

SECTION 4: PROPHECY AND SCRIPTURE

Editor's Note: *This paper is the full version of the executive summary available at http://www.fairlds.org/DNA_Evidence_for_Book_of_Mormon_Geography/. This paper was last updated 13 September 2008.*

This document is a partial analysis of the scholarly merits of the evidence and research used by Rodney Meldrum¹ in his firesides and DVD presentation, *DNA Evidence for Book of Mormon Geography*.² Neither FAIR nor this document take any position on the geographic location of Book of Mormon events.³ It is important, however, that Meldrum's theories be analyzed according to the same standards by which other Book of Mormon geography theories are evaluated. To avoid confusion, this paper refers to Meldrum's geographic model as the Limited North American Model, or LNAM.⁴ This document is just one in a series of such analytical documents.

In this document we examine the use to which Meldrum puts the statements and prophecies of Joseph Smith, other prophets, and scripture in general. This examination addresses, specifically, Part 4 of the DVD presentation, which is titled "The Promised Land: Scriptural Evidence Indicating the 'Promised Land' of the Book of Mormon" and Part 5, titled "Prophecies and Promises: Book of Mormon Qualifications."

The DVD presentation attempts to use a kind of "scripture chain" to establish the location of the Book of Mormon lands. The problem with such a technique is that each link in the chain depends on the one before it: If one link fails or is questionable, everything after it is lost—the remaining portion of the chain is cut loose from its predecessor.

The chain presented in the DVD is essentially as follows:

¹ This paper follows the scholarly custom of referring to an individual, at first reference, by full name and then subsequently referring to the individual by last name only. We fully recognize Rodney as a brother in the gospel, but in discussing secular issues (such as scholarly research and geographic models) it was felt that continually prefacing his name or the name of any other referenced scholar or individual with "Brother" or "Sister," while accurate, would distract from the readability of the paper.

² Rodney Meldrum, *DNA Evidence for Book of Mormon Geography: New scientific support for the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon; Correlation and Verification through DNA, Prophetic, Scriptural, Historical, Climatological, Archaeological, Social, and Cultural Evidence* (Rodney Meldrum, 2008). The DVD is in sections; citations in this paper reference the DVD's section number and title, followed by an approximate time stamp from the DVD.

³ FAIR recognizes that faithful individuals and scholars can honestly disagree on where Book of Mormon events took place; there is no revealed or officially accepted geography. FAIR provides an online reference to over 60 different geographic models at http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon_geography (click on Book of Mormon Geographical Models).

⁴ Meldrum's model places Book of Mormon peoples in an area roughly covering the Atlantic seaboard to the Rocky Mountains. This name was chosen as descriptive of the general model. We recognize that Meldrum may pick a different name at some point and would invite him to do so.

1. Missouri is the New Jerusalem (established using the D&C)⁵
2. The New Jerusalem is Zion (established using the Articles of Faith)⁶
3. Missouri is the Land of Promise (established using D&C 57:1–3)⁷
4. The New Jerusalem will be upon “this land” (where the prophet was standing, relying upon Ether 13:6)⁸
5. The Land of Promise is a “choice land” (“a land where people would choose to live,” relying upon 2 Nephi 1:5)⁹
6. The choice land will be lifted up by God above all other nations because God approves of the political system (“nation”) on the choice land (established using 1 Nephi 13:30–31)¹⁰
7. The gentiles mentioned in 1 Nephi 13 are Joseph Smith’s ancestors (American colonists) because he brought the book forth spoken of in the chapter¹¹
8. Where the Book of Mormon comes forth will be a land of liberty with no kings, fortified against all other nations, and God will be the King of the people of the land (established using 2 Nephi 10:11–14)¹²

This chain of reasoning provides what the DVD’s website calls “scriptural ‘chain maile’ [sic],”¹³ which it believes provides sturdy, interlocking support and protection for the idea that the Book of Mormon took place in the area currently occupied by the United States of America. As is shown in this paper, there are flaws in the chain.

ZION AND THE NEW JERUSALEM

The presentation’s first link is unassailable; it is certainly true that the city of New Jerusalem will be built in Jackson County, Missouri.¹⁴ The problems crop up beginning with the second link. Note that the second link tries to equate the New Jerusalem with

⁵ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, “Promised Land,” 0:00-2:00.

⁶ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, “Promised Land,” 2:01-3:00.

⁷ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, “Promised Land,” 3:01-4:00.

⁸ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, “Promised Land,” 3:30-4:45.

⁹ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, “Promised Land,” 4:40-5:15.

