



NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title “We Did Again Take Our Journey”

Author(s) David A. LeFevre

Reference *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/2 (2006): 58–67, 120–22.

ISSN 1065-9366 (print), 2168-3158 (online)

Abstract David A. LeFevre analyzes the studies done by Warren Aston (see page 8), Richard Wellington and George Potter (see page 26), and Kent Brown (see page 44) and compares them, using the text of the Book of Mormon as a guide. These three studies take liberty in interpreting Nephi’s usage of specific terms; LeFevre, however, insists that such interpretations are unnecessary and inaccurate. He analyzes other phrases in a more conservative way in order to find additional information regarding Lehi’s trek. He specifically discusses Lehi’s life in Jerusalem, the route Lehi took from Jerusalem to the Red Sea, the Valley of Lemuel, the route from Shazer to Nahom, the route from Nahom to Bountiful, and the building of the ship at Bountiful.

“We Did Again Take Our Journey”

David A. LeFevre

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.”¹ Nibley modestly called his work “little more than a general survey,”² 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.³ His subsequent works continued to bring Lehi’s story to life and show its

unambiguous connection to life in ancient Israel and Arabia.⁴

Nibley’s writings proved to be a catalyst for subsequent scholars and explorers,⁵ including those featured in this issue of the *Journal*,⁶ 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.⁷ 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-

Shoreline of the Gulf of Aqaba near Bir Marsha. Forty-four miles from Aqaba, these mountains block further travel south and force travelers inland via the valley in the center. Photo courtesy George Potter.



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.⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

Another term that Wellington and Potter examine to help determine both the path to and the location of the Valley of Lemuel is *borders*.¹¹ 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 *gēbûl*. This is the term Wellington and Potter equate with “mountain.” But *gēbûl* means “territory” or “boundary.”¹² Nephi has no trouble distinguishing between “borders” and “mountains” elsewhere,¹³ 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*.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ Based on the available evidence, there is no compelling motivation to prefer one over the other, except perhaps to choose the quickest way out.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ Gathering seeds probably indicates a stay of at least one growing season.²⁰ 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.²¹

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

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.²⁶ 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.



To the right of center is the mountain pass that makes passage possible from the seashore and lower canyon to the long valley known as Wadi Tayyib al-Ism. Photo courtesy George Potter.

Marsha,²² but Potter had already visited the area and determined that the wadis there were dry.²³ Potter and Wellington’s suggestion of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, which they have visited multiple times, satisfactorily fits the description in 1 Nephi,²⁴ and no other serious candidate has been presented.²⁵ With further research and exploration, including a detailed and scientific survey of the area, we may

