

The Narrow Neck of Land

A Touchstone of Book of Mormon Geography

Lynn and David Rosenvall, August 2012

Since the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in 1830 a narrow neck of land has been a touchstone of its geography. It is the physical feature most readily perceived in the mental maps of Book of Mormon readers. Nearly all want to know its location, and many attempt to find it. It is deemed an essential piece of a geographical puzzle—if we could only identify it, everything else should fall into place. This hour-glass-shaped landform, some have assumed, would be so obvious that surely it could be located quickly on any map of the western hemisphere. But alas, after some 180 years, and many models of Book of Mormon geography later, there is still much discord over its location. And the search, for some, still continues.

The narrow neck of land is not just a relatively narrow geographical landform—it had a geopolitical role far beyond that of a confined physical feature between two seas. It was the pivotal point for dividing the “land northward” from the “land southward.” It was the location of a fortified Nephite defense line and two defensible passes leading northward, and served as a converging point for controlling the movement of people and animals. It was the often-sought gateway to freedom for the hemmed-in Lamanites. It was a location for launching Hagoth’s ill-fated ships into the western sea. And it was part of the geographical context for captain Moroni’s emblematic *Title of Liberty*.



There are numerous references scattered among the chapters of the Book of Mormon describing the physical features of the narrow neck land, the historical events within its confines and its sometimes crucial security role in the ongoing Book of Mormon story. It stands to reason that the human and physical setting of our candidate location for



The wilderness looking south from the “narrow neck of land” in Baja California.

the narrow neck of land in Baja California would need to fully match everything in the scripture text impinging on that constricted landform before affirming the location as “the narrow neck of land.” We suggest being able to match only some of the numerous details, but not all, would place the candidacy of a narrow neck of land in question. Any narrow neck of land on the earth’s surface advanced by us or others would also need to match the Book of Mormon descriptions for the

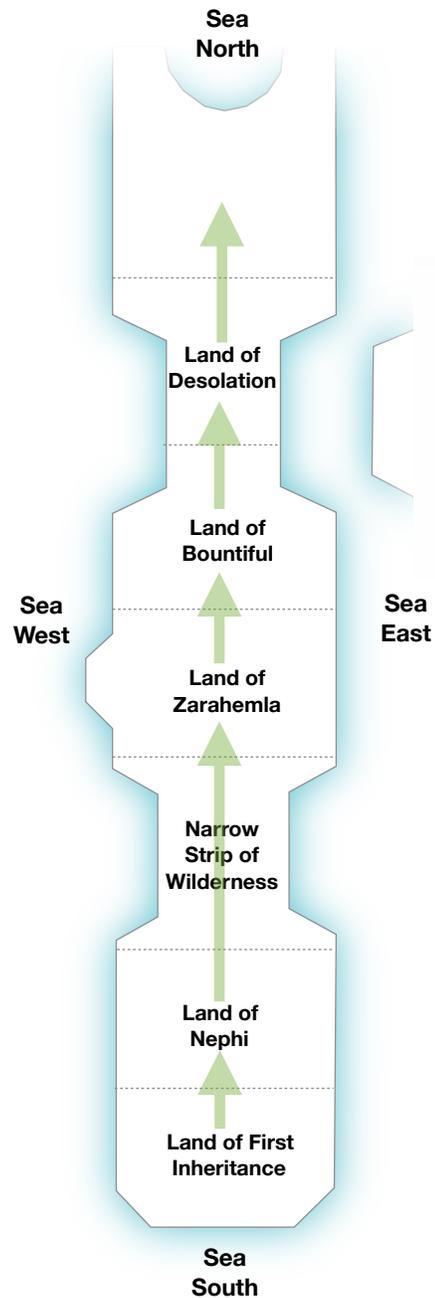
adjoining regions and the surrounding seas in “the land northward” and “the land southward.” We submit that our proposed location in Baja California, and its inherent landscape features, not only matches the relevant references in the Book of Mormon account, but also all the recorded geographical details. Moreover, this narrow neck of land fits correctly within the required historical setting and timeline of the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon Timeline