¹⁰ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, “Promised Land,” 6:00-7:34.

¹¹ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 1:12.

¹² Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 1:12-5:00.

¹³ Rod Meldrum, “Frequently Asked Questions,” <http://www.bookofmormonevidence.org/FAQ.php> (last accessed September 1, 2008).

¹⁴ See D&C 84:1-4.

Zion. While this is true in some cases, we must remember that there are many uses of the term “Zion.” Bruce R. McConkie provides a good overview of these uses:¹⁵

1. The Lord’s covenant people (D&C 97:21, Moses 7:18)
2. Enoch’s city (D&C 38:4; Moses 7:18–69)
3. Old World Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:6–7; 1 Kings 8:1)
4. New Jerusalem in Jackson County (D&C 84:1–4)
5. All of North and South America (*Teachings of Prophet Joseph Smith*, 362; D&C 133)
6. The dwelling place of exalted beings (Hebrews 12:22–24)

In the case of Meldrum’s chain links, the Articles of Faith do refer to the city of Zion, which is clarified to be the New Jerusalem, as distinct from the other usages of that word. In Ether (link #4), the term “Zion” does refer to the city of New Jerusalem.

Already, though, the chain is in serious trouble—the New Jerusalem is Zion only in some senses, not all. In not recognizing this, in trying to make “New Jerusalem” and “Zion” synonymous, the LNAM develops serious problems.

IS MISSOURI THE LAND OF PROMISE?

Missouri is certainly *a* land of promise. The prophets and apostles have consistently been clear, however, that Missouri is not the *only* land of promise, nor the only area to which Book of Mormon promises apply. Meldrum is not keeping company with the apostles and prophets when he asserts that because Zion is in Missouri, and Missouri is *a* land of promise, then Missouri is the *only* promised land in the Americas (and, thus, the promised land of the Nephites). Consider a few examples:

Joseph Smith: “speaking of the Land of Zion, It consists of all N[orth] & S[outh] America but that any place where the Saints gather is Zion which every righteous man will build up for a place of safety for his children...The redemption of Zion is the redemption of all N[orth] & S[outh] America.”¹⁶

Brigham Young: “And what is Zion? In one sense Zion is the pure in heart. But is there a land that ever will be called Zion? Yes, brethren. What land is it? It is the land that the Lord gave to Jacob, who bequeathed it to his son Joseph and his posterity, and they inhabit it, and that land is North and South America. That is Zion as to land, as to territory, and location. The children of Zion have not yet much in their possession, but their territory is North and South America to begin with.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, second edition (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 854-855.

¹⁶ Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, edited by Dean C. Jessee, “Joseph Smith’s July 19, 1840 Discourse,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 19/3 (Spring 1979): 392.

¹⁷ Brigham Young, “Faithfulness and Apostacy,” *Journal of Discourses*, reported by G.D. Watt 6 April 1855, Vol. 2 (London: Latter-Day Saint’s Book Depot, 1855), 258.

Brigham Young: “You need not teach that this place is Zion, or that Nauvoo or Missouri is Zion; but tell the people that North and South America are the land of Zion...”¹⁸

John Taylor: “And it is not enough for us to embrace the gospel and to be gathered here to the land of Zion.” (Pres. Taylor was speaking in Salt Lake City.)¹⁹

Wilford Woodruff: “This land, North and South America, is the land of Zion; it is a choice land—the land that was given by promise from old father Jacob to his grandson and his descendants, the land on which the Zion of God should be established in the latter days.”²⁰

Orson Pratt: “And the Lord gave unto them the whole continent, for a land of promise, and he promised, that they, and their children after them, should inherit it, on condition of their obedience to his commandments; but if they were disobedient, they should be cut off from his presence.”²¹

Orson Pratt: “We are not in possession of our land of promise particularly, only as we obtain it by a renewed promise; but we are inheriting a land that was given to the remnant of Joseph, and God has said that we must be remembered with them in the possession of this land.”²²

Ezra Taft Benson: “This is our need today—to plant the standard of liberty among our people throughout *the Americas*... the struggle for liberty is a continuing one—it is with us in a very real sense today right here on this choice land of the Americas.”²³

Bruce R. McConkie: “The Americas are the land of Joseph—the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, the land of the Nephites, the land of the Ephraimites who are gathering in the latter days.”²⁴

Melvin J. Ballard: “...I turn the key, unlock, and open the door for the preaching of the Gospel in all these South American nations...that thy name may be honored and glorified in this part of the land of Zion.”²⁵

¹⁸ Brigham Young, “Religion of the Saints, Etc.,” *Journal of Discourses*, reported by J.V. Long 22 April 1860, Vol. 8 (London: Latter-Day Saint’s Book Depot, 1861), 72.

