

Prophesied Cursing and Blessing of Book of Mormon Lands

Lynn and David Rosenvall, September 2011

Cursing: And I will lay [my vineyard] waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. (2 Nephi 15:6 and Isaiah 5:6)

Blessing: For the Lord shall comfort Zion, he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody. (2 Nephi 8:3 and Isaiah 51:3)

Where is the lush vegetation within Baja California? Should we not expect vast forests, grasslands and agricultural fields? Is it true that much of the natural landscape of Baja California is a rugged terrain consisting of cactus and other succulents and plants with briars and thorns, and the climate in many areas is arid and semi-arid with very little rainfall? Surely this sparsely vegetated and thinly populated peninsula could not be the “land choice above all other lands.” These are the reasonable concerns and questions of some upon first learning that Baja California has been proposed as the location of the Book of Mormon lands, even though the setting for that peninsula consists of magnificent vistas, world-class wildlife habitats, spectacular coastlines, a delightful climate and an endless array of hills, mountains and landscape features coupled with a bio-diversity like nowhere else on earth.

Thus to confirm our research on Book of Mormon geography, there are some who appeal for us to not only find ruins of buildings in our proposed lands that match the



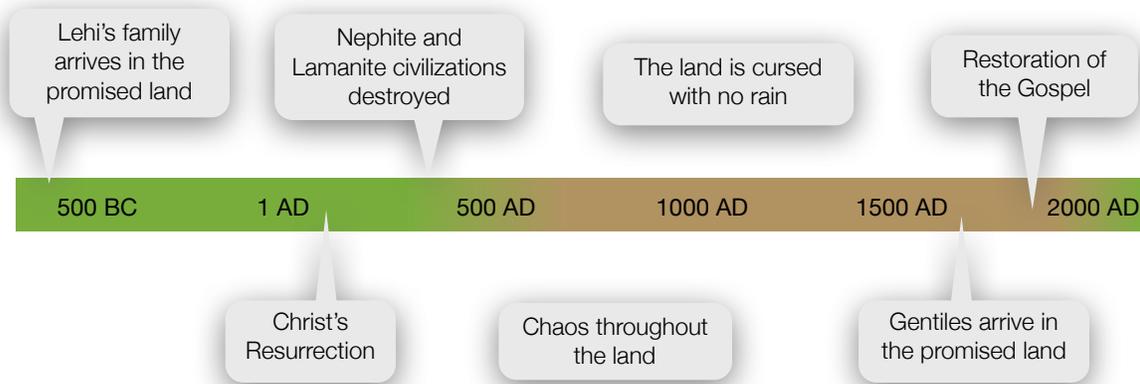
Playa de los Palmas near Todos Santos, Baja California.

mental images of what an ancient Nephite building or city is expected to look like as well as to locate these ruins in a landscape that also matches their mental images of “a land choice above all other lands.” They often discount Baja California as the location of Book of Mormon lands simply because that land does not match their expectations and the commonly held images and descriptions of such a landscape found in print and films and depicted in artist’s renditions (see our topic article, *Searching for Book of Mormon Ruins: What should we expect to find?*).

In contrast, the Nephite prophets such as Nephi, Jacob, Alma, Mormon, and Moroni, as well as Isaiah, the Old Testament prophet, are clear, when prophesying of the ending events of the destruction of the Lamanite and Nephite civilizations, that there would follow a declining and degenerate state of the environment in their “lands of inheritance,” which were once “choice above all other lands.” (For a discussion of the nature of a “choice land,” see our main article, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon Geography: A Land Choice Above All Other Lands*). These dire prophecies, spanning numerous chapters and hundreds of verses in the Book of Mormon, describe not only the impending lowly conditions of their descendants but also the harsh landscape change coming to their homeland—conditions that will follow as consequences of disobedience and transgression. Our analysis of these Book of Mormon prophecies suggests four stages of demographic and environmental degeneration and a subsequent fifth stage of restoration and blessing:

1. Their populations would be decimated in a final prolonged war, and both the Nephite and the Lamanite civilizations would be destroyed, that is, their government and societal infrastructures would no longer exist.
2. The survivors among the Nephites and the Lamanites would be swept off their homelands by the Lord and scattered to other lands.
3. The Nephite and Lamanite dwelling places and lands would be rendered desolate by the Lord.
4. The abandoned and desolate Nephite and Lamanite homeland would then be cursed and laid waste by the Lord for their sakes.
5. In the latter days the Lord would bless and comfort his waste places, and father Lehi’s descendants would return to their lands of inheritance.

These prophecies of the Book of Mormon prophets also describe the nature of a “desolate” landscape and a “cursed” land and what we should expect to see when traveling through the Book of Mormon lands today—the peninsula of Baja California. These prophecies of the Book of Mormon prophets often include the Jews and their homeland of Jerusalem and surrounding area and stress that the Jewish homeland and the homelands of the Lamanites and Nephites would follow a parallel path of degeneration because of iniquity. Thankfully these prophets also predicted that these homelands—on two separate continents—would be restored at a future time to a blessed condition, and their descendants and those of their brethren would return to “the lands of their inheritance.”



A timeline of the cursing of the land and the restoration of the gospel as prophesied by Book of Mormon prophets.

The Book of Mormon is a “most correct book” and should stand on its own merits without interpolations and extraneous interjections or forming assumptions beyond the scriptural account. The following is our analysis of these five stages as described and prophesied by the record keepers of that ancient document and the nature of the landscape of the Book of Mormon lands as it would exist today. We outline the demise and later blessing of the Nephite and Lamanite civilizations and their lands and describe such concepts as “the people being swept off the land,” “dwelling places being left desolate,” and a “land cursed by the Lord for their sakes.” All of this is intended to help answer a simple but essential question: What should we expect the environment of the Book of Mormon lands to look like today?

Nephite and Lamanite Civilizations Destroyed

The First Stage

The Book of Mormon prophets unerringly predicted the future destruction and decimation of their people. Nephi, son of Lehi, was told by an angel that the Lord Jesus Christ would visit his father's descendants "in six hundred years from the time [his] father left Jerusalem" (1 Ne. 19:8). Nephi beheld in vision that after four generations from the coming of the Lord, "the people of [his] seed gathered together in multitudes against the seed of [his] brethren; and they were gathered together to battle" (1 Ne. 12:15). Nephi recorded the ensuing consequences of these two contrasting events upon his people.

(Words in the text have been bolded for emphasis.)

But the Son of righteousness shall appear unto [my people]; and he shall heal them, and they shall have peace with him, until three generations shall have passed away, and many of the fourth generation shall have passed away in righteousness.

And when these things have passed away a **speedy destruction** cometh unto my people; for, notwithstanding the pains of my soul, I have seen it; wherefore, I know that it shall come to pass; and they sell themselves for naught; for, for the reward of their pride and their foolishness they shall **reap destruction**; for because they yield unto the devil and choose works of darkness rather than light, therefore they must go down to hell.

For the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man. And when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh **speedy destruction**, and this grieveth my soul. (2 Ne. 26:9-11)



Lamanites and Nephites civilizations are destroyed around A.D. 385.

Alma related a similar prophecy of the future destruction of his people for his son Helaman to record and then to be brought to light later:

Behold, I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, according to the spirit of revelation which is in me, in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them, shall **dwindle in unbelief**.

Yea, and then shall they see wars and pestilences, yea, famines and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall **become extinct**— [In older English “extinct” meant “extinguish: to quench, reduce or silence.”]

Yea, and this because they shall **dwindle in unbelief** and fall into the works of darkness, and lasciviousness, and all manner of iniquities; yea, I say unto you, that because they shall sin against so great light and knowledge, yea, I say unto you, that from that day, even the fourth generation shall not all pass away before this great iniquity shall come.

And when that great day cometh, behold, the time very soon cometh that those who are now, or the seed of those who are now numbered among the people of Nephi, shall **no more be numbered** among the people of Nephi.

But whosoever remaineth, and is not **destroyed** in that great and dreadful day, shall be numbered among the Lamanites, and shall become like unto them, all, save it be a few who shall be called the disciples of the Lord; and them shall the Lamanites pursue even until they shall **become extinct**. And now, because of iniquity, this prophecy shall be fulfilled. (Alma 45:10-14)

Dictionary Definitions

In our studies of the Book of Mormon text, we have found it helpful to search for word definitions that were acceptable and appropriate before the Book of Mormon was first printed in 1830. These older definitions have been selected, with that date as a benchmark, from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the accepted authority on the evolution of the English language over the last millennium. Current definitions often obscure the original meanings of scripture text. We have found these older definitions often parallel the pattern of word usage in the *King James* version of the Bible. Where appropriate, these older definitions are provided in our analysis of the Book of Mormon text.

Samuel the Lamanite predicted the same dire fate of the people if they did not repent:

Behold, I, Samuel, a Lamanite, do speak the words of the Lord which he doth put into my heart; and behold he hath put it into my heart to say unto this people that the sword of justice hangeth over this people; and four hundred years pass not away save **the sword of justice falleth** upon this people.

Yea, **heavy destruction awaiteth this people**, and it surely cometh unto this people, and nothing can save this people save it be repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, who surely shall come into the world, and shall suffer many things and shall be slain for his people.

And behold, an angel of the Lord hath declared it unto me, and he did bring glad tidings to my soul. And behold, I was sent unto you to declare it unto you also, that ye might have glad tidings; but behold ye would not receive me.

Therefore, thus saith the Lord: Because of the hardness of the hearts of the people of the Nephites, except they repent I will take away my word from them, and I will withdraw my Spirit from them, and I will suffer them no longer, and **I will turn the hearts of their brethren against them.**

And four hundred years shall not pass away before I will cause that they shall **be smitten**; yea, I will visit them with the sword and with famine and with pestilence.