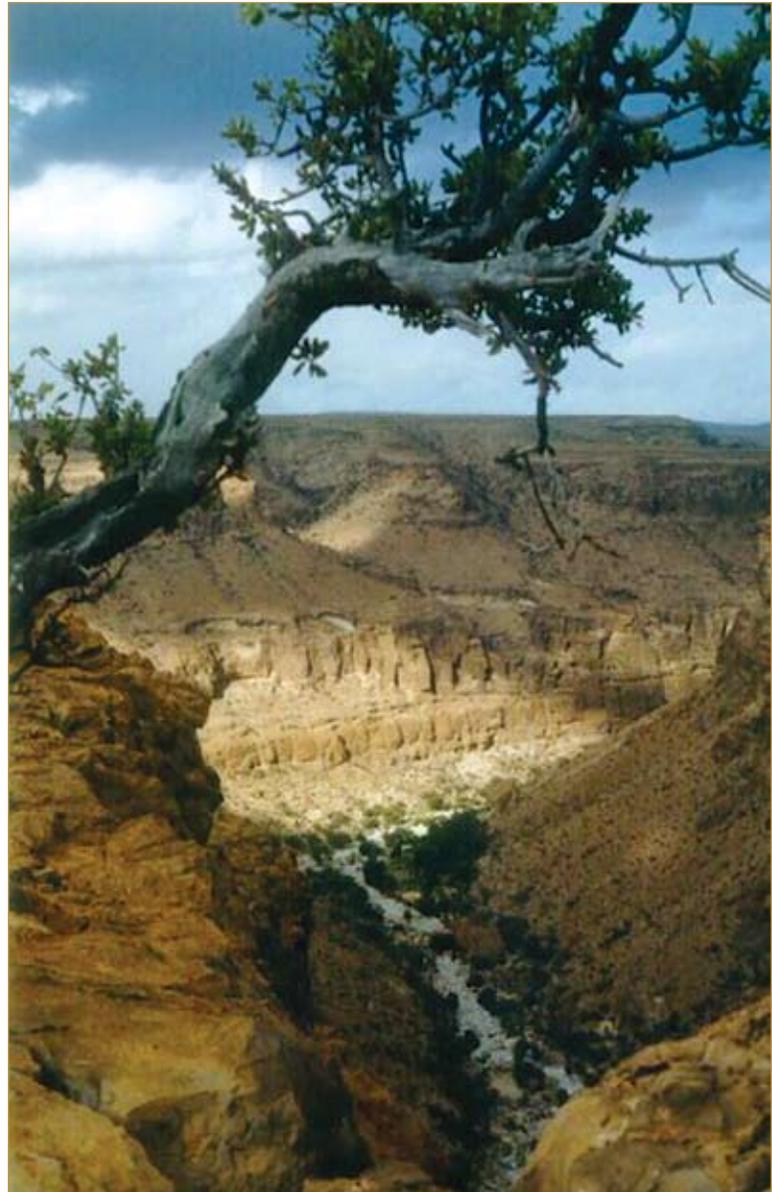
A note on directions: Wellington and Potter are inclined to take Nephi's directional pronouncements literally, while Brown argues that they are more a general sense of direction. It is true that the "ball" *could* have provided specific directions as Wellington and Potter suggest, but there is little indication of that in Nephi's record, only that it pointed the way.²⁷ 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,²⁸ 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 fertility²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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.³¹ 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 fer-



Typical wadi in Yemen. Photo courtesy Kim Clark.

tile 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.³² 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.³³ This concurs with a strong cultural and scriptural mandate to bury a body quickly, preferably on the same day as death.³⁴ 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 a more exact starting 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.³⁵ 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.³⁶

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 Wellington 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 Furdāt (“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 Rub’ 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



Collapsed structures blend into the barren Arabian landscape. Photo courtesy Warren Aston.

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 13.⁴¹ 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.⁴²

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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ Though the evidence appears to be leaning in favor of Khor Kharfot,⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

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,⁴⁷ 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



Aerial view of Wadi Sayq/Khor Kharfot. Photo courtesy Kim Clark.

Semitic, as has been suggested,⁴⁸ they had to learn the word from someone there who already spoke that language.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰

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 con-

cludes, "After we had sailed for the space of many days we did arrive at the promised land" (18:23).