¹⁹ John Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John Taylor, Third President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, edited by G. Homer Durham, *Teachings of the Latter-Day Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 89–90 (in Assembly Hall, 12 February 1882).

²⁰ Wilford Woodruff, “The Signs of the Coming of the Son of Man, Etc.,” *Journal of Discourses*, reported by David W. Evans 12 January 1873, Vol. 15 (London: Latter-Day Saint’s Book Depot, 1873), 279.

²¹ Orson Pratt, *Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840); cited in David J. Whittaker, *The Essential Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 11.

²² Orson Pratt, “The Joy and Happiness, Etc.,” *Journal of Discourses*, reported by David W. Evans 1 November 1868, Vol. 12 (London: Latter-Day Saint’s Book Depot, 1869), 322.

²³ Ezra Taft Benson, *Conference Report* (October 1962): 14–15.

²⁴ Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 4 volumes (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1979), 4:311.

²⁵ Melvin Joseph Ballard, *Melvin J. Ballard: Crusader for Righteousness* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1966), 81.

A. Theodore Tuttle: “South America—battleground of freedom, land of indolence and complacency, land of maana [*sic*], land of searching, struggling, striving people, land of latent, surging power, land choice above all other lands. This land is included in the Book of Mormon declaration. It does not refer to North America alone; when the prophets were speaking they included both South America and North America as the land of promise.”²⁶

Ted E. Brewerton: “Three groups left the land of Jerusalem and crossed the oceans...and arrived in the promised land, the Americas.”²⁷

Meldrum’s chain fails to link with any of these authoritative and consistent statements. If a viewer is not aware of these statements by many prophets, apostles, and seventies, the “chain” may appear plausible. When one knows of them, one realizes there is no chain at all—the first link never connects with the second.

WHAT ABOUT AMERICA?

In today’s world “America” means the great land of hope and liberty, the United States of America. But Meldrum does not recognize that this usage has not always been followed—even by Americans! Noah Webster’s dictionary from 1828 defined “America” as:

One of the great continents...It extends from the eightieth degree of North, to the fifty-fourth degree of South Latitude; and from the thirty-fifth to the one hundred and fifty-sixth degree of Longitude West from Greenwich, being about nine thousand miles in length. Its breadth at Darien [Panama] is narrowed to about forty-five miles, but at the northern extremity is nearly four thousand miles. From Darien to the North, the continent is called North America, and to the South, it is called South America.²⁸

“America” is, in reality, the entire hemisphere. Even if such usage isn’t common today, it was in earlier times. Further, it seems obvious that the term “land of promise” refers to whatever land the Lord has granted to His people, and upon which they are commanded to gather. A people may have more than one promised land (as the Saints in Utah saw themselves in one promised land, waiting to go back to Missouri, *another* promised land; the Jews tenaciously cling to *their* promised land—promised to them through Abraham centuries ago).

The DVD distorts the meaning of the Doctrine and Covenants when it insists that because the Nephites had a land of promise and the Saints in Missouri had a land of promise, that they must be one and the same. This can’t be the case, because those same Saints also received *other* lands of promise, as taught by the prophets. The DVD might as well insist

²⁶ A. Theodore Tuttle, “South America—Land of Promise,” address to BYU student body (14 April 1964); cited in *BYU Speeches of the Year*, 1964 (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1964), 3.

²⁷ Ted E. Brewerton, “The Book of Mormon: A Sacred Ancient Record,” *Ensign* (November 1995): 30.

²⁸ Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 volumes (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v., “America.”

that because Israel has a promised land in the Middle East, the Nephites couldn't have another promised land in the Americas.

It is now time to abandon the "chain" metaphor entirely—only three links in and it is falling apart.

ETHER AND THE NEW JERUSALEM ON "THIS LAND"

The DVD presents Ether's prophecy of the New Jerusalem being built on "this land" and equates this location with the eastern United States. This is a *tautology*, or circular reasoning. Here is why.

Meldrum asks viewers to presume that the prophet Ether is standing somewhere near the Great Lakes when he refers to "this land." Well, of course, if one presumes that is where he was, the result follows. If one presumes that he was standing in Santa Fe when he spoke, then the Southwest could be "this land." If he was standing in Key West when he spoke... well, you get the point. The leaders of the Church don't engage in faulty logic, as this premise does. They have considered *all* the Americas to be the land of promise.