The story of father Lehi’s family starts suddenly in the land of Jerusalem and abruptly ends some 1,000 years later in the land of Cumorah. As dissensions and population pressures increased, descendants of the small group that landed in the far south of Baja California moved towards empty lands to the north during several phases of their long history. Along the way they merged with the people of Zarahemla (the Mulekites) and then later settled north of the narrow neck of land in the lands left desolate by the destroyed Jaredite civilization. We note that in the Book of Mormon account there is no mention of any events, activities, settlements, or the existence of more distant lands, to

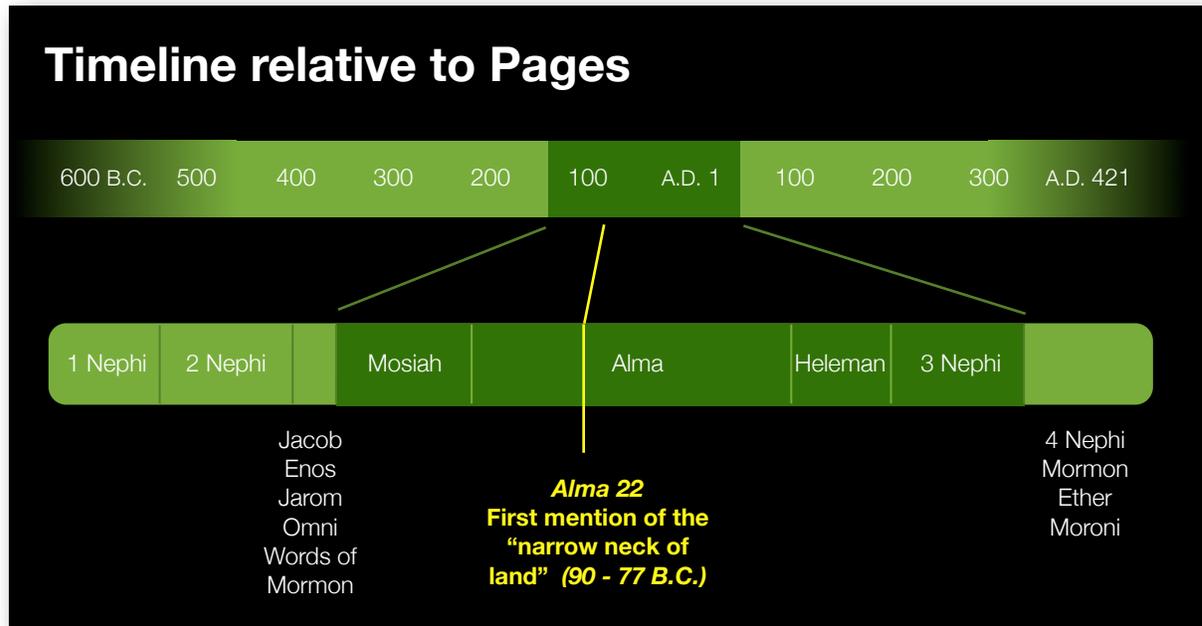
the south of where they first landed—only the presence of a “sea south.” Thus the general migrational trend of father Lehi’s descendants, by necessity, was consistently toward the north, and as Mormon indicates, “they did multiply and spread” from “the land southward to the land northward” (Hel. 3:8). We note the positioning of the word “to” in this phrase, stressing the southward *to* northward direction of migration (see our topic article, “From the Sea West to the Sea East” – *The Orientation of the Book of Mormon Lands to the Sea*).

This often-turbulent Nephite history (600 B.C. to A.D. 421), even though mostly chronological in the Book of Mormon account, is not uniformly represented. For example, the pages in the books of Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, and Third Nephi represent some 200 years, or approximately one-fifth of the Nephite history. Yet this short time period occupies nearly two-thirds, or 319 of the total of 531 pages in the Book of Mormon. As a result, fewer geographical details are recorded from the first 400 years when the Nephites were settled in the land of Nephi and the last 400 years when they were primarily located in the northern lands of Bountiful and Desolation and farther north. The loss of the 116 pages of Mormon’s abridgment of the Book of Lehi (see the heading to Doctrine and Covenants 10), which spanned the first 400 years of the Nephite history in the land of Nephi, presumably denies us more geographical details than provided by the less-secular small plates of Nephi covering the same period (First Nephi to Omni). Likewise the



The south to north migration of father Lehi’s descendants.

Book of Fourth Nephi records nearly 300 years of the history in only four pages and, understandably, with almost no geographical details. Because little is recorded about the land of Nephi in the Book of Mormon, the better-known lands are the lands of Zarahemla, Bountiful and Desolation—the lands progressively located toward the north.



