.D. (just months prior to the death of Herod the Great in April of 4 B.C) and that Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem probably occurred 600 years earlier, in late 605 B.C. In this model I presume that the ‘first year of the reign of Zedekiah’ spoken of in 1 Nepi 1:4 does not refer to 21-year-old Zedekiah’s installation by Nebuchadnezzar, but to the year 609 B.C., theorizing that following the death of Zedekiah’s father, Josiah (see 2 Kings 23:29–30), and the Egyptian removal of Zedekiah’s older full brother Jehoahaz from the throne (see 2 Kings 23:30–34), the young 8-year-old Zedekiah was recognized by Judah as legitimate heir to the throne, even though the Egyptians installed his older half brother Jehoaikim (see 2 Kings 23:34). This solution further theorizes that the exilic or postexilic composer of the last segment of 2 Kings (comprising 2 Kings 23:26–25:30) was unaware of the situation with young Zedekiah and reported only the tenure of the Egyptian vassal Jehoahaz, first mentioning Zedekiah at his installment by the Babylonians at age 21. However, it would have been the 8-year-old Zedekiah, in a 609 B.C context, of whom Nephi was speaking in 1 Nephi 1:4.

Thus I date “the first year of the reign of Zedekiah mentioned by Nephi (1 Nephi 1:4) to 609 B.C., when eight- or nine-year-old Zedekiah could logically have been regarded as the genuine successor to his deceased father Josiah and his deposed brother Jehoahaz (see 2 Kings 23:29–35; on the question of whether an eight- or nine-year-old son of Josiah could plausibly have inherited the kingship, compare the account in 2 Kings 22:1, where Josiah himself was only eight years old when he was placed on Judah’s throne). This means that Lehi’s ministry in Jerusalem may have lasted as much as four years (609–605 B.C) prior to his departure. But these issues of dating are far from settled.

The expertise in metalwork that Nephi documents in his narrative strongly suggests that he and his father were metal smiths and that they had experience in mining ore and processing it into tools, plates, and other artifacts. Lehi possessed supplies of both gold and silver (see 1 Nephi 2:4), and Nephi was able to work in these precious metals (see 2 Nephi 5:15). Silver was the common medium of exchange in Judah and was always in plentiful supply locally. But gold was rare, and the main source for Judaeans to obtain gold in that period was Egypt. This may help explain Lehi’s and Nephi’s skill in Egyptian as a second language—they likely traveled to Egypt on a regular basis to obtain gold supplies. (Hebrew, of course, would have been their native tongue.) Nephi also noted his ability to work in iron and copper (see 2 Nephi 5:15).

The primary source for copper ore in the Red Sea area near the Gulf of Aqaba and the adjacent Sinai Peninsula. This suggests to me that Lehi and his sons had previously traveled from Jerusalem to the Gulf of Aqaba area, perhaps often, in order to obtain copper ore and smelt it into ingots that could be brought back to Jerusalem. And this would mean that Lehi and Nephi were already well familiar with the most expeditious route from Jerusalem to the Red Sea, having probably traveled it numerous times. The suggestion that Lehi was a metalworker was first made by John Tvedtnes as early as 1984 in “Was Lehi a Caravaneer?” (FARMS Preliminary Report, 1984) and was later expanded by him in “Was Lehi a Caravaneer?” in his Most Correct Boats from a Book of Mormon Scholar (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 94–97. See my fuller discussion of Lehi and Nephi as metal smiths who were experienced in traveling to the Red Sea area to obtain copper in “Lehi’s House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance,” 113–17.


10. The wilderness route from Jerusalem along the Drag...
and Arugot valleys is shown in the influential Carta Bible Atlas (formerly The Macmillan Bible Atlas) as the path taken by Flavius Silva's Tenth Roman Legion to travel from Jerusalem past Ein Gedi to Masada. See Yoel Hazaroni et al., The Carta Bible Atlas, 4th ed. (Jerusalem: Carta, 2002), 190 (map 260).

11. In the winter of 1994, when I was a full-time instructor at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, I explored the segment of this route from Jerusalem to Ein Gedi with my wife and children. I also served as Scoutmaster of Jerusalem Troop 75 at the time and took my Scouts along the Arugot valley segment of that desert trail (located in Israel's Ein Gedi National Park).

12. Brown explains in an endnote that the Jerusalem/Ein Gedi/Arabah route is the one preferred by D. Kelly Ogden in “Answering the Lord’s Call (1 Nephi 1–7),” in Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven: 1 Nephi to Alma 29, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 23n8. I think it is important to mention, even if only in an endnote, that Ogden walked the entire distance from Jerusalem to the Red Sea via the Arabah valley in order to explore Lehi’s trail firsthand. The walk was accomplished over several terms during 1986 and 1987 while Ogden was an instructor at Brigham Young University’s Jerusalem Center student programs. As a fellow instructor there, I joined him on some portions of his “Lehi Trek,” including the summer 1986 portion which it became evident to us both that Lehi could not have taken a trail from Qumran to Ein Gedi along the northwest shore of the Dead Sea since steep cliffs meet the lake’s edge there. This led us both to the conclusion, on strictly practical grounds, that Lehi must have come from Jerusalem to Ein Gedi via the Arugot valley approach and that he traveled along the Dead Sea’s west shore only south of Ein Gedi, where that shoreline flattens out and makes foot traffic possible.