A CHOICE LAND

The DVD presentation uses the term "choice land" in a very unusual way to refer to the United States: a "land where people would choose to live."²⁹ This definition acts as if there is nowhere else where one might choose to live. But, there are people who choose to live in many different places, such as Brazil, the Philippines, Italy, or Japan. This definition risks offending them all, since it implies that no one would "choose" to live anywhere but the United States. Such a view is hardly compatible with our international Church, whose leaders have repeatedly encouraged members to *choose* to stay and raise their families in their country of origin—to build up Zion where they are. "Choice," rather, means "select, precious, very valuable."³⁰

You have already seen that according to many Church leaders "land" does not mean a small area or a particular nation-state. The leaders cited earlier applied claims about the choice land to *all* of North and South America. If this is the case, then the LNAM's claim is useless for establishing a Book of Mormon geography more precisely than the Western Hemisphere.

The United States of America is one of God's gifts to mankind. It is a land of great value, and its liberties are precious beyond measure. It is the chosen home of millions, and millions more would like to call it home. But that is not the point when we are considering claims about where in the New World the Book of Mormon events took place.

²⁹ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, "Promised Land," 5:10.

³⁰ Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v., "choice."

Meldrum’s argument hinges on the claim that the United States is all that is referred by the Book of Mormon phrase “this choice land.” Restricting the label to just the United States, as we have seen, is not acceptable to the prophets and apostles. And it is easy to understand why—because the scriptures don’t teach it. For example, one of the most easily misunderstood passages in the Book of Mormon is the following:

And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even *unto the seed of my brethren*, who were *in the promised land*. (1 Nephi 13:12, emphasis added)

The same chapter that talks about “this land” describes someone generally interpreted as Christopher Columbus as “discovering” America.³¹ Many people do not realize it, but when we say that Columbus discovered “America” we do not mean the United States of America. History shows that Columbus never made it even as far north as Mexico; he first made landfall in what is now the Bahamas.³²

So, 1 Nephi 13:12 cannot be talking about *just* the United States, because some of the lands discussed *cannot be* the United States. Of course the United States is included in these promises, and as the cradle of the Restoration is one of the choice parts of the choice lands. The choice lands, as the prophets and apostles have taught, occupy most or all of the hemisphere—not because people choose to live there (though they do), but because they are precious.

In the same chapter of the Book of Mormon, the Gentiles are described as fighting against “their mother Gentiles.” Members of the Church in the United States properly see the American Revolution as a fulfillment of this prophecy. But that is not the whole story. In the entire western hemisphere, every single nation except what is now Canada had to fight a war for its independence from European monarchs—and even Canada did not achieve complete independence from the British crown until 1969. Thus, the fulfillment of what Nephi saw is applicable across the entire hemisphere, not just in the United States.

DID JOSEPH’S ANCESTORS PREACH TO THE AMERINDIANS?

The DVD presentation claims that the events recorded in the Book of Mormon must have been located in the northeastern United States because Joseph Smith’s ancestors are supposed to have taught Lehi’s descendants.³³ This is circular reasoning again, but in addition the prophesied preaching did not take place just through the Book of Mormon. We read in the text:

³¹ The first known application of these verses to Columbus was a footnote in Orson Pratt’s 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon [Nephi L. Morris, July 1, 1928, radio address, reproduced in *Deseret News* (July 7, 1928)]. Other authors who have made the association include Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 427, and Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 577.

³² Meldrum mistakenly claims that Columbus arrived in Cuba. See Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 7, “Weather and Climate,” 1:30.

³³ See Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 1:12-1:30.

And it came to pass that I beheld the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the book of the Lamb of God, which had proceeded forth from the mouth of the Jew, that it *came forth from the Gentiles* unto the remnant of the seed of my brethren. (1 Nephi 13:38, emphasis added)

Columbus undoubtedly encountered some of the seed of Nephi's brethren, although you now know that these cannot have been Amerindians in the modern United States because Columbus never came near the United States. And here we find that it is a book which "proceeded mouth of the Jew"—the Bible—was what was used to preach to Lehi's descendants. Many Gentiles helped with the spread of the Bible to Amerindians, including but not limited to the Latter-day Saints. For example, it was not immigrants to the United States that spread the Bible to the areas visited by Columbus. That task fell largely to Catholic missionaries.