The timeline of the Book of Mormon in relationship to the number of pages in each of the books.

Historic Setting of the Narrow Neck of Land

It is noteworthy that there is no mention of the narrow (small) neck of land in the Book of Mormon until Mormon’s extensive geographical description in chapter 22 of the Book of Alma, an account of events between 90 and 77 B.C., over 500 years after the arrival of Lehi’s family in their promised land. Moreover, the Nephites and Lamanites did not occupy the narrow neck of land and the lands to the north in substantial numbers until 55 B.C.

After living nearly 400 years in the land of Nephi at the southern end of the Book of Mormon lands, the Nephites “departed out of the land [of Nephi] into the wilderness, as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord,” and they were led northward “by the power of his arm, through the [narrow strip of] wilderness until they came down into

the land which [was] called the land of Zarahemla,” which bordered on the river Sidon (Omni 1:13; Alma 2:15). The land of Nephi, their previous home, was south of the narrow strip of wilderness, and a journey of “many days” north of the “land of first



inheritance,” the place of their landing following a long ocean voyage. In about 200 B.C., after many “serious” wars in the land of Nephi, “the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed” (Omni 1:5), and the more righteous Nephites abandoned their troubled homeland under the direction of king Mosiah (the first), the father of king Benjamin, and departed northward into the wilderness seeking a refuge (Omni 1:12; see also, “Historic Setting of River Sidon Area.” in our topic article, *The River Sidon—A Key to Unlocking Book of Mormon Lands*).

Starting in 55 B.C., at the time when Helaman and Shiblon, the sons of Alma, were the record keepers, large groups of Nephites migrated northward from the land of Zarahemla into the abandoned and desolated Jaredite lands. These northern lands had been deforested by the Jaredites, that is, the trees had been cut down, and the land had “been rendered desolate and without timber, because of the many inhabitants who had before inherited the land” (Hel. 3:5–7; see also, Alma 63:4). Some “five thousand and four hundred men, with their wives and their children, departed out of the land of Zarahemla into the land which was northward” and emigrated to the northern land of Desolation from

the lands of Bountiful and Zarahemla to the south (Alma 63:4). In the next year “there were many people who went forth into the land northward” (Alma 63:9). Eight years later, there were “an exceedingly great many who departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and went forth unto the land northward to inherit the land” (Hel. 3:3). And “many of the people of Ammon, who were Lamanites by birth, did also go forth into this land” (Hel. 3:12). These companies of Nephite and Lamanite emigrants would have

traveled through “the narrow neck which led into the land northward” (Alma 63:5). Several groups traveled northward by ship (Alma 63:5–8, 10; Hel. 3:14). In total, tens of thousands of people relocated to these northern lands.

Thus after some 535 years of living in the lands of Nephi, Zarahemla and Bountiful to the south, the Nephites and the people of Ammon migrated to these northern lands suddenly and in substantial numbers (see Alma 63:4). The reason is not clear. The record, however, states “there was much contention and many dissensions” among the people of Nephi at the time they left the land of Zarahemla (Hel. 3:3). Moreover, the Nephites may have determined they should wait until a sufficient number of regenerated trees had grown and matured before they could settle the deforested Jaredite lands with a reasonable chance of success. The record states that there was a “little timber upon the face of the land” when they arrived (Hel. 3:7). We do not know how many years elapsed between the final battle of Jared’s descendants and the Nephite migration into this land, but possibly a couple of hundred years.



Scarcity of trees in central Baja California matches the description given in the Book of Helaman.

For nearly all of their first 600 years in the promised land, the narrow neck of land was the northern bounds of the Nephite occupied territory and not its center—contrary to what one might expect or sometimes represented in models of Book of Mormon geography. This one-sided settlement pattern—centered only within lands to the south of the narrow neck of land—was the setting for the Book of Mormon record keepers from Nephi to Jacob to Mosiah to Alma and to Helaman, and their place of residence. Others of their brethren may have migrated to the northern lands, but these prophets—with a few exceptions by Helaman—recorded activities in the area to the south of the narrow neck of land for their entire history.