Yea, I will visit them in my fierce anger, and there shall be those of the fourth generation who shall live, of your enemies, to behold your **utter destruction**; and this shall surely come except ye repent, saith the Lord; and those of the fourth generation shall visit your **destruction**. (Hel. 13:5-10)

At the time of his visit to the Book of Mormon people, the Lord Jesus Christ foretold the same impending destruction:

But behold, it sorroweth me because of the fourth generation from this generation, for they are led away captive by him even as was the son of perdition; for they will sell me for silver and for gold, and for that which moth doth corrupt and which thieves can break through and steal. And in that day will I visit them, even in **turning their works upon their own heads**. (3 Ne. 27:32)

As prophesied, the Lamanites and the Nephites after some one-thousand years in their promised land dwindled in unbelief until the fulness of their iniquity, then their civilizations were destroyed through the hand of the Lord by wars, pestilences and famines, and their land was left desolate and cursed. The Lamanites and Nephites no longer existed as a people with a centralized government and coherent organizations. The church and its authority also ceased to exist. There was chaos throughout the land, and those who remained warred one with another. The Lord declared that those who were destroyed shall be destroyed speedily, “and the multitude of their terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away—yea, thus saith the Lord God: It shall be at an instant, suddenly” (2 Ne. 26:18). Mormon in speaking of the evil that at an earlier date was brought upon the people by a man named Gadianton and his followers, stated: “And behold, in the end of this book ye shall see that this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi. Behold I do not mean the end of the book of Helaman, but I mean the end of the book of Nephi

[the large plates], from which I have taken all the account which I have written” (Hel. 2:13-14). Mormon recorded this warning of the Lord to his people:

Vengeance is mine, and I will repay; and because this people repented not after I had delivered them, behold, they shall be **cut off from the face of the earth**. (Morm. 3:15)



Proposed Hill Cumorah near Cataviña, Baja California, where the Nephites were destroyed by the Lamanites around A.D. 385.

Moroni described the scene after the final battle when hundreds of thousands of the Nephites and the Lamanites perished:

And now it came to pass that after the great and tremendous battle at Cumorah, behold, the Nephites who had escaped into the country southward were hunted by the Lamanites, until they were **all destroyed**.

And my father [Mormon] also was killed by them, and I even remain alone to write the sad tale of the destruction of my people. But behold, **they are gone**, and I fulfil the commandment of my father. And whether they will slay me, I know not.

Therefore I will write and hide up the records in the earth; and whither I go it mattereth not.

Behold, my father hath made this record, and he hath written the intent thereof. And behold, I would write it also if I had room upon the plates, but I have not; and ore I have none, for **I am alone**. My father hath been slain in battle, and all my kinsfolk, and I have not friends nor whither to go; and how long the Lord will suffer that I may live I know not.

Behold, four hundred years have passed away since the coming of our Lord and Savior.

And behold, the Lamanites have hunted my people, the Nephites, down from city to city and from place to place, even until **they are no more**; and great has been their fall; yea, **great and marvelous is the destruction of my people**, the Nephites.

And behold, it is the hand of the Lord which hath done it. And behold also, the Lamanites are at war one with another; and the whole face of this land is one continual round of murder and bloodshed; and **no one knoweth the end of the war**. (Morm. 8:2-8)

In this account, Moroni uses an unexpected word: “marvelous.” He states that, “marvelous is the destruction of my people, the Nephites.” In older English the word “marvelous” meant “astonishing,” or “having remarkable or extraordinary (and as if supernatural) properties.” Indeed the destruction of the Nephites was “marvelous,” that is, it was “astonishing” and appeared to be “supernatural,” because as Moroni also states, “it is the hand of the Lord which hath done it” (Morm. 8:8).

Many Lamanites and Some Nephites Escape the Destruction

An uncertain number of the Lamanites survived the slaughter and destruction, along with the Nephites who had dwindled in unbelief and joined with the Lamanites.

Mormon reported to his son Moroni: “Many of our brethren have deserted over unto the Lamanites, and many more will also desert over unto them” (Moro. 9:24).

Gadianton robbers were among the survivors (Hel. 2:13-14; 4 Ne. 1:42-46; Morm. 1:18-19; 2:27-28). All the disciples of the Lord were killed in battle or hunted down and killed by the Lamanites, except for Moroni who died some years later (Morm. 8:2-9). The following scriptural references give support to the assertion that a significant number of Nephites escaped the final destruction and were scattered with the Lamanites: 1 Ne. 13:30; 2 Ne. 3:3; 9:53; 29:12-13; Alma 45:10-14; Hel. 3:16; Morm. 5:7, 9, 15, 20; 8:2-3, 7-9; Moro. 9:24; D&C 3:17-20; 10:45-48.

Destructions

The word “destruction” or “destructions” occurs over 100 times in the Book of Mormon record. It appears in such phrases as, “destructions of my people,” “destructions which came upon the people, by night,” “destruction of their enemies,” and “destructions by fire, and by smoke, and by tempests, and by whirlwinds” (1 Ne. 19:4; Ether 13:14; 2 Ne. 6:14; 3 Ne. 10:14). We would suggest that in many references the term “destruction” has a meaning that is broader than solely the annihilation or the destroying of a people. In older English, “destruction” meant “the action of ravaging or laying waste; or causing havoc or ruin” on lands, structures, people and animals. In the plural, “destructions,” referred to the “ruins” or remains of such destruction. We find these older meanings to be helpful when analyzing the text.

Survivors Swept Off the Land and Scattered

The Second Stage

The families of Lehi and the families of Jared and his brother and their friends were led to a “land of promise” (1 Ne. 2:20; 4:14; 5:5; 7:1,13; 2 Ne. 1:5; Jacob 5:43; Ether 1:38, 42; 2:7). It was called a “land of promise” because the Lord “promised,” or covenanted with those who obtained it and kept the commandments that they would prosper, but if the people didn’t keep the commandments, he “promised,” or covenanted they would be “swept off” the land (Morm. 4:18; Ether 2:9). The descendants of these families, along with the people of Zarahemla (the Mulekites), enjoyed the fruits of a righteous civilization when they kept the covenants and were blessed with prosperity when they obeyed the commandments of the Lord. The Lord through the prophets clearly explained what would happen to the people if they didn’t observe this gospel imperative. Moroni recorded the decrees of God concerning their “land of promise”—decrees that included a warning that if iniquity befell them, they would be swept off the land because of their transgressions:



Lamanites and Nephites are “swept off” the land and occupy Oasis America and beyond.

[The Lord] had sworn in his wrath unto the brother of Jared, that whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only God, or they should **be swept off** when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them.

And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall **be swept off** when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity.

For behold, this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall **be swept off**; for it is the everlasting decree of God. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they **are swept off**. (Ether 2:8–10)

Nephi saw in vision that his people at the time of dissolution would be swept off the land and scattered by going “forth in multitudes upon the face of the land” and then they would “dwindle in unbelief” (1 Ne. 12:20-22). Jarom, writing “according to the commandment of [his] father Enos,” observed:

Behold, it is expedient that much should be done among this people, because of the hardness of their hearts, and the deafness of their ears, and the blindness of their minds, and the stiffness of their necks; nevertheless, God is exceedingly merciful unto them, and has **not as yet swept them off** from the face of the land. (Jarom 1:3)

Thus Jarom in his day (about 400 B.C.) was aware of the decrees of God, and the people could be “swept” from off “the face of the land,” even then, because of unrighteousness.

The Book of Mormon account describes the destruction of the civilization of the descendants of Jared as well as the civilizations of the descendants of the Lamanites and Nephites all of whom were literally “swept off” the land because of their iniquity. The prophecies of the Lord declared, and the record confirms, that this sweeping destruction and almost annihilation included not only the people but their cities and the buildings within, comparable to the Jews as a people, and their temple and other

The Hopi and Aztec people

The Hopi people, living in the northeast corner of Arizona, claim their ancestors came from a “red city,” located “where the rocks and earth are red,” somewhere “in the far southwest” of their present home (Gary A. David, *The Orion Zone*, 214-17). The name Zarahemla means “red city” (Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, 340). The landscape of our proposed land of Zarahemla is red earth and rocks. The Aztecs of Mexico and Central America claim their ancestors came from an area northwest of central Mexico, near the southwest United States, called *Aztlán*. Some claim that *Aztlán* means “place of the white heron [egret or white-faced ibis]” (see, *Wikipedia*, *Aztlán*). Baja California is a breeding ground of the white heron. These two relative directions—southwest of northern Arizona and northwest of Mexico City—triangulate to the area of southern California and northern Baja California, which is the expected location and travel direction of a people who would have left the Baja California peninsula as they were being “swept off” the land.

structures, being swept off the land of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (3 Ne. 10:7; see also, Matt. 24:2,15; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6; JS-M 1:12, 31-32).