EQUATING THE PROMISED LAND WITH THE UNITED STATES

Relying upon his scripture chain, Meldrum boldly states that "the promised land is the United States of America."³⁴ The chain of scriptures established by Meldrum to prove that every reference to a blessing upon a promised land refers to, and only to, the United States doesn't exist. Therefore, his stated conclusion has no substance:

So, what nation, then, fulfills the prophecies concerning the Book of Mormon's promised land? They would have to have the Gentiles would be blessed upon the land. It'd be a land of liberty. There would be no kings. It'll be fortified against all other nations. It will contain Zion and the New Jerusalem.

The Gentiles will afflict the Lamanites, but ultimately they will be like a father to them. Gentiles will bring the record of the Jews of the Bible to the Lamanites. The Book of Mormon is to come forth from these particular Gentiles. The gospel will be restored upon this land, and those who fight against it shall perish. Anybody want to take a guess what land we're talking about?

Audience Member: USA.

Meldrum: OK. The only nation that fulfills every Book of Mormon requirement to be the promised land is the United States of America.³⁵

This exchange with the audience demonstrates not only the serious errors in what Meldrum presents, but that he does it so persuasively that audience members are led to the incorrect conclusion he desires. A member of the audience accepted Meldrum's notion that the Book of Mormon "lands of promise" must only be the United States. This is why what Meldrum teaches is not only in error, but leads others into error. Instead of relying upon the presentation's faulty chains of logic, let us read instead the text of the Book of Mormon itself:

³⁴ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, "Prophecies and Promises," 8:50.

³⁵ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, "Prophecies and Promises," 4:30-5:15.

But behold, this land, said God, shall be a land of thine inheritance, and the Gentiles shall be blessed upon the land. And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon the land, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles. And I will fortify this land against all other nations. And he that fighteth against Zion shall perish, saith God. For he that raiseth up a king against me shall perish, for I, the Lord, the king of heaven, will be their king, and I will be a light unto them forever, that hear my words. (2 Nephi 10:11-14)

As we have already seen, “this land” cannot be read as Meldrum’s relatively small area in the United States. It is interesting to read what Orson Hyde would have said in answer to Meldrum’s question, “Anyone want to guess what land we’re talking about?”

“THERE SHALL NO KING BE RAISED UP ON THIS LAND; AND WHOSOEVER SEEKETH TO RAISE UP A KING ON THIS LAND SHALL PERISH.” [Quoting 2 Nephi 10:11] “This land,” means both North and South America, and also the families of islands that geographically and naturally belong and adhere to the same.³⁶

Were he not more than a century too early, Orson Hyde could have expanded on the answer to Meldrum’s question:

There are promises and decrees of God in relation to “this land” of an extraordinary character. No other land can boast of the same. How beautifully does the spirit of the above prophetic sentiment chime in with the great American principle, “that no foreign prince, potentate, or sovereign will be allowed to *interfere in the affairs of this Continent!*” Spain must give up Cuba; England, Canada and the United States of America must hold, as her dependencies, every country on the *Western Continent*, with the islands along its borders.³⁷

For Orson Hyde, “fighting against Zion” meant foreign interference with any inhabitants of the western hemisphere, though he also sees a key role for the United States. In point of fact, Elder Hyde is enunciating what has become known as “The Monroe Doctrine.” So, these scriptures don’t help the LNAM in restricting Book of Mormon promises, prophecies, and geography to the United States—they extend them to the entire hemisphere, in Elder Hyde’s reading.

It is therefore troubling when Meldrum declares, “the promised land is the United States of America.”³⁸ At another point in the presentation he elaborates, “I’m not just trying to rah-rah here. This is from revelation. This is from the scriptures.”³⁹

³⁶ Orson Hyde, “Celebration, Etc.,” *Journal of Discourses*, reported by G.D. Watt 4 July 1853, Vol. 7 (London: Latter-Day Saint’s Book Depot, 1860), 108, capitalization in original.

³⁷ Orson Hyde, “Celebration, Etc.,” *Journal of Discourses*, reported by G.D. Watt 4 July 1853, Vol. 7 (London: Latter-Day Saint’s Book Depot, 1860), 108-109, emphasis added.

³⁸ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 8:50.

³⁹ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 5:10-5:25.

Despite his errors and his disagreement with many of the prophets and apostles about the interpretation of LDS scripture, there is a more troubling aspect to Meldrum's claim. He here insists that *his* reading "is from revelation," and so to differ with him, as Elder Hyde and others would, is to be cast in the role of rebel against the revealed word. But what is being presented is not the revealed word; it is Meldrum's word, and it is wrong. He gives *his* personal interpretation of the text—contradicted by the witness of history and the prophets and apostles—the sheen of revelation or scripture. "This" (his reading and theory) is *not* "from revelation." It is not "from the scriptures." It is only from him.