Mormon's Placement of the Narrow Neck of Land

Mormon in an extensive description of all the Book of Mormon lands sets out the relative placement of the small neck of land (Alma 22:27-34):

Thus **the land on the northward was called Desolation**, and **the land on the southward was called Bountiful**, it being the wilderness which is filled with all manner of wild animals of every kind, a part of which had come from the land northward for food.

And now, it was only the distance of a day and a half's journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea; and thus the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla were nearly surrounded by water, **there being a small neck of land between the land northward and the land southward**. (Alma 22:31-32; bolded words added here and in other references)

The small neck of land in Mormon's description extends "from the east to the west sea" and is the integral point around which two geographical regions are positioned—the land Desolation in "the land northward" and the land Bountiful in "the land southward." This constricted land area is called a "small neck of land" by Mormon in verse 32, but a "narrow neck of land" in a later reference (Alma 63:5). Moroni in his account of the Jaredites also calls it a "narrow neck of land" (Ether 10:20). It should be noted that in older English, "small" meant "narrow or slender." We refer to this confined land area as the "narrow" neck of land.



The narrow neck of land in Mormon's description has a width equal to a distance of "a day and half's journey." The land Bountiful on the south of the narrow neck of land is described as a wilderness area, "filled with all manner of wild animals of every kind, a

part of which had come from the land northward for food” (Alma 22:31). This implies the land of Desolation to the north also had areas of wilderness with wild animals. Our proposed narrow neck of land of Baja California is a wilderness area of wild animals, bordered by geographical areas with wild animal habitats on both the north and the south.

An understanding of Mormon’s extensive geographic description is essential in placing the narrow neck of land in its relative context (Alma 22:27-34). At this point in his abridgment of the Book of Alma, Mormon relates how Lamoni’s father, the king of the Lamanites in the land of Nephi, converted to the gospel through the preaching of Aaron, one of the sons of Mosiah. The king then sent a proclamation to all his people



A typical view of the proposed “narrow strip of wilderness” in southern Baja California.

declaring the four sons of Mosiah could preach the gospel in all parts of the land, without hinderance.

Mormon then pauses the narrative of this missionary event and inserts in his own words a geographical account of the converted king’s land, including a description of the land of Nephi, the land of the people of Zarahemla, the lands previously occupied by the Jaredites and the small (narrow) neck

of land positioned between the lands of the people of Zarahemla (the Mulekites) and the Jaredites (Alma 22:27-34). No explanation for the inclusion of these geographical positioning scriptures (GPS) is given. However, these eight verses, providing some 22 geographical details, in sequence, are without equal for finding and matching a proposed location for the Book of Mormon story. In his geographical description, Mormon also defines the shape of the combined land area, the relative location of the lands within the larger area and the spatial location of wilderness regions, the small (narrow) neck of land, the river Sidon and the west and east seas.

We suggest any proposed location for the Book of Mormon lands—including the positioning of a narrow neck of land—would be required to pass the test of fully matching these 22 geographical descriptions provided by Mormon. In our main article,

A New Approach to Book of Mormon Geography, under the subtopic, *Mormon's Description of Book of Mormon Lands*, we illustrate with several maps the results of our correlating all 22 geographical points to the area and landforms of Baja California. We recommend the reader view these maps point by point, while studying the corresponding scripture text. We propose the configurations and alignments of the Baja California peninsula, including the location of the narrow neck of land, fully match the 22 geographical points in Mormon's description of the Book of Mormon lands (see also our topic article, "*From the Sea West to the Sea East*"—*The Orientation of the Book of Mormon Lands to the Sea*, and, *Mormon's Description of the Book of Mormon Lands*, a video presentation on our web site).

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.

Within his geographical description, the narrow neck of land is positioned by Mormon in the area north of the two Nephite-held lands of Zarahemla and Bountiful—lands that extend in sequence to the north of the *narrow strip of wilderness* (Alma 22:29–33). The land of Nephi included the *narrow strip of wilderness* and the land to the south (Alma 22:28, 33–34).

The Jaredites before their destruction possessed the land of Desolation “in the land northward” (Omni 1:22; Alma 22:30). The people of Zarahemla (the people of Mulek) initially landed in this northern area and many moved south to a place they called the city and land of Zarahemla, located to the north of the narrow strip of wilderness (Alma 22:30–31).