The Book of Mormon record is correct when it states that the people were swept off their homelands, and we believe that homeland was in Baja California. We suggest the surviving Lamanites and Nephites scattered primarily over the area of western North America (Oasis-America) and their descendants became a people such as the Hopis, Aztecs and other linguistically related groups. These groups continued to build houses

The Uto-Aztecan Language

The work of Brian Stubbs is a significant contribution to the origins of the Uto-Aztecan language family. See, for example, Brian D. Stubbs, "Looking Over vs. Overlooking: Native American Languages: Let's Void the Void," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Volume 5, Issue 1, Provo, Utah: Maxwell Institute, Brigham Young University, 1996. Stubb's research has yielded hundreds of Hebrew and Egyptian words that have been preserved within the Uto-Aztecan language. This would not be unexpected based on statements in the Book of Mormon on the original languages of the Lamanites and Nephites (1 Ne. 1:2; Morm. 9:32-33). See also, *Wikipedia*, Uto-Aztecan languages, and the website for Uto-Aztecan Studies: <http://uto-aztecan.org/uanist/>

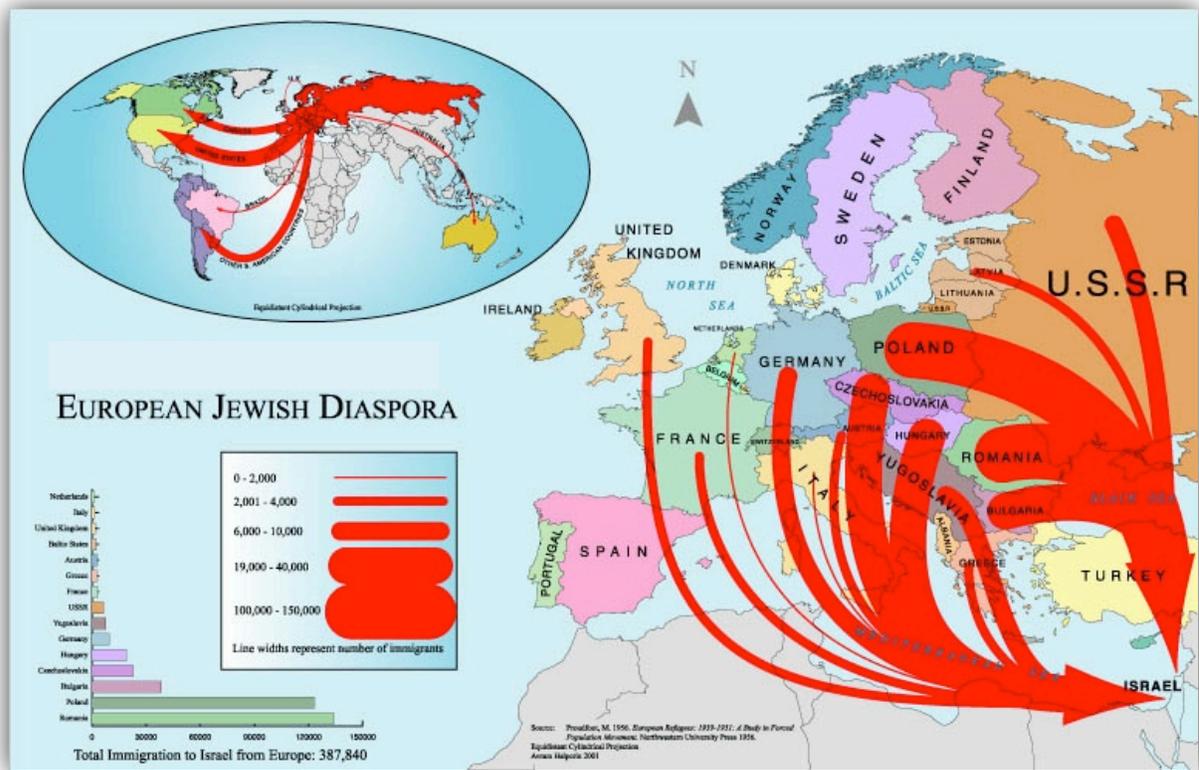
of timber and cement (adobe) and lived in tents. Those who were "swept off" scattered over all the face of the earth like branches broken off a tree. They separated into many subcultures and language groups with similar characteristics, and spread throughout western North American, and down to Meso-America and beyond. These language groups have been classified into an extended language family called Uto-Aztecan. This language family of Central America and western North America includes

Comanche, Hopi, Nahuatl (the language of the Aztecs), Paiute, Pima, and Shoshone and others. Several linguists have traced the origin of this language family to the area around southern California and Arizona, near the borders of Baja California. Today, there are 18 federally recognized Indian reservations in San Diego County alone, more than any county in the United States. (*Wikipedia*, San Diego County; see numerous references on the scattering: 1 Ne. 10:12-19; 22:8; Hel. 3:16; 15:12; Morm. 5:15, 17-20; Ether 2:2-10; D&C 109:61, 67)

The Scattering of the Jews

As prophesied, the scattering of the descendants of Judah over the centuries has paralleled this dispersal pattern of the Nephites and Lamanites. Because of iniquity the

Jews were nearly annihilated, and the survivors were then swept from their Biblical homeland, scattered to distant lands, and smitten by the gentiles. In time, the Lord promised, by covenant, they would be gathered and embrace the gospel. Only the instruments of scattering—the Babylonians and the Romans—and the timing of the stages varied from the Lamanite and Nephite pattern. But unlike the descendants of father Lehi, the Jews, with the Lord’s direction, have been able to maintain their identity and recall the location of their homeland. To better understand their two histories, we underscore another parallel: Just as we would not expect to find the Biblical homeland of the Jews in the lands where they have been scattered (the *Diaspora*), such as Europe, Russia, or North America, we should not expect to find the Book of Mormon homeland of the Nephites and Lamanites in the lands where they now live or have lived in their scattered condition. (See section on *After Cumorah*, in our main article, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon Geography: A Land Choice Above All Other Lands*)

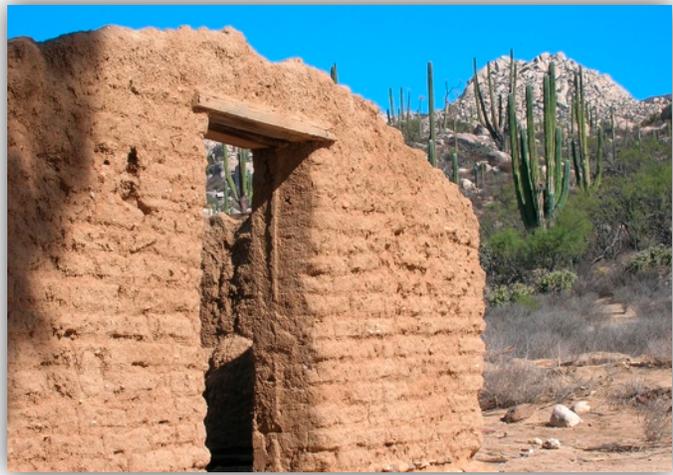


After their scattering (the diaspora), many Jews are returning to their homeland of Israel.

The Desolation of their Dwelling Places

The Third Stage

Some have asked: Should there be artifacts or remains that the Book of Mormon people left behind when they were swept off the land? Our response is: Yes, but only artifacts or remains of items actually mentioned in the Book of Mormon account and that could have survived to the present day, such as cast up highways. We should not be expected to find the types of buildings or other structures that the Nephites did not construct (see our topic article, *Searching for Book of Mormon Ruins: What should we expect to find?*). The remains or artifacts of the Nephite structures may not still exist because of their perishable nature, or, more importantly, these structures were left “desolate” in keeping with the prophecies of the Lord to the Nephites and to the people of Jerusalem, that if they did not repent and return unto him with full purpose of heart, “the places of [their] dwellings shall become desolate until the time of the fulfilling of the covenant to [their] fathers” (3 Ne. 10:6–7):



Adobe ruins—no older than 200 years—within the proposed narrow neck of land in central Baja California.

O ye people of these great [Nephite and Lamanite] cities which have fallen, who are descendants of Jacob, yea, who are of the house of Israel, how oft have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and have nourished you.

... yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, ye that dwell at Jerusalem, as ye that have fallen; yea, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not.

O ye house of Israel whom I have spared, how oft will I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart.

But if not, O house of Israel, **the places of your dwellings shall become desolate** until the time of the fulfilling of the covenant to your fathers. (3 Ne. 10:4–7)

The actual deed—the “desolation of their dwelling places”—is an often-overlooked step within the total disintegration process of the Lamanite and Nephite civilizations. Isaiah

also predicted this desolated condition would be inflicted upon those of the house of Israel:

Isaiah quoting the Lord: Thy children shall make haste against thy destroyers; and they that made thee **waste** [desolate] shall go forth of thee.

For thy **waste** and thy **desolate places**, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants; and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. (1 Ne. 21:17, 19 and Isa. 49:17, 19)

Isaiah quoting the Lord: And **I will lay it waste**; it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

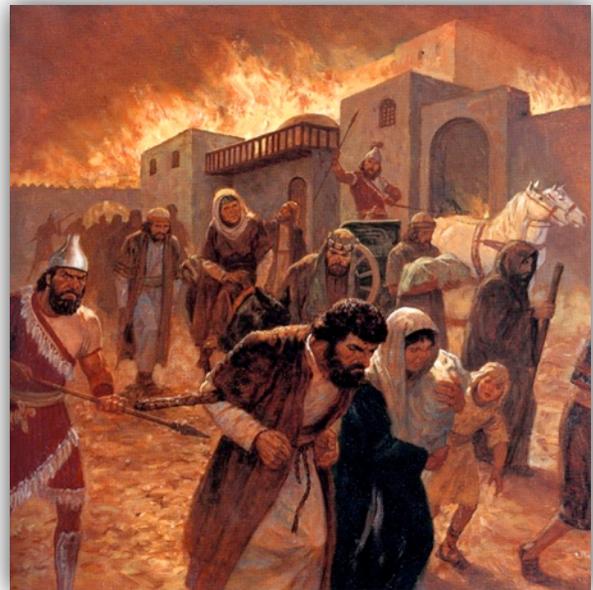
Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the **waste places** of the fat ones shall strangers eat. (2 Ne. 15:6, 17 and Isa. 5:6, 17)

Isaiah quoting the Lord: Then said I: Lord, how long? And he said: Until **the cities be wasted without inhabitant**, and **the houses without man**, and **the land be utterly desolate**; (2 Ne. 16:11 and Isa. 6:11)

The concept of rendering a place “desolate” should be clearly defined and understood. A “desolated” place by definition is one that is caused to be “deserted of people” and “made empty or bare” by the devastation and obliteration of buildings, crops, trees and everything of substance, rendering the land “without sign of life” and “unfit for habitation.” The Book of Mormon record is clear that the Nephites and the Lamanites in the end did not repent and return to the Lord, and the prophesied desolation was fulfilled.