16. The article may be accessed online at maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/review-main.php by clicking on the link for FARMS Review 17/2, 2005.


18. My negative conclusions about Tayyib al-ism were not well received in some quarters, as noted by the FARMS Review editor (see the editor’s introduction by Daniel C. Peterson, “Not So Easily Dismissed: Some Facts for Which Counterexplanations of the Book of Mormon Will Need to Account,” FARMS Review 17/2 [2005]: xvii-xviii). I fully understand this disappointment, and even the initial tendency toward denial, on the part of those who not only felt that a “valley of Lemuel” had been discovered but also had invested significant resources in presenting the site to the public in books and video programs. And to be fair, I should point out that Brown and Wellington had not yet seen my review when they began preparing their original drafts for the articles in this present issue of JBMS. It may be that they or others who have a vested interest in Tayyib al-ism will eventually prepare and publish a full response to the issues I raised in the FARMS Review.


20. This is essentially a restatement of the model presented in Chadwick, “The Wrong Place for Lehi’s Trail and the Valley of Lemuel,” 211.

21. The apparatus for capitalized abbreviations in the footnotes is found at the beginning of each Book of Mormon, triple combination, and Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible. However, the apparatus for the Book of Mormon and the triple combination omits the capitalized abbreviations HEB (Hebrew) and GR (Greek) that are included in the Bible. The page titled “Explanation Concerning Abbreviations” at the front of the Latter-day Saint edition of the KJV indicates that a HEB footnote provides “an alternate translation from the Hebrew.” The use of HEB in footnote α of 1 Nephi 16:13 is thus supposed to indicate that an “alternate translation” of Shazer is “twisting, intertwining.” The problems, of course, are that we do not have a translation of the name to begin with and that we cannot know if the proposed alternate translation is legitimate.

22. In addition to 1 Nephi 16:13, HEB occurs in a footnote to each of the following verses: 1 Nephi 16:34 (concerning Nahom, but at least qualified by probably); 2 Nephi 9:20; Mosiah 11:3; and Mosiah 27:29.


26. See Potter and Wellington, Lehi in the Wilderness, 142–43. Not only do the authors suggest that Arab sailors accompanied Lehi’s colony on the voyage to America, they propose that Lehi took along household servants as well, who remain unmentioned in Nephi’s text because they possessed no rights as family members. But no textual evidence for this suggestion is offered.

1. The Brightening Light on the Journey of Lehi and Sariah By Daniel Mc Kinlay

1. See the bibliography of Lehi’s journey that follows this article.


4. Warren P. Aston and Michaela Knoth Aston, “The Search for Nahom and the End of Lehi’s Trail in Southern Arabia” (FARMS, 1989); And We Called the Place Bountiful: The End of Lehi’s Arabian Journey (FARMS, 1991); In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi’s Journey Across Arabia to Bountiful (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994).


13. Hilton and Hilton, In Search of Lehi’s Trail, 81.


17. See Aston and Aston, In the Footsteps of Lehi, 22.


22. See Aston and Aston, In the Footsteps of Lehi, 37–43.

23. See Potter and Wellington, Lehi in the Wilderness, 152–53.


Birds Along Lehi’s Trail
Stephen L. Carr

1. The trip leaders for this tour were Gregory Witt of Brigham Young University; Lynn M. Hilton, author of two books pertaining to Lehi’s journey, In Search of Lehi’s Trail and Discovering Lehi; and Warren P. Aston, author of the book In the Footsteps of Lehi.


3. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, in “Lehi’s House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance,” in Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 81–130, presents evidence that Lehi’s house was located inside the city of Jerusalem and that his land of inheritance lay at some distance outside the city.


7. See the footnotes in the 1979 edition of the Latter-day Saint King James Bible for Deuteronomy 14:12–18. Also see William Smith, A Dictionary of the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1948, 11th printing 1976).

8. See note 2 for publication data.

9. This word, when broken down into its Latin components, means “bone-break,” or “a bird that breaks bones.” The Eurasian Lannergeer, Gypaetus barbatus, a type of vulture, after cleaning off a carcass as much as possible, tosses the animal’s bones high up in the air and repeatedly drops them until they break open and the marrow can be extracted.

10. If this bird is the same as the present-day Osprey, Pandion haliaetus, it is bird of prey that feeds solely on bony fish, which were clean according to the Mosaic law, and does not consume carrion as a vulture does. If, however, this bird is...
10. The kite, as well as the falcon, is a type of hawk.