Mormon's description leaves little question as to the relative location of the narrow neck of land within the northern extent of the Book of Mormon lands, all of which trend north–south in sequence (see our topic article, "*From the Sea West to the Sea East*"—

The Orientation of the Book of Mormon Lands to the Sea). This pivotal location accurately matches the setting of the narrow neck of land in the northern half of the peninsula of Baja California, a location that also conforms to the relative positions required for all the adjoining Book of Mormon lands, both in “the land southward” and “the land northward.”

Mormon wrote these 22 geographical descriptions as a supplement to his abridgment in about A.D. 385, some 460 years after the missionary event he is recording in the Book of Alma (between 90 and 77 B.C.). We should stress that Mormon does not mention any changes to the configuration of the Book of Mormon lands in the intervening 460 years, such as the wide-scale destruction which took place at the time of the Savior's crucifixion, when “the whole face of the land was changed” (3 Ne. 8:12). The “face of the land” in older English and in Hebrew refers to the “upper or outer surface” of the land (earth) and not its periphery or its general shape or its extent. It would appear these changes to the surface of the land did not adversely affect the shape and locations of the land configurations mentioned in Mormon's narrative, and, therefore, the geographical descriptions of all the Book of Mormon lands, including the relative location, shape and alignment of the narrow neck of land, were still accurate and identifiable in his day.



Mormon's description of the relative locations of Nephite and Lamanite lands. For defense, the Nephites “hemmed in” the Lamanites on the south.

Distinctive Features of the Narrow Neck of Land

The following is a geographical analysis of the narrow neck of land, based on relevant references within the Book of Mormon record—references that help establish 10 distinctive features such as width, relative location and terrain alignments for designating and confirming a location on the earth’s surface. We then match these physical criteria and landmarks to a conforming narrow neck of land in Baja California.

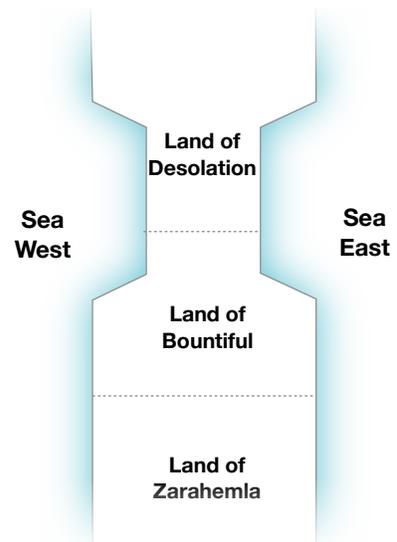
Defining a “narrow neck of land”

The narrow neck of land is not given the distinction of a proper name in the Book of Mormon, only a three-word descriptive phrase indicating its breadth as “narrow,” its form as a “neck,” and its surface area as a “land.” Each of these descriptive words has helpful and precise meanings.

A “Narrow” Land Area

The word “narrow” as an adjective refers to something “of small width.” Narrow also denotes a landform that is shorter in width relative to the width or breadth of adjacent areas. Thus the narrow neck of land would have less width than the lands of Zarahemla and Bountiful to the south and the land of Desolation to the north. Narrow can also describe something that is “restricted” or “limited in extent, amount, or scope.” Using its older English roots, the word narrow indicates something that is “strait” or “confined.”

We are sometimes asked how the Book of Mormon people would know the *narrow neck of land* and the *narrow strip of wilderness* were “narrow” given their lack of sophisticated measuring devices, precise satellite maps and triangulation technology. The best answer is provided by the Jesuit fathers who in the late 1600s scaled a peak along a mountain crest in the southern half of the peninsula of Baja California, just west of their mission base at Loreto on the Sea of Cortez. The mountain peak is near our proposed location of the



Schematic map showing the “narrow neck of land” between the land of Bountiful and the land of Desolation.

Book of Mormon city of Helam in the *narrow strip of wilderness*. The Jesuits reported they could see both the Pacific Ocean on the west and the Sea of Cortez on the east from this single vantage point. In like manner, the terrain of the other narrow feature, the “narrow neck of land” in the northern extent of Baja California, has high peaks along its crest where one can see both seacoasts simultaneously. Certainly the Book of Mormon people could have done the same.

A “Neck” of Land

A “neck” of land refers to a “narrow piece of terrain” of “approximately uniform breadth,” or “the same width throughout its length,” A narrow land area described as a “neck,” implies that the land area could extend for a distance, even to a length matching or exceeding its width, like the corresponding anatomical part of a human, rather than being only a short convergence point.