Likewise, the people of the Biblical land of Jerusalem, because of wickedness,

witnessed the equivalent “abomination of desolation” of their homes and towns by the Romans under Titus, including the temple they thought would not be destroyed (Deut. 28:52; Matt. 24:2; Mark 13:1–2; Luke 19:40–44; 21:20; D&C 45:18–21; JST–Matthew



Destruction of Jerusalem. © Gary Kapp

2–21). According to the Lord, this “desolation” and the resulting devastation and abandonment of Jewish and Nephite places and dwellings would continue until “the fulfilling of the covenant to [their] fathers,” which began with the restoration of the gospel in 1830 (3 Ne. 10:7; see also, D&C 66:2).

The Nature of a Desolated Land

It is the destruction and “sweeping off” of people and their possessions by decree of the Lord and the ruination and obliteration of structures that render a land “desolate.” A desolated land is not the same as a deserted land. A deserted land is abandoned but not devastated nor left desolate and obliterated. And a desolate land is not a barren land that was never productive. A desolate land, unlike a barren land, can be resettled and reclaimed to its former productive state when the Lord so directs, for example, the once “desolated,” but now productive agricultural areas of the Holy Land. Because the Book of Mormon people built humble structures of wood and cement (adobe), all of which would have easily been destroyed by natural disasters, leaving little or no evidence of their civilization, the question then becomes: What should we expect to find after the Lord has allowed the Lamanites and Nephites to be swept off the land, their civilizations destroyed and the land cursed?

The Desolated Jaredite Land

The previously inhabited Jaredite land in the “land northward” was “called Desolation by the Nephites,” even though the land itself, its



Example of a “desolated” or obliterated town: Greenburg, Kansas, before and after a tornado struck, May 4, 2007.

soil and its potential to grow vegetation and crops, was not “desolate, save it were for timber; but because of the greatness of the destruction of the people who had before inhabited the land it was called desolate” (Ether 7:6; Hel. 3:6; see also, Morm. 3:5; Morm. 4:2). This empty land of Desolation, before it was reclaimed and restored by the Nephites, was “rendered desolate and without timber, because of the many inhabitants who had before inherited the land” (Hel. 3:5). Like the Nephite and Lamanite lands, this Jaredite land, in fulfillment of the prophecies of the Lord, was swept of people and made empty or bare by the devastation and obliteration of buildings, crops, trees and everything of substance, rendering the land without sign of life and for a period of time



Dry lake bed in Valle de los Cirios near the proposed Jaredite location of Moron within the land of Desolation.

unfit for habitation. The Lord “had sworn in his wrath unto the brother of Jared, that whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them” (Ether 2:8). In 121 B.C., king Limhi secretly sent a “small number of men” northwards, “to search for the land of Zarahemla,”

and to obtain help for freeing his people from bondage. The search party was “lost in the wilderness for the space of many days, yet they were diligent, and found not the land of Zarahemla” but “discovered a land [the land Desolation] which was covered with bones of men, and of beasts, and was also covered with ruins of buildings of every kind, having discovered a land which had been peopled with a people [the Jaredites] who were as numerous as the hosts of Israel” (Mosiah 8:7–11). The Nephites and Lamanites refrained from settling this desolated northern land of the Jaredites until 55 B.C., for reasons that are not clear from the record—they may have been delayed by the Lord’s timetable, or possibly resettlement needed to wait until the land naturally recovered and became reforested to an advanced stage (see section on *Cement*, in our topic article, *Searching for Book of Mormon Ruins: What should we expect to find? and also*, “Arriving in the Promised Land” in our topic article, *Jared, his Brother and their Friends: A Geographical Analysis of the Book of Ether*).

The Cursing of the Land

The Fourth Stage

The Book of Mormon prophets also declared that their promised land would be “cursed for their sakes” after the destruction of their civilizations, the sweeping of their people off the land and the desolation of their dwelling places. Alma predicted this fourth and ongoing stage and explained that the Lord’s cursing of the land comes because of sin:

And [Alma] said: Thus saith the Lord God—**Cursed shall be the land**, yea, this land, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe; and as I have said so shall it be; for this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon the land, for the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. (Alma 45:16)



Alma also declared:

For behold, **there is a curse upon all this land**, that destruction shall come upon all those workers of darkness, according to the power of God, when they are fully ripe; therefore I desire that this people might not be destroyed.

Yea, and **cursed be the land** forever and ever unto those workers of darkness and secret combinations, even unto destruction, except they repent before they are fully ripe. (Alma 37:28, 31)

A view from near the top of the proposed Hill Cumorah near El Marmol, Baja California.

Nephi explained the justification for the Lord’s cursing of a land:

And [the Lord] leadeth away the righteous into precious lands, and the wicked he destroyeth, and **curseth the land unto them for their sakes**. (1 Ne. 17:38)

Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom [the Lord] shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity; for if iniquity shall abound **cursed shall be the land for their sakes**, but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever. (2 Ne. 1:7)

Jacob reiterated this principle to his people by quoting the words of the Lord:

Wherefore, this people shall keep my commandments, saith the Lord of Hosts, or **cursed be the land for their sakes**. (Jacob 2:29)

But, wo, wo, unto you that are not pure in heart, that are filthy this day before God; for except ye repent **the land is cursed for your sakes**; and the Lamanites, which are not filthy like unto you, nevertheless they are cursed with a sore cursing, shall scourge you even unto destruction. (Jacob 3:3)

Enos was taught this principle directly from the Lord's voice:

And while I was thus struggling in the spirit, behold, the voice of the Lord came into my mind again, saying: I will visit thy brethren according to their diligence in keeping my commandments. I have given unto them this land, and **it is a holy land; and I curse it not save it be for the cause of iniquity**; wherefore, I will visit thy brethren according as I have said; and their transgressions will I bring down with sorrow upon their own heads. (Enos 1:10)

Mormon recorded the actual cursing of the land:

But I did remain among them, but I was forbidden to preach unto them, because of the hardness of their hearts; and because of the hardness of their hearts **the land was cursed for their sake**.

And these Gadianton robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because **the Lord had cursed the land**, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again. (Morm. 1:17-18)

The Land “Cursed for their Sakes”

When the concept, “cursing of the land,” occurs in the Book of Mormon, it is followed by the phrase, “for their sakes.” For example, Nephi’s statement: “And [the Lord] leadeth away the righteous into precious lands, and the wicked he destroyeth, and curseth the land unto them for their sakes” (1 Ne. 17: 38; see also, 2 Ne. 1:7; Jacob 2:29; 3:3; Morm. 1:17, above). The word “sakes” can have the meaning of “benefit,” as in, “cursed for their benefit,” but the prevalent meaning of the word “sakes” in older English refers to “crimes, transgressions, sins, guilt, contentions, strife” (see “sakes” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*). We suggest this older meaning of “transgressions” of some kind is what the Lord meant by the word “sakes” in the phrase, “cursed for your

sakes.” In other words, the Lord is saying the land was “cursed for your transgressions” or “because of your transgressions.” He is not saying the land was cursed for your benefit. Moreover, when the Lord speaks of this affliction, “the land cursed for your sakes,” it is preceded by a phrase stressing the iniquity or transgressions of the people, for example, “the wicked he destroyeth,” in Nephi’s statement above.

The Lord reiterated this principle to the Nephites through the message of Samuel the Lamanite: “And behold, a curse shall come upon the land, saith the Lord of Hosts, because of the peoples’ sake [transgression] who are upon the land, yea, because of their wickedness and their abominations” (Hel. 13:17). In the Book of Mormon text, as in older English, the phrase that follows the

word “yea” reinforces and enlarges upon the preceding phrase. Thus the Lord is saying that the land shall be cursed “because of the “peoples’ sake [transgression] who are upon the land,” and this transgression was “their wickedness and their abominations.”

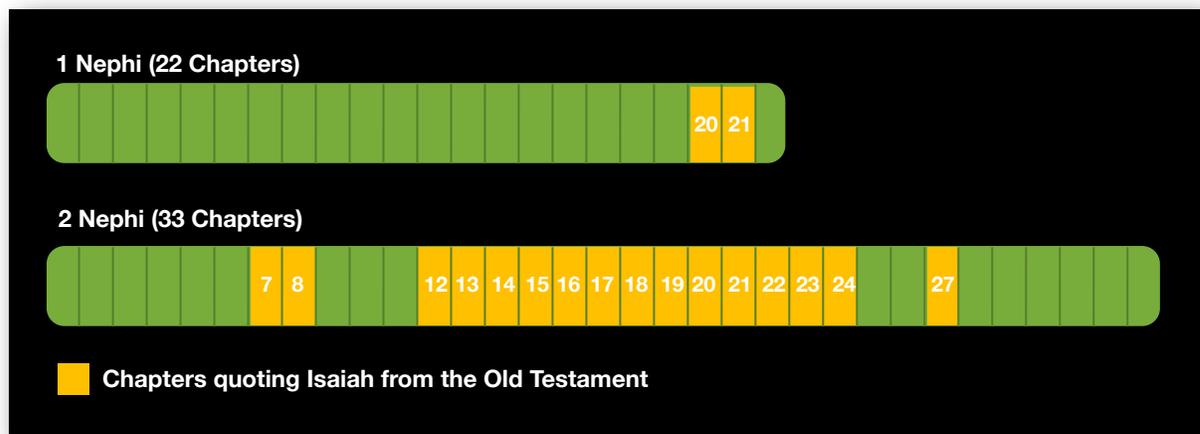
The phrase, “cursed is the ground for thy sake,” occurs in the book of *Genesis*. We suggest that in this Biblical verse the word “sake” should also be defined as “transgression.” The Lord says to Adam: “Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake [transgression]; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life” (Gen. 3:17; see also Gen. 8:21; Deut. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21).