WHAT KIND OF LIBERTY?

What kind of liberty did the Book of Mormon have in mind for the promised land? Jacob explains in one of his discourses in 2 Nephi:

Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are *free to act for yourselves*—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life. (2 Nephi 10:23, emphasis added)

The Book of Mormon authors were very concerned about "freedom," but Meldrum makes the mistake of presuming that what the Nephites thought was important when they said "liberty" is what *he* thinks is important. It isn't.

To a modern US citizen, freedom includes democracy and a whole host of human rights. But how did the Nephites understand it? When Mosiah decided to set up the reign of the judges, he told the people that he wished to do so because it would be fairer. But, Mosiah did not think the existing system was unfair to the people—he thought it was unfair to the kings!

And I command you to do these things in the fear of the Lord; and I command you to do these things, and that ye have no king; that if these people commit sins and iniquities *they shall be answered upon their own heads*. (Mosiah 29:30, emphasis added)

Mosiah's worry is not that the kings took liberty from the people—he is worried that the king will be *responsible* for the sins committed by his people if he doesn't teach them properly. So, the "inequality" he wants to get rid of is the *greater* responsibility borne by the kings:

And now I desire that *this inequality* should be no more in this land, especially among this my people; but I desire that this land be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike, so long as the Lord sees fit that we may live and inherit the land... (Mosiah 29:32, emphasis added)

This is exactly backward from how a modern US citizen would think about it (or a US citizen in Joseph Smith's day), but Mosiah's reasoning makes perfect sense when we understand what kind of freedom he valued—it was the freedom to be responsible for one's own acts, "to act for yourselves," as Jacob put it.

And he told them that these things ought not to be; but that *the burden* should come upon all the people, *that every man might bear his part....*

And now it came to pass, after king Mosiah had sent these things forth among the people they were convinced of the truth of his words.

Therefore they relinquished their desires for a king, and became exceedingly anxious that every man should have an equal chance throughout all the land; yea, and every man expressed a willingness *to answer for his own sins*. (Mosiah 29:34, 37-38, emphasis added)

Thus, Mosiah is trying to spread a *burden* around his people. He is not trying to give them more “liberty” in the sense of more freedom to act—they were always free to sin or not to sin, regardless of the kind of government. But, the king was less free, because he had to bear responsibility for *other people’s* actions.

The Book of Mormon doesn’t even seem to think that having a democracy is necessary for this kind of freedom. Mosiah said that

...if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God, and judge this people according to his commandments, yea, if ye could have men for your kings who would do even as my father Benjamin did for this people—I say unto you, if this could always be the case then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you. (Mosiah 29:13)

Alma was of the same view, arguing that “if it were possible that ye could always have just men to be your kings it would be well for you to have a king” (Mosiah 23:8). The Book of Mormon does not talk of political liberty, but of moral liberty—the ability to make one’s own choices and be responsible to God for those choices.

Part of the problem is that it seems Meldrum reads the scripture as if it was written by a modern author, instead of it being an ancient work with a foreign way of looking at things. But that is not the case; the Book of Mormon describes political systems that were unknown in Joseph’s day and which bear no resemblance to the political systems of today—particularly to the political system of the United States. Richard Bushman remarked on this fact years ago:

And yet the reign of the judges in the Book of Mormon bears little resemblance to nineteenth-century American republicanism. Nephite culture was never republican insofar as the Book of Mormon describes government. The first prophet, Nephi, allowed himself to be made a king and established a line of kings that lasted 500 years. Around 92 B.C. King Mosiah gave up his throne and established a system of judges chosen by the voice of the people, but the resulting government was a far cry from the American pattern. The chief judge, by democratic standards, was more king than president, as suggested by the Book of Mormon phrase “the reign of the judges.” After the first judge, whose name was Alma, was proclaimed by the voice of the people, he enjoyed life tenure. When he chose to resign because of internal difficulties, he selected his own successor, who was the founder of a dynasty of judges. In the next succession the judgeship passed to the chief

judge's son and thence, according to his "right," as the book says, to the successive sons of the judges. The "voice of the people" entered only marginally into the appointment of an officer who essentially enjoyed life tenure and hereditary succession.