A Wilderness Landscape

In the Book of Mormon account, the narrow neck of land spans the northern part of the land of Bountiful and the southern extent of the land of Desolation, both of which are described as containing “wilderness” landscapes, with all that implies (Alma 22:31). A wilderness landscape by definition is an “uncultivated, uninhabited and inhospitable region.” It is a land inhabited by wild

animals: the “wild” in the word wilderness refers to wild animals. Wilderness in its Biblical meaning is “not a barren desert but a district or region suitable for pasturing sheep and cattle; an uncultivated place” (*Easton’s Bible Dictionary*).

These definitions match the descriptions of the wilderness areas in the Book of Mormon. And in the major Book of Mormon lands there are wilderness areas almost

everywhere, some 250 scripture references to wilderness altogether, starting with the wilderness immediately outside of Jerusalem when Lehi and his family leave their homeland (1 Ne. 2:2-6). Wilderness was



God commanded Moses to bring the Israelites to the mountain, where He would give them His law. This photo shows a traditional wilderness site of Mount Sinai.

encountered at the place of their first landing in the new land (1 Ne. 18:25), in the land of Nephi (2 Ne. 5:5-7), and, of course, “the narrow strip of wilderness.” There were four wilderness areas surrounding the land of Zarahemla (see the section, *Directional Flow of the River Sidon*, in our topic article, *The River Sidon: A Key to Unlocking Book of Mormon Lands*). Thus the wilderness areas of the land of Bountiful and the land of Desolation are not unexpected landscape features (Alma 22:31; see also the numerous references to wilderness in verses 27-34). All the Book of Mormon lands, as well as the cities, towns and villages, are described as having wilderness areas close by.



Satellite view of Baja California depicting the “narrow neck of land” relative to other major lands of the Book of Mormon and to the sea west and the sea east.

The Book of Mormon does not describe wilderness areas with jungle-like, tropical landscapes. It portrays a wilderness landscape with open vegetation such that one can see approaching armies coming for some distance, unlike thickly treed, tropical areas (Mosiah 19:6; 20:8). It is a landscape where traveling groups get lost in spite of its open vegetation (Mosiah 7:2-4; 8:8; 23:30). It is a landscape where one cannot follow the tracks of others, unlike a path through heavy tropical vegetation which leaves broken

branches as obvious signposts along the exit path (Mosiah 22:11-12,16). It is a dry landscape where travelers suffer from thirst (Mosiah 7:16; Alma 17:5). It is a landscape containing thickets of small trees that provide places to hide (Mosiah 18:5) and some forested areas (1 Ne. 18:5; Enos 1:3; Mosiah 18:30). And in the land northward it was a sparsely treed landscape where “they did suffer [allow] whatsoever tree should spring up upon the face of the land that it should grow up, that in time they might have timber to build their houses ... and all manner of their buildings” (Hel. 3:9).

These Book of Mormon references describe a Mediterranean-type landscape that is characterized by woodlands, scrublands, some forested areas at higher elevations, with areas of open, arid, semi-arid or steppe plant communities (see “Mediterranean Climate” in *Wikipedia*). Hugh Nibley discusses the character and role of Book of Mormon wilderness areas, such as described above, in his article, “The Nature of Book of Mormon



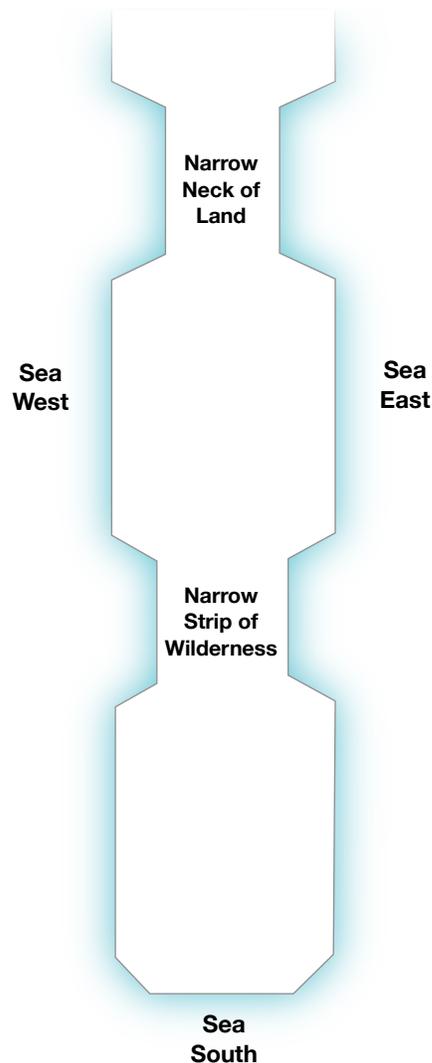
Wilderness area southeast of the proposed land of Zarahemla in Baja California.