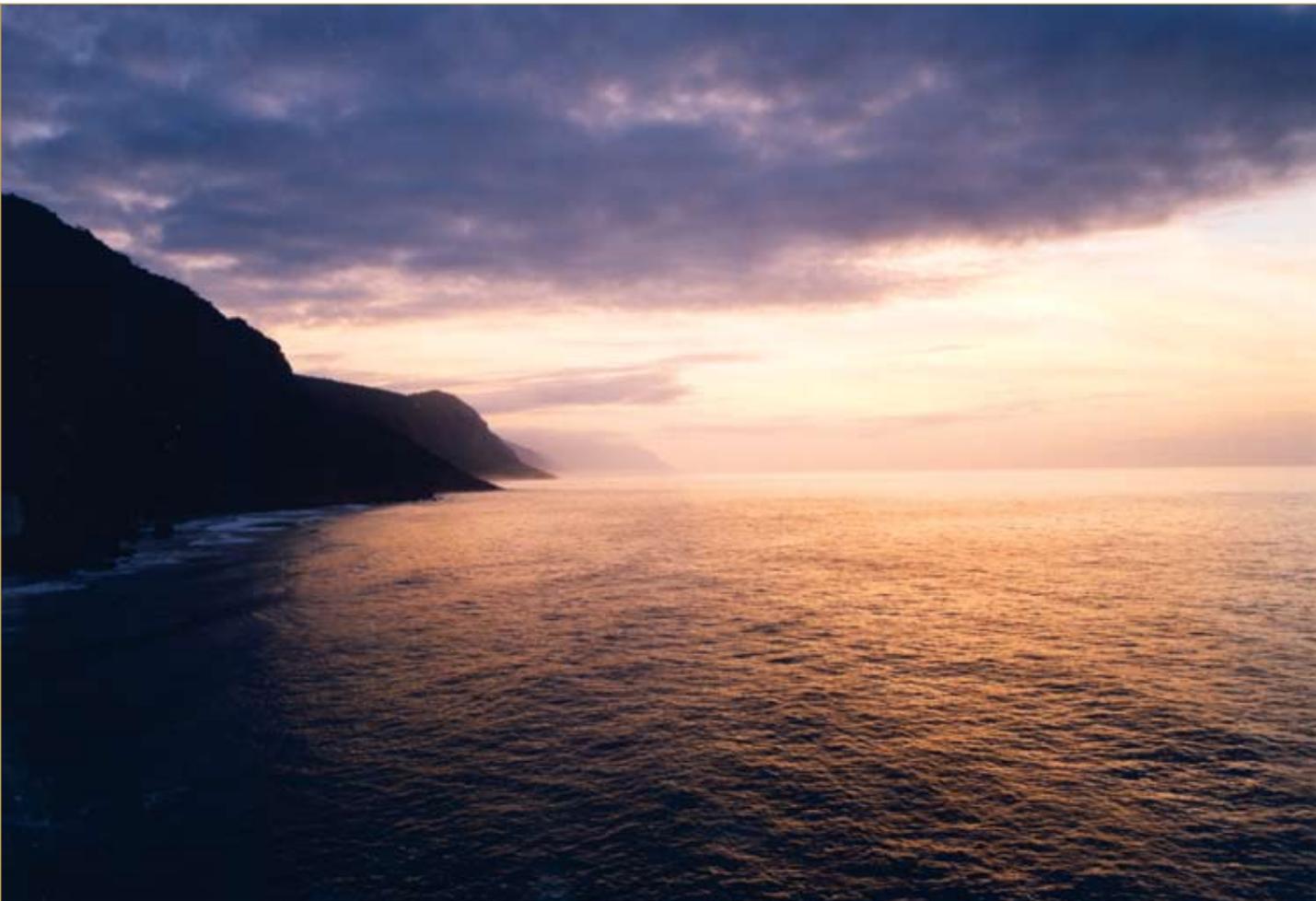
The route followed by the ship cannot be determined from the text; Nephi does not even give directions as he did with the Arabian journey. It is probable that the voyagers had to stop many times along the way, for fresh water if nothing else.⁵¹ This surely meant additional interactions with other people 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,⁵² 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,⁵³ 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 sea-coast. 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.”⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ 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. 