Furthermore all of the constitutional checks on Nephite rulers, whether kings or judges, are missing. The standard three branches of government do not appear. The chief judge was judge, executive, and legislator combined. In wartime he raised men, armed them, and collected provisions. His titles were interchangeable: chief judge and governor. He was also lawmaker, for no conventional legislature can be found in the Book of Mormon. In the early part of the book the law was presented as traditional, handed down from the fathers as "given them by the hand of the Lord," and "acknowledged by this people" to make it binding. Later, the chief judge assumed the power of proclaiming or at least elaborating laws. Alma gave his successor Nephiah the "power to enact laws according to the laws which had been given." Any major constitutional changes, such as [p.133] a return to formal kingship, required approval of the people, but day-to-day legislation, so far as the record speaks, was the prerogative of the chief judge. Perhaps most extraordinary by American standards, nothing was made of taxation by a popular assembly. Oppressive kings overtaxed the people, but the remedy never lay in a representative body of any kind. The maxim "no taxation without representation" had no standing in Nephite consciousness.⁴⁰

LOCATING ZARAHEMLA

The LNAM also appeals to D&C 125:3, in which the Lord tells Joseph to have the Saints "build up a city unto my name upon the land opposite the city of Nauvoo, and let the name of Zarahemla be named upon it."⁴¹ "When I show people this," Meldrum tells us,

a lot of times they don't believe that this is real. But in Doctrine and Covenants section 125, the Lord gave a revelation to Joseph....This is God saying Zarahemla. Now, is it the same Zarahemla? We don't know that for sure. But one thing I do know is that when God names places, he's only done it a few times, a handful of times. And as an example, when he had this place over in the Old World called Jerusalem, when he established a new one over here, did he call it Jerusalem? He called it the New Jerusalem. OK? I think, when God names something, it means something.⁴²

Notice the cautionary remark at the beginning of the statement: we are not sure that this scripture means that God has identified the area across from Nauvoo as the Nephite Zarahemla. Unfortunately, within ninety seconds, he has already transformed an uncertainty into a revealed truth:

⁴⁰ Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 132.

⁴¹ This passage is discussed in Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B.H. Roberts, volume 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1972), 311-312.

⁴² Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, "Prophecies and Promises," 6:01-7:00.

Now, this is the Book of Mormon geographic, what I call, map anchors. These are places that you can put in there that are, *by revelation, known to be firm places* for establishing a geographic map of the Book of Mormon...we *know where Zarahemla is, from the revelation* we just saw.⁴³

Meldrum was correct in the first instance—we have no way of knowing if the Lord’s intent was to identify the city across from Nauvoo as the site of the Nephite Zarahemla, and many reasons to be cautious about such a conclusion. But, he has now declared that this is an “anchor...by revelation, known to be firm...from the revelation.” Meldrum has again asserted that his interpretation of this scripture is certain—that we *know* his view is right. Unfortunately, it is not his place to provide authoritative interpretations of scripture, especially when no prophet or apostle has read this verse as he has.

In fact, at least two apostles have indicated that no one knows the location of Zarahemla. In 1929, Anthony W. Ivins, member of the First Presidency, said in General Conference:

There is a great deal of talk about the geography of the Book of Mormon. Where was the land of Zarahemla? Where was the City of Zarahemla? and other geographic matters. It does not make any difference to us. *There has never been anything yet set forth that definitely settles that question.* So the Church says we are just waiting until we discover the truth. All kinds of theories have been advanced. I have talked with at least half a dozen men that have found the very place where the City of Zarahemla stood, and notwithstanding the fact that they profess to be Book of Mormon students, they vary a thousand miles apart in the places they have located. We do not offer any definite solution. As you study the Book of Mormon keep these things in mind and *do not make definite statements concerning things that have not been proven in advance to be true.*⁴⁴

Harold B. Lee also did not show any awareness that the location of Zarahemla had been revealed through Joseph Smith:

Some say the Hill Cumorah was in southern Mexico (and someone pushed it down still farther) and not in western New York. Well, if the Lord wanted us to know where it was, or where Zarahemla was, he’d have given us latitude and longitude, don’t you think? And why bother our heads trying to discover with archaeological certainty the geographical locations of the cities of the Book of Mormon like Zarahemla?⁴⁵

Does anyone think that Ivins and Lee were not students of the scriptures, somehow lacking understanding of the revelations of Joseph Smith? It is fine for a person to propose Book of Mormon geographies that span the globe, if that is their predilection, but it is

⁴³ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 8:12-8:45, emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Anthony W. Ivins, *Conference Report* (April 1929): 16, emphasis added.

⁴⁵ Harold B. Lee, “Loyalty,” address to religious educators, July 8, 1966, *Charge to Religious Educators*, second edition (Salt Lake City: Church Educational System and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 65, cited in Dennis B. Horne, *Determining Doctrine: A Reference Guide for Evaluating Doctrinal Truth* (Roy, Utah: Eborm Books, 2005), 172–173, emphasis added.

inappropriate for a private member to claim that we have revelatory certainty when two apostles have taught otherwise.