Society,” published in his work, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*. It should be noted that both the land of Jerusalem and the Book of Mormon lands have a similar climate, topography and natural vegetation (see *The Nature and Location of Mediterranean Climates* and *The Ecology of Planting Seeds* in our main article, *A New Approach to Book of Mormon Geography* and also section on “Cement” in our topic article, *Searching for Book of Mormon Ruins—What should we expect to find?*).

A Sea on the West and a Sea on the East

Not unlike the “narrow strip of wilderness” which ran from the west sea to the east sea between the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi, the “narrow neck of land” was bordered by a sea on the east and a sea on the west (Alma 22:27, 32). The narrowness of its “neck” was the result of the constriction of the land between these two seas. The western seacoast of the “narrow neck of land” was where Hagoth launched forth his ships “on the borders of the land Bountiful, by the land

Desolation, ... into the west sea, by the narrow neck which led into the land northward” (Alma 63:5). According to this description, the lands of Bountiful and Desolation and the “narrow neck” of land all shared the same sea on the west.



Mormon in his extensive geographical description uses a shortened phrase when referring to the seas on both sides of the small or narrow neck of land: “from the east to the west sea” (Alma 22:32-33; see also, Hel. 4:7). To create a narrower “narrow neck of land” to fit within their overly wide geographical models, some researchers have suggested that because the word “sea” in this phrase does not follow the word “east,” “east” refers not to a sea, but to a closer land-based point or place the Nephites called “east.” We suggest, however, that Mormon’s shortened description, “from the east to the west sea,” is not unlike the wording, “from the Atlantic to Pacific Ocean,” when referring to the east to west coastal extent of the United States, even though the word ocean is only used once within the phrase to indicate both the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.

Mormon, elsewhere in his record, clarifies what is meant by this shortened description, “from the east to the west sea.” He describes Lehi’s army encountering the people of Morianton by the “borders of the land Desolation, ... by the narrow pass which led by the sea into the land northward, yea, by the sea, on the west and on the east” (Alma

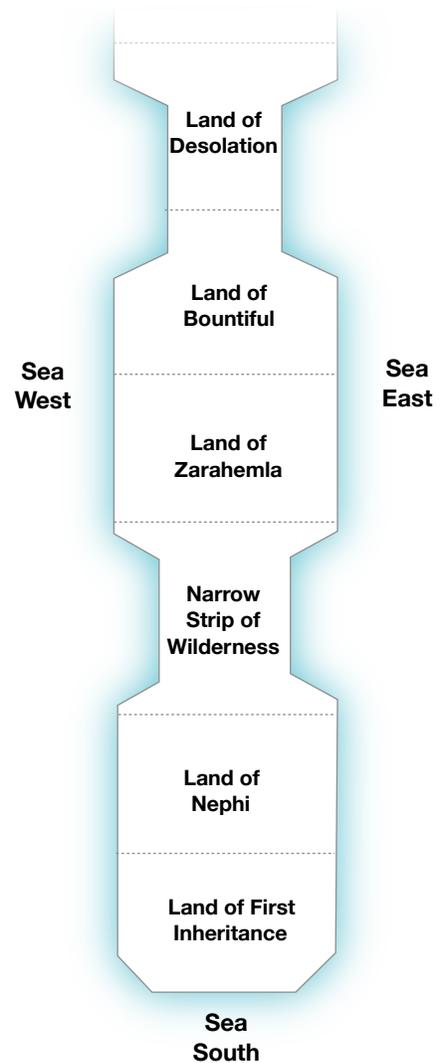
50:34). This description of the borders of the land of Desolation implies there was a sea on the west and a sea on the east of the narrow neck of land, the narrow landform that comprised the southern extent of the land of Desolation. Throughout the Book of Mormon text, as in older English, the phrase that follows the word “yea” reinforces and enlarges upon a parallel preceding phrase. “Yea” means “even, truly or verily,” similar to our use of the word “indeed” today. Thus Mormon is emphasizing that the two seas,

“the sea, on the west and on the east,” were indeed “the borders of the land Desolation” and “the land northward.” It is clearly not “the narrow pass which led by the sea into the land northward” that extended between the two seas (see section on “Textural Antecedence” in our topic article, *The River Sidon: A Key to Unlocking Book of Mormon Lands*).