Cactus bush growing by the proposed River Sidon near San Ignacio, Baja California.

Isaiah’s Prophecies Predict and Describe a Cursed Land

What was the condition of the Book of Mormon lands after they were cursed by the Lord for iniquity? We suggest that some of the most descriptive words and phrases come from Isaiah’s prophecies as recorded in the Book of Mormon. One of the seeming incongruities of the Nephite record is the inclusion by Nephi, Jacob, Abinadi and the Lord of a significant number of chapters of Isaiah—21 out of the 66 chapters recorded in the *King James* version of the Bible. Moreover, the words of Isaiah occupy 18 of the 55 chapters that comprise the contributions of Nephi and Jacob upon the special and limited small plates of Nephi—the books of *First Nephi* and *Second Nephi*.



18 of the 55 chapters recorded by Nephi and Jacob are taken directly from the Brass Plates and recorded in the small plates of Nephi.

The prophecies of Isaiah were found on the plates of brass obtained by Nephi from Laban when their family left Jerusalem and, understandably, were available to the Nephites. Nephi received a commandment of the Lord that the small plates (the plates containing words from 18 full chapters of Isaiah) should include only the more “precious” parts of “the ministry and the prophecies,” and these items should be written for the “instruction of [their] people”:

And after I had made these plates by way of commandment, I, Nephi, received a commandment that the ministry and the prophecies, the more plain and precious parts of them, should be written upon these [small] plates; and that the things which were written should be kept for the instruction of my people, who should possess the land, and also for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord. (1 Ne. 19:3) [The “other wise purposes” included providing a substitute for the lost 116 pages of the English translation of the large plates of Nephi, see D&C 10:1-53.]

Wherefore, I shall give commandment unto my seed, that they shall not occupy these plates with things which are not of worth unto the children of men. (1 Ne. 6:6)

Jacob, the brother of Nephi, also understood the purpose of the small plates, and consequently the significance of Isaiah's prophecies to their people. Thus Jacob includes the prophecies of Isaiah in spite of the inability to "write but a little of [his] words, because of the difficulty of engraving [their] words upon plates":

And [Nephi] gave me, Jacob, a commandment that I should write upon these plates a few of the things which I considered to be most precious; that I should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi. (Jacob 1:2)

Now behold, it came to pass that I, Jacob, having ministered much unto my people in word, (and I cannot write but a little of my words, because of the difficulty of engraving our words upon plates) and we know that the things which we write upon plates must remain; (Jacob 4:1)

We have pondered this question: If the limited small plates were for specific purposes and were also difficult to write upon, why did the Nephite prophets include so many of the prophecies of Isaiah—prophecies Nephi says were "hard for many of [his] people to understand; for they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews" (2 Ne. 25:1). Nonetheless, Nephi indicates that he includes the words of Isaiah on his record for the benefit of his people and their descendants.

But behold, I, Nephi, have not taught my children after the manner of the Jews; but behold, I, of myself, have dwelt at Jerusalem, wherefore I know concerning the regions round about; and I have made mention unto my children concerning the judgments of God, which hath come to pass among the Jews, unto my children, according to all that which Isaiah hath spoken, and I do not write them.

But behold, I proceed with mine own prophecy, according to my plainness; in the which I know that no man can err; nevertheless, in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled men shall know of a surety, at the times when they shall come to pass. (2 Ne. 25:6-7)

What was the benefit of Isaiah's prophecies to Nephi's people to know "concerning the judgments of God, which hath come to pass among the Jews"? Isaiah's predictions, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, cover many topics—from the fate of the people of Jerusalem to prophecies pertaining to the coming of Christ. We suggest, however, that Isaiah's prophecies also concern others of the house of Israel, such as father Lehi's

descendants, and the conditions which will prevail when they are swept off their lands through the “judgments of God” because of iniquity.

It should be noted that Nephi “likened” the words of Isaiah to his own people:

And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words. For I will **liken his words unto my people**, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him.

And now I write some of the words of Isaiah, that whoso of my people shall see these words may lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men. Now these are the words, and ye may **liken them unto you** and unto all men. (2 Ne. 11:2, 8)

The word “liken,” especially in older English, means “to represent as like; to compare to.” Thus we suggest that many of Isaiah prophecies directly represent the fate of Lehi’s family, including where Isaiah describes the future cursed condition of the Book of Mormon lands, as well as other lands occupied by the house of Israel such as the land of Jerusalem. And because Isaiah in numerous verses describes the debased condition which would come upon their lands because of their transgressions, his prophecies are as Nephi says, “of great worth” to his people and their descendants. Hopefully these prophecies would serve as a warning and a deterrent from transgressing the commandments of the Lord—transgressions which would ultimately determine the length of their tenure and the quality of their life on the land.



A typical blooming cactus found in Baja California.

Wherefore, [the prophecies of Isaiah] are of worth unto the children of men, and he that supposeth that they are not, unto them will I speak particularly, and confine the words unto mine own people; for I know that they shall be **of great worth** unto them in the last days; for in that day shall they understand them; wherefore, for their good have I written them (2 Ne. 25: 8).

Nephi's brother Jacob also "likens" or compares the words of Isaiah unto his people because these prophecies directly represent them:

And now, the words which I shall read are they which Isaiah spake concerning all the house of Israel; wherefore, they may be **likened unto you**, for ye are of the house of Israel. And there are many things which have been spoken by Isaiah which may be **likened unto you** [that is, Isaiah's words talk about you and represent you], because ye are of the house of Israel. (2 Ne. 6:5)

For the benefit of his people, Jacob also includes the lengthy (87 verses) of the allegory of the tame and wild olive tree of Zenos (Jacob 4:13-18; 5:1-77; 6:1-4) on the same few precious plates that Nephi warned should only be used for that which is of greatest worth. In this allegorical prophecy of Zenos the people of Lehi are depicted as one of the branches of the house of Israel that would be separated from the people at Jerusalem and placed in the "nethermost" (lowermost) parts of the Lord's vineyard (Jacob 5:20-25). Father Lehi's family was planted in a "good spot of ground" within the vineyard (Jacob 5:24; see also, Jacob 5:38-45; 3 Ne. 10:16-17).



Cactus surrounding the proposed location of Hill Shim near Cataviña, Baja California.

We suggest that a careful reading of these sometimes difficult to understand chapters of the small plates of Nephi leads to the conclusion that an impressive portion of both the prophecies of Isaiah and of Zenos are a revelation concerning the future condition of the "precious lands" of that part of the Lord's vineyard occupied by Lehi's descendants and the predicted "cursed" condition that would fall upon these lands

because of the iniquity of the people. Thus Nephi and Jacob "liken" Isaiah's words to their people because many of Isaiah's prophecies described the future cursed condition of their lands—the condition which would befall them if they transgressed the Lord's commandments. Mormon in his abridgment also noted the small plates contained prophecies concerning his people that already had been fulfilled, such as the words of

Isaiah, and stated that the prophecies contained therein concerned them, and many would come to pass “beyond [his] day”:

And the things which are upon these [small] plates pleasing me, because of the prophecies of the coming of Christ; and my fathers knowing that many of them have been fulfilled; yea, and I also know that as many things as have been **prophesied concerning us** down to this day have been fulfilled, and as many as go beyond this day must surely come to pass— (W of M 1:4)

After thoughtful analysis we firmly suggest that Isaiah’s prophecies of a cursed land are intended to describe and foretell the status of the Book of Mormon lands, especially from the time of the destruction of the Lamanite and Nephite civilizations until our day. To confirm this observation, we recommend a reading of the books of *First and Second Nephi* and *Jacob* with this concept in mind. Understandably, we propose Baja California as the location of these Book of Mormon lands, and as we have noted, Lehi’s family was sent to a “nethermost” or lowermost part of the Lord’s vineyard (Jacob 5:13-14, 19, 38-39, 52). Nephi stressed to his brethren who questioned the meaning of Isaiah’s words: “these things of which are spoken [by Isaiah] are temporal; for thus are the covenants of the Lord with our fathers; and **it meaneth us** in the days to come, and also all our brethren who are of the house of Israel” (1 Ne. 22:6; see also, all of 1 Ne. 22).

The Nature of a Land Cursed by the Lord

What should we expect would happen to a land cursed by the Lord? There are numerous references from the Book of Mormon, including the prophecies of Isaiah, portraying the land being cursed by “pestilence,” “famine” and “briers and thorns.”

A Land Cursed with Pestilences

One could suspect that pests of some kind, such as a swarm of devastating grasshoppers, are described by the word pestilence, but “pestilence” in older English refers to “a fatal epidemic disease, especially a plague like the bubonic plague.” Pestilence also denotes a pervasive situation that is “morally corrupting” or “socially pernicious,” such as “evil conduct, wickedness, or sin.” In other words, “pestilence” describes a wide range of conditions, from a morally corrupting environment to a devastating condition such as a plague that could beset the land. The record is not clear as to which specific pestilences would smite the Book of Mormon lands.

In the following references, note that destruction by pestilence, famine, and sword (bloodshed) often appear together in a triad when characterizing a “cursed land.”