In fact, D&C 125 was not the first application of the name Zarahemla to the area—Joseph examined the site near Montrose, Iowa on July 2, 1839, and instructed “that a town be built there, and called Zarahemla.”⁴⁶ If Joseph had known by revelation that this was the site of the Nephite Zarahemla, it seems strange that he said nothing then or later, given his obvious keen interest in Book of Mormon locations.

Little was done across the river, despite Joseph’s instructions, until the March 1841 revelation, whose probable intent becomes more clear when read in context. In response to the question, “What is the will of the Lord concerning the saints in the Territory of Iowa?” the Lord replies,

If those who call themselves by my name and are *essaying to be my saints*, if they will do my will and keep my commandments concerning them, let them gather themselves together unto the places which I shall appoint unto them *by my servant Joseph*, and build up cities unto my name... (D&C 125:1-2, emphasis added).

The intent of this revelation seems to have been to encourage obedience to Joseph’s instructions, whether about the name of a town or the location for a settlement. An exhortation to obedience (a common—and vital—spiritual message) seems more plausible than an oblique revelation of an obscure point of Book of Mormon geography, which none of the recipients noted anyway. Neither Joseph or anyone else described this as the site of the Nephite Zarahemla.⁴⁷

The DVD’s argument also ignores that Old World Jerusalem still exists—thus, it is unsurprising that another Jerusalem was labelled “new,” to distinguish it, especially given the long history of similar Christian terminology. Since the Nephite Zarahemla is gone, there is little need for a distinguishing “New” Zarahemla, even if the sites are different. The Saints were also happy to name cities in Utah after Book of Mormon cities without adding “New” in front of them (e.g. Bountiful, Lehi, Manti, Nephi), and these cannot be the original location of Book of Mormon cities according to the LNAM.

The geography of the Mississippi also makes the DVD’s identification of Zarahemla questionable. In the Book of Mormon, the River Sidon near Zarahemla could be crossed on foot by troops during battle.⁴⁸ Despite this fact, the DVD tells us elsewhere that American bison “won’t swim [across a body of water] if they can’t clearly see the other side. And so

⁴⁶ See *History of the Church* 3:382.

⁴⁷ There is, for example, no mention of any connection between the Montrose, Iowa, area or nearby Zarahemla Stake with the Nephite Zarahemla in such works as Richard E. Bennett, “Montrose, Iowa,” in Donald Q. Cannon, Richard O. Cowan, Arnold K. Garr, *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2000); or Stanley B. Kimball, “Nauvoo West: The Mormons of the Iowa Shore,” *BYU Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 132–142. It is difficult to prove a negative, but one presumes Meldrum has no further textual evidence of his claim either, else he would have presented it.

⁴⁸ See Alma 2:27–35, for example.

when they get their heads down low, like a buffalo is, this is the Mississippi River at Nauvoo, this is a long swim. The buffalo wouldn't cross there."⁴⁹

The LNAM is self-contradictory. It asserts that the Mississippi at Nauvoo is too wide for buffalo to swim—yet, it insists that the Nephite Zarahemla is located right across the Mississippi from Nauvoo. Yet the text of the Book of Mormon requires that troops be able to ford it on foot. During an April 1842 visit, the anti-Mormon author Henry Caswell reported that the Mississippi between Montrose and Nauvoo was “about a mile and a half in width.” He crossed by canoe, and noted that “at length the stout sinews of the Mormons prevailed....[and a]fter labouring hard [paddling] for more than half an hour we safely landed at Nauvoo.”⁵⁰ It is difficult to see how Alma and his men could ford the river anywhere near this Zarahemla, unless Meldrum can provide evidence that the river was substantially narrower and shallower in Nephite times.

CONCLUSION

The material which treats prophecy and revelation is relatively simple—the Book of Mormon's teachings are quite clear, and there can be little doubt about what Joseph Smith and many later prophets and apostles taught. Even a brief review shows them to differ with Meldrum's reading on many points. It is also clear that points that the DVD claims as facts firmly established by revelation are mere opinions that face scriptural and geographical difficulties. If the LNAM errs with this material, how can we trust it on the more complex, nuanced matters about which it likewise appears so confident?

⁴⁹ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 8, “Buffalo Evidence,” 1:55-2:10.

⁵⁰ Henry Caswell, *The City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo, 1842* (London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1842), 6–7.