11. This is the European Red Kite, Milvus milvus, which does not occur in the Middle East. Therefore, the term buzzard, as rendered in the Hebrew, although being more generic, is more accurate.

12. Buzzards are a large, soaring type of hawk.

13. The raven, after its kind, includes crows, magpies, and jays, all of which are scavengers.

14. There is a notable difference between the eight-foot-tall ostrich and even the largest owl. The present-day range of the wild ostrich is essentially confined to the savannah areas of central and east Africa, reaching as far north as the southern edge of Egypt. In millennia past, the range extended farther up into Egypt, the Sinai Peninsula, and even southern Palestine. Interestingly, in light of the Bible’s prohibition of eating ostrich, there are at least two ostrich farms in Israel, one in the south a few miles north of Eilat, the other near the Sea of Galilee.

15. This word apparently does not refer to the Cuckoo. Most modern biblical scholars consider it to be either the Seagull, as do the Tanakh translators, or the Petrel. Petrels are a sea-going family of gull-sized or smaller birds that feed off the surface of the water, thereby picking up anything that might be edible. They are scavengers of the high seas, similar to gulls, except that they do not come to the land except to breed and raise their young. They even sleep at night resting atop the rolling waves of the sea.

16. Practically all gulls are known to be scavengers, either on the open sea or along beaches.

17. While most hawks prefer to capture their prey fresh, if extremely hungry they might be forced to eat carrion.

18. Even now there is a species named Little Owl, Athene noctua, in the Middle East and North Africa.

19. There are several large owls in the Middle East similar to North America’s Great Horned Owl.

20. This is an obvious mistranslation, as the swan belongs to the larger goose-duck-swan family, which was and is currently used for food.

21. The only essentially all-white owl in the Middle East is the ubiquitous Barn Owl, Tyto alba.

22. The gier eagle is a type of vulture, probably the Egyptian Vulture, Neophron percnopterus.

23. The bustard is a large terrestrial bird, several species of which are native to the Middle East and are not related to the hawk eagle family.

24. Included in the heron family are bitterns and egrets, all marsh waders, which besides catching and eating fish also consume many kinds of amphibians, and reptiles, some of which may be poisonous to humans.

25. Why this mistranslation occurred is unclear. The Lapwing, Vanellus vanellus (a type of plover), and the Hoopoe, Upupa epops, occur both in continental Europe as well as in Turkey. However, only the Lapwing is common in Great Britain, where the King James translators lived, while the Hoopoe is found in the Middle East, including southern Palestine near where the Mosaic law was given and in parts of the Arab Peninsula.

Weather Report from the Valley of Lemuel

Wm. Revell Phillips

1. Lehi was of the northern tribe of Manasseh (see Alma 10:3) but was living in the southern tribal lands of Judah.


3. See Butzer, “Environmental Change in the Near East.”


11. See Groom, Frankincense and Myrrh, 96.

12. See Groom, Frankincense and Myrrh, 69.

13. See Groom, Frankincense and Myrrh, 111.


15. Hugh Nibley, Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 50.


17. See Potter and Wellington, Lehi in the Wilderness, 5.


20. A perched water table is formed where an impermeable bed of limited horizontal extent (e.g., clay or granite) is overlain by permeable rock material (e.g., sandstone or alluvium). Rainwater accumulates in the permeable and porous upper rock material but cannot penetrate downward into the impermeable rock. Thus water builds up on the impermeable surface and flows out where that surface is exposed by erosion, as in the floor of a canyon. A perched water table in the desert lies much nearer the surface than the regional water table, which may lie at very great depth.


23. It is noted here that no report of children being born appears in the record before the party left Nahom (see 1 Nephi 17:1). This in no way precludes the earlier birth of children, and to assume from this that Lehi departed Nahom nine months after Ishmael’s daughters arrived at Lehi’s camp would be an unfounded assumption. Lehi’s complete journey took eight years (see 17:4) and over 2,000 miles. If the left Nahom after one year on the trail, the remaining seven years and 700 miles are summed up in three scriptural verses (see 17:3–5).


29. [With Real Intent] Out of Judaism

Nancy Goldberg Hilton

1. I give more details about my conversion in my autobio-
Steel in Early Metallurgy
John L. Sorenson

5. See Van der Merwe and Avery, "Pathways to Steel," 146.
10. See Harvey Harlow Nininger, Find a Falling Star (New York: Paul S. Erikson, 1972), 238.
15. While it is theoretically possible that presence of a name does not require physical presence of the object so labeled, in this case from where else could the names for metal have been borrowed?
17. See Marcelo Alejandre, Cartilla Hausteca con Su Gramática, Diccionario, y Varías Reglas para Aprender el Idioma (México: Oficina Tip. de la Secretaria de Fomento, 1890), 80, 88.
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