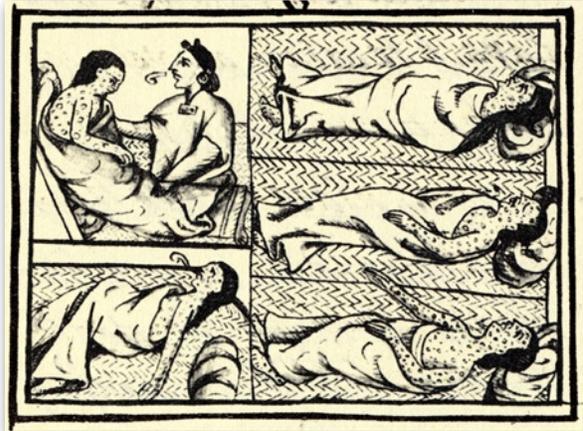
Jacob quoting Isaiah: And they that believe not in him shall be destroyed, both by fire, and by tempest, and by earthquakes, and by bloodsheds, and by **pestilence**, and by famine. And they shall know that the Lord is God, the Holy One of Israel. (2 Ne. 6:15)

Jacob: Wherefore, because of their iniquities, destructions, famines, **pestilences**, and bloodshed shall come upon them; and they who shall not be destroyed shall be scattered among all nations. (2 Ne. 10: 6)

Abinadi quoting the Lord: And it shall come to pass that I will smite this my people with sore afflictions, yea, with famine and with **pestilence**; and I will cause that they shall howl all the day long. And they shall be smitten with a **great pestilence**—and all this will I do because of their iniquities and abominations. (Mosiah 12:4, 7)

Amulek: Yea, and I say unto you that if it were not for the prayers of the righteous, who are now in the land, that ye would even now be visited with utter destruction; yet it would not be by flood, as were the people in the days of Noah, but it would be by famine, and by **pestilence**, and the sword.

But it is by the prayers of the righteous that ye are spared; now therefore, if ye will cast out the righteous from among you then will not the Lord stay his hand; but in his fierce anger he will come out against you; then ye shall be smitten by famine, and by **pestilence**, and by the sword; and the time is soon at hand except ye repent. (Alma 10:22-23)



An illustrated panel appearing on fol.54 of Book XII of the Florentine Codex, the 16th-century compendium of materials and information on Aztec and Nahuatl history collected by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún. The drawing shows Nahuatl people infected with smallpox disease. The illustration accompanies text written in Nahuatl, which in English translation says in part:

". . . [The disease] brought great desolation: a great many died of it. They could no longer walk about, but lay in their dwellings and sleeping places, no longer able to move or stir. They were unable to change position, to stretch out on their sides or face down, or raise their heads. And when they made a motion, they called out loudly. The pustules that covered people caused great desolation; very many people died of them, and many just starved to death; starvation reigned, and no one took care of others any longer. On some people, the pustules appeared only far apart, and they did not suffer greatly, nor did many of them die of it. But many people's faces were spoiled by it, their faces were made rough. Some lost an eye or were blinded."

Alma: Yea, and then shall they see wars and **pestilences**, yea, famines and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct— (Alma 45:11)

The Lord: Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth with famine, and with **pestilence**, and destruction, according to the wickedness of this people. (Hel. 10:6)

Nephi, son of Helaman: O Lord, thou didst hearken unto my words when I said, Let there be a famine, that the **pestilence** of the sword might cease; and I know that thou wilt, even at this time, hearken unto my words, for thou saidst that: If this people repent I will spare them.

Yea, O Lord, and thou seest that they have repented, because of the famine and the **pestilence** and destruction which has come unto them. (Hel. 11:14-15)

Mormon: And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of **pestilence**, they will not remember him. (Hel. 12:3)

Samuel the Lamanite quoting the Lord: And four hundred years shall not pass away before I will cause that they shall be smitten; yea, I will visit them with the sword and with famine and with **pestilence**. (Hel. 13:9)

Moroni describing the cursed condition of the Jaredite lands: And they hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord, because of their wicked combinations; wherefore, there began to be wars and contentions in all the land, and also many famines and **pestilences**, insomuch that there was a great destruction, such an one as never had been known upon the face of the earth; and all this came to pass in the days of Shiblom. (Ether 11:7)

A Land Cursed with Famine by Lack of Rain

Creating the environmental conditions that lead to a famine is a common way for the Lord to humble a people, decimate a population and curse a land. A famine is a condition of “extreme scarcity of food with its accompanying privations.” The shortage of food is most often the result of lack of rain or reduced rainfall upon a land, and a shortage of food from lack of rain for a prolonged period can keep a land from being resettled by the former inhabitants or by others. Famine can also be described as a “dearth” in older English, that is, a “shortage and dearthness of food.” In the *King James* version of the Bible, the words “dearth” and “famine” are translations rendered from the same Hebrew root word (Gen. 41:54; Isa. 51:19). The concept of famine or dearth

being caused by the lack of rain is illustrated in the words of Moroni concerning the Jaredites:

And it came to pass that there began to be a **great dearth** upon the land, and the inhabitants began to be destroyed exceedingly fast because of the **dearth**, for there was **no rain** upon the face of the earth. (Ether 9:30)

In another example, Nephi, the son of Helaman, faced a serious problem of “wickedness” among his people (19 B.C.) and asked the Lord to humble them by causing a “famine in the land to stir them up in remembrance of the Lord their God, and perhaps they will repent and turn unto [him]” (He. 11:4). The Lord had earlier told Nephi:



Drought conditions in Baja California due to the lack of rain.

Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth with **famine**, and with pestilence, and destruction, according to the wickedness of this people. (Hel. 10:6)

The conditions surrounding the withdrawal of rain by the Lord and the resultant famine are described by Mormon:

And so it was done, according to the words of Nephi. And there was a **great famine** upon the land, among all the people of Nephi. And thus in the seventy and fourth year the **famine** did continue, and the work of destruction did cease by the sword but became sore by **famine**.

And this work of destruction did also continue in the seventy and fifth year. For the earth was smitten that it was **dry**, and did not yield forth grain in the season of grain; and the whole earth was smitten, even among the Lamanites as well as among the Nephites, so that they were smitten that they did perish by thousands in the more wicked parts of the land.

And it came to pass that the people saw that they were about to perish by **famine**, and they began to remember the Lord their God; and they began to remember the words of Nephi.

And the people began to plead with their chief judges and their leaders, that they would say unto Nephi: Behold, we know that thou art a man of God, and therefore cry unto the Lord our God that he turn away from us this **famine**, lest all the words which thou hast spoken concerning our destruction be fulfilled.

And it came to pass that in the seventy and sixth year the Lord did turn away his anger from the people, and caused that **rain** should fall upon the earth, insomuch that it did bring forth her fruit in the season of her fruit. And it came to pass that it did bring forth her grain in the season of her grain.

And behold, the people did rejoice and glorify God, and the whole face of the land was filled with rejoicing; and they did no more seek to destroy Nephi, but they did esteem him as a great prophet, and a man of God, having great power and authority given unto him from God. (Hel. 11:5-8, 17-18)

This famine at the time of Nephi, the son of Helaman, was caused by a three and a half-year drought upon the land. This span of time with no rain can be calculated by noting the sequence of a six-month season of fruit (normally a dry season) with the six-month season of grain (normally a wet season) during this period of prolonged drought (see also, Hel. 11:13). Mormon in his recording of this famine observed:

And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with **famine** and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him. (Hel. 12:3)

As expected, there are numerous references in the Book of Mormon describing famine because of the transgression of the people, not only during their long one-thousand year history but especially describing the prophesied conditions at the end when they are swept off the land. Lehi envisioned the long, extended cursing that would come upon his descendants after their destruction:

My heart hath been weighed down with sorrow from time to time, for I have feared, lest for the hardness of your hearts the Lord your God should come out in the fulness of his wrath upon you, that ye be cut off and destroyed forever;

Or, that **a cursing should come upon you for the space of many generations**; and ye are visited by sword, and by **famine**, and are hated, and are led according to the will and captivity of the devil. (2 Ne. 1:17-18)

A “generation” in the Book of Mormon record is a period of about a hundred years (1 Ne. 12:11-12; 2 Ne. 26:9; Alma 45:12; Hel. 13:10; 3 Ne. 27:32; 4 Ne. 1:14, 18, 22).

This cursing “for the space of many generations” in Lehi’s prophecy extended from the time (about A.D. 385) when his descendants would be “visited by sword, and by famine,” and then hated and led “according to the will and captivity of the devil,” until the present day.