- Yassine, "Social-Religious Distinctions in Iron Age Burial Practice in Jordan," in *Midian, Moab and Edom: The History and Archaeology of Late Bronze and Iron Age Jordan and North-West Arabia*, ed. John F. A. Sawyer and David J. A. Clines (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 32.
59. On mourning customs, see Lawrence H. Schiffman, "mourning rites," *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier et al. (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 661–62.
60. See Brown, *Voices from the Dust*, 35–37.
61. About a temple to the moon god Wadd between Marib and Sirwah, west of Marib 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).
62. The tombs consist of a rectangle 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.
63. 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 Nagrān" (*Frankincense and Myrrh*, 224–25).
64. See Phillips, *Unknown Oman*, 169; and Jörg Janzen, *Nomads in the Sultanate of Oman: Tradition and Development in Dhofar* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1986), 38.
65. 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.
66. 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'" (Janzen, *Nomads in the Sultanate of Oman*, 29–30, citing Miles, 1919).
67. 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 "predominate during the remainder of the year." Moreover, there are "frequent sandstorms during these [later] months, particularly in the Salalah plain" (Janzen, *Nomads in the Sultanate of Oman*, 30, 22).
68. See Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 152–55.
69. See Juris Zarins, *Dhofar—Land of Incense: Archaeological Work in the Sultanate of Oman 1990–1995* (Muscat, Sultanate of Oman; unpublished manuscript). For early cave paintings of watercraft, see Ali Ahmed al-Shahri, *The Language of Aad* (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates: National Packaging and Printing Est., 2000), 135–42, 155–56 in the Arabic section.
70. The lack of local shipbuilding may explain the brothers' skepticism (see 1 Nephi 17:17). Of other shipbuilding centers, in the "mart of Persis called Ommana" one finds "local sewn boats called madarate [which] are exported to Arabia" (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 "Rhapta" (exact locale unknown), and on an island called "Menouthias" (Pemba or Zanzibar), one finds the manufacture of sewn boats and, possibly, boats made from one log (Huntingford, *Periplus*, 29–30, §§15–16, also 96–101 [three maps]). "Sumerian and Akkadian inscriptions of the third millennium BC. . . . [mention] Magan . . . [and] Umān. Timber and copper are said to be found there, and there is mention of 'the shipwrights of Magan'" (George F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951], 6). Shipbuilding is noted only in two locales along the Arabian 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, §21, and 40, §36). Potter and Wellington argue for a shipbuilding industry in southern Oman (see *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 148–50).
71. Hourani says that the earliest boats were made "of skins, hollowed tree trunks" and the "earliest sailing ships . . . were not nailed but stitched" (*Arab Seafaring*, 3–4).
72. See Wm. Revell Phillips, "Metals of the Book of Mormon," *JBMS* 9/2 (2000): 36–41.
- "We Did Again Take Our Journey"**
David A. LeFevre
- The title quotes 1 Nephi 16:33; 17:1.
1. "Lehi in the Desert," *Improvement Era* 53 (January–October 1950), available today in Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988).
 2. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 6.
 3. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 110, 112 (map). Nibley's map is remarkably similar to the most current ones suggested by Aston, Brown, and Wellington and Potter, whose latest 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 Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989).
 5. For an insightful discussion of this point, see Noel B. Reynolds, "The Coming Forth
- of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century," *BYU Studies* 38/2 (1999), particularly 34–37. Also see Eugene England's study "Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land: Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?" in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982), 143–56.
6. Significant publications on this topic by these authors include Warren P. Aston and Michaela Knoth Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi's Journey across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994); and George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2003). S. Kent Brown's many significant publications are listed in his article in this issue of *JBMS*, but of special interest here is his study "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," in Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 55–125; his first two chapters of *Voices from the Dust* (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2004); and the excellent DVD *Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2006).
 7. See Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi's Arabian Journey Updated," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 388.
 8. For mention of this phrase in the Old Testament, see Exodus 13:18; Deuteronomy 2:8; Joshua 8:15; Judges 20:42; 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 Yohanan 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 *midbār*, “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 *midbār* 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 commoner 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, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 147. Despite the fact that in one or two cases in the Hebrew Bible *gēbûl* 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 *gēbûl* 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 assertion 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 for the 1837 edition misread Joseph’s *were* (possibly written as *ware*) 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).
 15. See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part One*, 70–72.
 16. See endnote 8 of S. Kent Brown’s article herein, “Refining the Spotlight on Lehi and Sariah.”
 17. See Chadwick, “The Wrong Place for Lehi’s Trail,” 202–4.
 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—*mišpāhā*, 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.
 23. See George D. Potter, “A New Candidate in Arabia for the Valley of Lemuel,” *JBMS* 8/1 (1999): 60, and Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 32: “There are no other streams to be found in a wadi near the Gulf of Aqaba.”
 24. For more details on the qualifications of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, see *Lehi in the Wilderness*, chaps. 1 and 3; and Potter, “Valley of Lemuel,” 54–63.
 25. Chadwick has spent much time north of the candidate sites but has not gone into Arabia as have Potter and Wellington, who document their conclusions in Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 9–12, 31–39. Brown almost casually mentions “their starting place at Wadi Tayyib al-Ism,” demonstrating his acceptance of the location. Other previously suggested but unlikely candidates include Wadi al-Afal (Hilton and Hilton, *Discovering Lehi*, 55) and a canal in Egypt (Josiah Douglas, “He May Have Gone Another Way,” *Church News*, 2 January 1988; and Ariel L. Crowley, “Lehi’s River Laman,” *Improvement Era* 47/1 [January 1944]: 14–15, 56–61).
 26. 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.
 27. 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.
 28. 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.
 29. Such fertility is surprising, perhaps, only to those who, like Joseph Smith, have not visited the region. The typical image of Arabia does not include hundreds of miles of farmland.
 30. Nephi takes personal responsibility for breaking his bow, though he doesn’t tell us how it happened (1 Nephi 16:18). He explains that it was a huge loss mainly because all the other bows had previously “lost their springs” (16:21). It is easy to imagine that Nephi would be “afflicted” (16:21) by the others in the party as a result of his accidental destruction of what seemed to be their last hope to obtain food.
 31. The fuller account of their thorough and interesting investigations into bow wood can be found in Potter and

- Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 99–105.
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 traditional burial 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 (using 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.
 39. See S. Kent Brown, "A Case for Lehi's Bondage in Arabia," *JBMS* 6/2 (1997): 205–17; *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998), 55–59; "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Parry, Peterson, and Welch, 88–92; "Lehi, journey of, to the promised land," in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey et al. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 512–15; and *Voices from the Dust*, 42–46.
 40. Since *strange* in Hebrew (*nēkār*) 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 for "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 Astons carefully document six potential sites before lobbying for their favorite, Wadi Sayq/Khor Kharfot; 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 Kharfot, 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 Kharfot 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.
 48. Paul Y. Hoskisson, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, "What's in a Name? Irreantum," *JBMS* 11 (2002): 90–93.
 49. This is 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 Largey et al., *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 830. For Nephi as metallurgist, see "Vikings, Iron, and the Book of Mormon," *Insights* 13/1 (January 1993): 2; and Brown and Johnson, *Journey of Faith*, 61–65.
 51. Brown, *Voices from the Dust*, 56.
 52. Brown suggests two in *Voices from the Dust*, 56–58.
 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.
 54. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 119.
 55. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 117.
 56. Two examples from President Benson are "Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, November 1988, 4, and "The Keystone of Our Religion," *Ensign*, January 1992, 2. On the emergence of the Book of Mormon in the modern Church, see Reynolds, "The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century," *BYU Studies* 38/2 (1999): 6–47.
- ### 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 Lei* 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 (editor), "Is the Mormon Figure Lehi Connected with a Prophetic Inscription Near Jerusalem?" in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 14/6 (November/December 1988): 19.
 3. See LaMar C. Berrett, "The So-Called Lehi Cave," *JBMS* 8/1 (1999): 64–66.
 4. The most recent effort of Latter-day Saint tourists trying to connect Lehi to the *Beit Lei* (*Beit Loya*) area is known as the "Beit-Lehi Excavations,"