Jacob explaining the words of Isaiah: And they that believe not in him shall be destroyed, both by fire, and by tempest, and by earthquakes, and by bloodsheds, and by pestilence, and by **famine**. And they shall know that the Lord is God, the Holy One of Israel. (2 Ne. 6:15; see also, 2 Ne. 7:2 and Isa. 50:2)

The Lord: And I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain **no rain** upon it. (2 Ne. 15:6 and Isa. 5:6)

The Lord: Therefore, my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge; and their honorable men are **famished**, and their multitude **dried up with thirst**. (2 Ne. 15:13 and Isaiah 5:13)

Abinadi quoting the Lord: And it shall come to pass that I will smite this my people with sore afflictions, yea, with **famine** and with pestilence; and I will cause that they shall howl all the day long. (Mosiah 12:4)

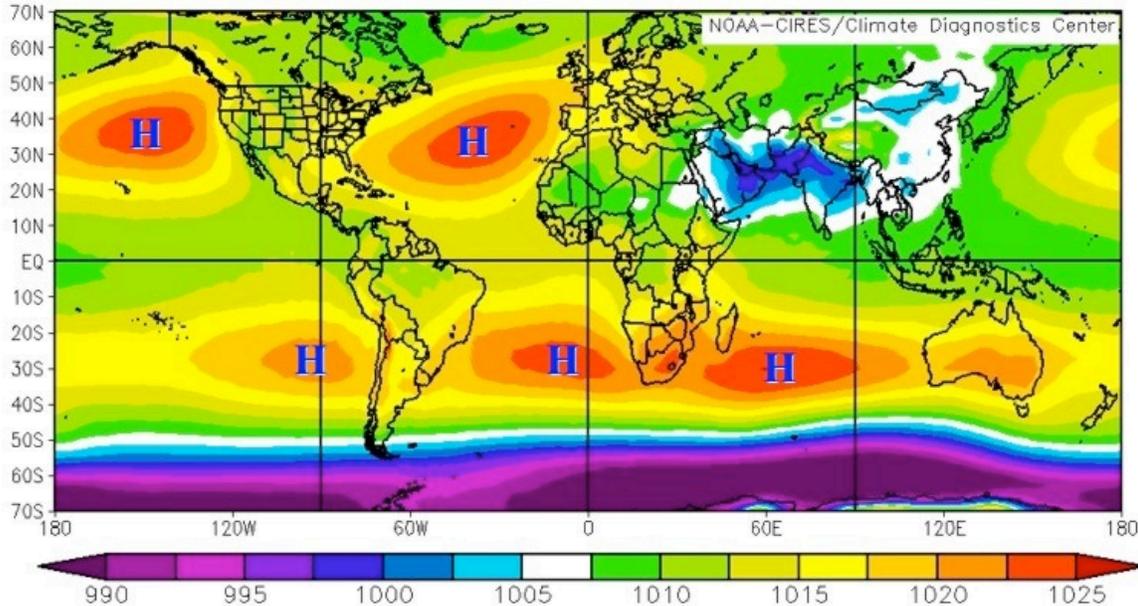
Amulek: Yea, and I say unto you that if it were not for the prayers of the righteous, who are now in the land, that ye would even now be visited with utter destruction; yet it would not be by flood, as were the people in the days of Noah, but it would be by **famine**, and by pestilence, and the sword.

But it is by the prayers of the righteous that ye are spared; now therefore, if ye will cast out the righteous from among you then will not the Lord stay his hand; but in his fierce anger he will come out against you; then ye shall be smitten by **famine**, and by pestilence, and by the sword; and the time is soon at hand except ye repent. (Alma 10:22-23)

Alma’s prophecy to his son Helaman: Yea, and then shall they see wars and pestilences, yea, **famines** and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct— (Alma 45:11)

The Lord: And four hundred years shall not pass away before I will cause that they shall be smitten; yea, I will visit them with the sword and with **famine** and with pestilence. (Hel. 13:9)

Climatologically it is not difficult to anticipate a situation of reduced rainfall in a Mediterranean or semi-arid climate like in Baja California where during the *summer* months of the year the normal pattern of dry air with little or no rain already exists. The orographic and cyclonic winds bringing moisture-laden clouds to the land during the wet *winter* months could be easily nudged to a drier condition by slightly altering the locations of the subtropical high pressure cells over the nearby oceans to the West.



Subtropical high pressure cells (H) located to the west of the five Mediterranean climate areas.

This irregular reduction of rainfall in the normally wet winter season already happens from time to time bringing temporary draught conditions upon the land. And these same meteorological mechanisms that often bring a short-term draught could be readily extended for hundreds of years without substantially upsetting the general pattern of global wind circulation, or as the Lord said to Isaiah, “I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it” (2 Ne. 15:6 and Isa. 5:6; for a discussion of Book of Mormon climates, see “A Choice Land Prepared by the Lord” in our main article, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon Geography: A Land Choice Above All Other Lands*). On the other hand, in tropical and subtropical climate areas of the world the primary source of rainfall is convective precipitation caused by air rising from the heated surface of the earth. This form of precipitation is difficult to change from a normally very high rainfall amount to an acute dry condition without somehow altering the tilt of the earth and changing the locations of the earth’s poles and the equatorial zone, and in the process unduly modifying climate regimes throughout the earth.

A Land Cursed with Briers and Thorns

As a result of severely reduced rainfall over a prolonged time, the natural vegetation comes under stress, and this deteriorating environmental transformation favors a succession of cactus and other succulents and plants that consist of briers and thorns. The term “briers” refers to “a number of prickly scrambling shrubs.” Not unexpectedly, several references in the Book of Mormon, especially the prophecies of Isaiah, describe the degenerative natural vegetation of a cursed land by the phrase, “briers and thorns”:

Isaiah quoting the Lord: And I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up **briers and thorns**; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. (2 Ne. 15:6 and Isa. 5:6)

Isaiah: And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all **thorns**, and upon all **bushes**.

And it shall come to pass in that day, every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, which shall be for **briers and thorns**.

With arrows and with bows shall men come thither, because all the land shall become **briers and thorns**.

And all hills that shall be digged with the mattock, there shall not come thither the fear of **briers and thorns**; but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and the treading of lesser cattle. (2 Ne. 17:19, 23-25 and Isa. 7:19, 23-25; a “mattock” is a type of hoe and “lesser cattle” in Hebrew refers to goats and sheep)

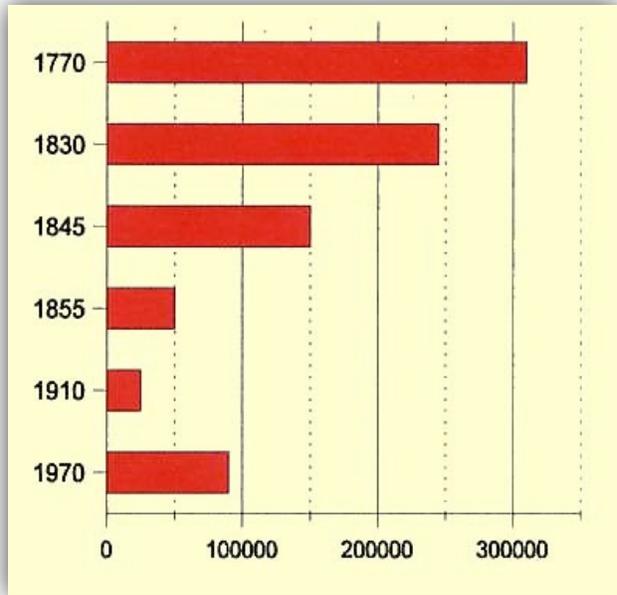
A Land not “Pruned nor Digged” but Hunted with “Arrows and Bows”

Isaiah quoting the Lord: And I will lay [my vineyard] waste; **it shall not be pruned nor digged**; but there shall come up briers and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. (2 Ne. 15:6 and Isa. 5:6; see also, Jacob 5:47)

Isaiah: And it shall come to pass in that day, every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings [pieces of silver], which shall be for briers and thorns.

With arrows and with bows shall men come thither, because all the land shall become briers and thorns. (2 Ne. 17:23-24 and Isa. 7:23-24)

Before the Book of Mormon lands were cursed by the Lord they contained areas of cultivated fields and domesticated animal husbandry. In a cursed condition, with less rainfall and a vegetative cover with briars and thorns, the altered land in Isaiah's words "shall not be pruned nor digged" and men shall come "with arrows and with bows." Thus any people upon the land would not typically cultivate fields of crops and pastures but merely occupy the land as hunters and gatherers. As we have noted, this debased and desolated condition would continue, according to the Lord, until "the fulfilling of the covenant to [their] fathers," which began with the restoration of the gospel in 1830 (3 Ne. 10:7; see also, D&C 66:2)



Native American population in California from 1770 to 1970. (Cook, Sherburne F. 1978. "Historical Demography". In *California*, edited by Robert F. Heizer, pp. 91–98. Handbook of North American Indians, William C. Sturtevant, general editor, vol. 8. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)

Cursing of Jaredite Lands

We should not forget that there was nearly complete decimation of the people and destruction of their civilizations both at the end of the Jaredite record as well as the end of the Nephite account. It was prophesied that the lands of both groups would become "cursed" and destroyed and the inhabitants would be "swept off" the land. Thus the Jaredite story provides an example of the wickedness of a people leading to a "cursed land":

Mormon: Now Lachoneus did cause that [the Nephites] should gather themselves together in the land southward, because of the **great curse which was upon the land** northward [the land previously occupied by the people of Jared]. (3 Ne. 3:24)

Moroni: And also in the reign of Shule [a Jaredite king] there came prophets among the people, who were sent from the Lord, prophesying that the wickedness and idolatry of the people was

bringing a **curse upon the land**, and they should be destroyed if they did not repent. (Ether 7:23)

And there came prophets in the land again, crying repentance unto them—that they must prepare the way of the Lord or there should come a **curse upon the face of the land**; yea, even there should be a great famine, in which they should be destroyed if they did not repent. (Ether 9:28)

And there was great calamity in all the land, for they had testified that a **great curse should come upon the land**, and also upon the people [of Jared], and that there should be a great destruction among them, such an one as never had been upon the face of the earth, and their bones should become as heaps of earth upon the face of the land except they should repent of their wickedness. (Ether 11:6)

And now there began to be a **great curse upon all the land** because of the iniquity of the people [of Jared], in which, if a man should lay his tool or his sword upon his shelf, or upon the place whither he would keep it, behold, upon the morrow, he could not find it, so great was the curse upon the land. (Ether 14:1)

The Jaredite Lands were Cursed by lack of Rainfall leading to Famine

Moroni: And there came prophets in the land again, crying repentance unto them—that they must prepare the way of the Lord or there should come a curse upon the face of the land; yea, even there should be a **great famine**, in which they should be destroyed if they did not repent.

And it came to pass that there began to be a **great dearth** upon the land, and the inhabitants began to be destroyed exceedingly fast because of the **dearth**, for there was **no rain** upon the face of the earth.

And it came to pass that when they had humbled themselves sufficiently before **the Lord he did send rain** upon the face of the earth; and the people began to revive again, and there began to be fruit in the north countries, and in all the countries round about. And the Lord did show forth his power unto them in preserving them from **famine**. (Ether 9:28, 30, 35)

And it came to pass that Shez, who was a descendant of Heth—for Heth had perished by the **famine**, and all his household save it were Shez—wherefore, Shez began to build up again a broken people. (Ether 10:1)

And they hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord, because of their wicked combinations; wherefore, there began to be wars and contentions in all the land, and also **many famines** and pestilences, insomuch that there was a great destruction, such an one as never had been known upon the face of the earth; and all this came to pass in the days of Shiblom. (Ether 11:7)

The Lord will Comfort the Waste Places

The Return of Father Lehi's Children to Baja California

The Fifth Stage

Isaiah: For the Lord shall comfort Zion, he will **comfort all her waste places**; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody. (2 Ne. 8:3 and Isa. 51:3)

As predicted by the revelations of the Lord, the peninsula of Baja California is undergoing a noticeable transformation. The once-cursed land is changing rapidly to a blessed and “comforted” homeland for father Lehi’s children. In older English, the term, “to comfort,” meant “to strengthen physically and to invigorate, refresh and gladden.” This renewal or refreshing of Baja California mirrors the remarkable change in the land of Israel over the last six decades. The children of the first settlers who returned to the Holy Land in the 1940s were called *Sabras*, as an allusion to the tenacious, thorny desert plants of the same name—similar to prickly pears—that had invaded the Israeli countryside over the centuries as “briers and thorns.” Now that land enjoys a renewed landscape with prodigious agricultural production and matching economic growth.



Many of the native Mexican people are migrating to Baja California for economic reasons.

Isaiah: For wickedness burneth as the fire; it shall **devour the briers and thorns**, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forests, and they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke. (2 Ne. 19:18 and Isa. 9:18)

Likewise, Baja California is being changed in unmistakable ways. The peninsula did not even have a rough highway from top to bottom until 1973, nor was the southern half granted the privilege of statehood until 1974. Now the two states on the peninsula boast the newly acquired status as being among the fastest growing population areas of Mexico with an economy considered to be one of the leading growth regions of the nation. Baja California until recently has had few native Americans among its population. Now tens of thousands of Uto-Aztecans (father Lehi's descendants) are migrating into the peninsula from impoverished areas of mainland Mexico seeking jobs in three booming industries of Baja California: Agriculture, Tourism and Manufacturing.

The new agribusinesses are impressively modern and based on sophisticated agricultural techniques such as drip irrigation practiced in Israel. New

agriculture-based towns have sprung up seemingly overnight. New tourism facilities cater to the sit-on-the-beach crowd staying in hundreds of luxury hotels in such storied places as San José del Cabo and to eco-tourists who come pursuing a wide range of ventures from whale-watching to tramping over a spectacular and unequalled countryside. An incursion of diverse and modern manufacturing has yielded thousands of "maquiladora" facilities on the northern half of the peninsula, including an upstart "Silicon Border" electronic park.

Church growth in Baja California has paralleled the population surge and the growth in the economy. In 2010 there were two missions and 12 stakes, a striking increase from no missions and one stake in 2000. Many members are coming from the mainland

Electronic Sources of Information

In this age of the Internet, a world of information is available at our fingertips. Not unlike the printed word, information found by electronic means has to be evaluated and sorted with care. And the needle we are seeking in an electronic haystack is frequently obscured when a full haystack of information falls upon us. Even so, electronic searching in places such as *Wikipedia* has grown into an essential tool and often the best or only means available for obtaining information on some subjects. We encourage readers to search the geographical topics we introduce as supportive information for our analysis of the Book of Mormon text. For example: *Sabra, Diaspora, Baja California, Baja California Sur, Baja California Peninsula, Mexicali, Tijuana, Maquiladora, Silicon Border, San José del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas.*

seeking work, and there are now more stakes per capita in Baja California than even on the mainland of Mexico. All of this newfound growth of Church membership led to the announcement at the October General Conference in 2010 of a temple to be built in the Tijuana area on the north of the peninsula.

We are monitoring these awe-inspiring developments as father Lehi's descendants return to the "lands of their inheritance" and are attempting to document the remarkable transformation and growth on this ancient Book of Mormon homeland. The Lord's prophets have declared not only the past but also the future:

Nephi quoting an angel of the Lord: Nevertheless, thou beholdest that the Gentiles who have gone forth out of captivity, and have been lifted up by the power of God above all other nations, upon the face of the land which is choice above all other lands, which is the land that the Lord God hath covenanted with thy father that his seed should have for the **land of their inheritance**; wherefore, thou seest that the Lord God will not suffer that the Gentiles will utterly destroy the mixture of thy seed, which are among thy brethren. (1 Ne. 13:30)

Nephi: Wherefore, [the Lord] will bring them again out of captivity, and **they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance**; and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel. (1 Ne. 22:12)

Nephi quoting the Lord: Thus saith the Lord: In an acceptable time have I heard thee, O isles of the sea, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee; and I will preserve thee, and give thee my servant for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to **inherit the desolate heritages**; (1 Ne. 21:8 and Isa. 49:8; see also 2 Ne. 10:20)

Samuel the Lamanite: Yea, I say unto you, that in the **latter times** the promises of the Lord have been extended to our brethren, the Lamanites; and notwithstanding the many afflictions which they shall have, and notwithstanding they shall be driven to and fro upon the face of the earth, and be hunted, and shall be smitten and scattered abroad, having no place for refuge, the Lord shall be merciful unto them. (Hel. 15:12)

Mormon quoting the Lord: And then shall the work of the Father commence at that day, even when this gospel shall be preached among the remnant of this people. Verily I say unto you, **at that day shall the work of the Father commence among all the dispersed of my people**, yea, even the tribes which have been lost, which the Father hath led away out of Jerusalem.

Yea, **the work shall commence among all the dispersed of my people**, with the Father to prepare the way whereby they may come unto me, that they may call on the Father in my name.

Yea, and then shall the work commence, with the Father among all nations in **preparing the way whereby his people may be gathered home to the land of their inheritance.** (3 Ne. 21:26-28)

The Lord: But before the great day of the Lord shall come, **Jacob shall flourish** in the wilderness, and **the Lamanites shall blossom as the rose.** (D&C 49:24)

Isaiah: And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame, and **shall burn and shall devour his thorns and his briars in one day;** (2 Ne. 20:17 and Isa. 10:17)

What Should We Find on the Land Today?

We have attempted to confirm the nature of a land cursed by the Lord, and its subsequent blessing, by quoting a compelling number of references from the Book of Mormon and to help answer a simple but essential question: What should we expect the environment of the Book of Mormon lands to look like today? This comprehensive matching of the Nephite record to the present condition of the land would be required not only for our proposed location of Book of Mormon lands in Baja California but also for any location put forth by others. We suggest the landscape of Baja California today fully matches the prophecies in the Book of Mormon of a land that was cursed by the Lord—and to some measure is still under that curse—and a land that is being blessed for the return of father Lehi's descendants. Yet the land shows remnants and reminders of a past landscape that one would expect of a once-blessed homeland. And today the Book of Mormon homeland of Baja California, in spite of its reduced rainfall and "briars and thorns," remains the setting for magnificent vistas, world-class wildlife habitats, spectacular coastlines, a delightful climate and an endless



Typical "briars and thorns" found in Baja California today.

array of hills, mountains and landscape features coupled with a bio-diversity like nowhere else on earth.

Moreover, we are beginning to see the day, in the words of Isaiah, when kings are “nursing fathers” and queens “nursing mothers” to the children of father Lehi and the prophecies of the Lord to Nephi and others are being fulfilled:

Nephi: Nevertheless, after **they shall be nursed by the Gentiles**, and the Lord has lifted up his hand upon the Gentiles and set them up for a standard, and their children have been carried in their arms, and their daughters have been carried upon their shoulders, behold **these things of which are spoken are temporal**; for thus are the covenants of the Lord with our fathers; **and it meaneth us in the days to come**, and also all our brethren who are of the house of Israel. (1 Ne. 22:6; see also, 1 Ne. 21:22-24 and Isa. 49:22-24)

The translation of the Book of Mormon came by the gift and power of God, and we have found the book’s numerous geographical details to be correctly recorded, and in harmony with existing topographical and environmental features on the earth. We know the Book of Mormon to be a true and correct account of the Nephite, Lamanite and Jaredite cultures and civilizations. We also believe that the most important contribution of the Book of Mormon is not its geography or its cultural details, but its clear and masterful contributions to our understanding of gospel doctrines of salvation, correct principles of behavior and the consequences of unrighteous choices.

We conclude our geographical analysis of Book of Mormon lands as they should exist today by again quoting prophetic declarations of the Lord to Nephi and Isaiah. These sobering and revealing words should inform and temper our expectations when searching for the Lord’s vineyard—the Book of Mormon lands:



The pioneers settled in the west among the northern Uto-Aztec people.

Isaiah quoting the Lord: And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard—I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down;

And I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for judgment, and behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry. (2 Ne. 15:5-7 and Isa. 5:5-7)

And then:

Nephi: Wherefore, [the Lord] will bring them again out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel. (1 Ne. 22:12)

Isaiah: And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame, and shall burn and shall devour his thorns and his briers in one day; (2 Ne. 20:17 and Isa. 10:17)

And thus it shall be.

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