The “narrow neck of land” was the natural feature that visually, physically and geopolitically divided the larger realms the Nephites called the “land northward” and the “land southward” (Alma 22:31-32). And both the land northward and the land southward are portrayed as being bordered by a sea west and a sea east:

And thus it did come to pass that the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land, and began to build up their waste places, and began to multiply and spread, even until they did cover the whole face of the land, both on the northward and on the southward, **from the sea west to the sea east.** (Hel. 11:20)

In Mormon’s extensive geographical account the land of Bountiful is described as being occupied by the Nephites “even from the east unto the west sea” (Alma 22:29, 33). As we have noted, this implies the land of Bountiful had a sea on the west and a sea on the east. North of the land of Bountiful was the land of Desolation. A west to east Nephite defense line separated these two lands creating a major north–south geopolitical division such that “the land on the northward was called Desolation, and the land on the southward was called Bountiful” (Alma 22:31). If the land of Bountiful were bordered by a sea on the west and a sea on the east then the adjoining land of Desolation also extended from the sea west to the sea east.



Given all the collateral descriptions of these sea-based boundaries, it is difficult to claim that Mormon’s phrase, “from the east to the west sea,” describing the width or extent

of the narrow neck of land, was not merely a shortened version of the longer phrase, “from the sea east to the sea west.”

A Place Where the Sea Divides the Land

In his account of the Jaredites, Moroni refers to a coastal location along the narrow neck of land as a division of the sea:

And they built a great city by the narrow neck of land, by **the place where the sea divides the land**. (Ether 10:20)

This statement, “the place where the sea divides the land,” implies the Nephites were able to observe another land mass somewhere beyond the coast of the “narrow neck of land.” The record does not indicate if this dividing body of water was part of the sea east or the sea west. If we assume the sea west was the expansive ocean crossed by Lehi’s family (with no visible continent to the west), it would follow that it was a narrower



Here at the “narrow neck of land,” the island of Tiburón on the coast of mainland Mexico can be dimly seen on the far horizon, some 40 miles across the sea of Cortez (sea east).

sea east that divided the Book of Mormon lands from another, but visible, land mass, such as the mainland of Mexico to the east of Baja California. (For a commentary on the western location of Lehi’s landing, see, “The Land of First Inheritance” in our topic article, “From the Sea West to the Sea East” — *The Orientation of the Book of Mormon Lands to the Sea*)

On the eastern or Sea of Cortez side of the “narrow neck of land” in Baja California are two bays, *Bahía de los Ángeles* and *Bahía de las Animas*. From the crest of the 5,000-foot mountains—rising abruptly inland from the bays—one can dimly see on a clear day the 2,700-foot peaks of the large island of *Tiburón*, some 40 miles to the east on the coast of the state of Sonora in mainland Mexico. This 25-mile-wide island is separated from the mainland by only a one-mile strait and visually blends with the Sonoran coastline as if it were contiguous. Certainly the Book of Mormon people could have observed these distant shores. This Sea of Cortez side of the peninsula of Baja California is the only location where the coastline of another continental land mass can be seen, matching the Book of Mormon geographical description as “the place where the sea divides the land.”



There is only one place along the east coast of Baja California where one can see across the sea of Cortez (sea east) to mainland Mexico. This is where the “sea divides the land” at the narrow neck of land.

A Fortified Defense Line

A fortified defense line—a military endeavor of the Nephites—spanned the narrow neck of land from west to east across its entire breadth:

And there [at the narrow neck of land] **they did fortify** against the Lamanites, **from the west sea, even unto the east**; it being a day's journey for a Nephite, **on the line which they had fortified and stationed their armies to defend their north country.** (Hel. 4:7)

With orders to Teancum, his field commander, captain Moroni stipulates the Nephite defense strategy:

And [Moroni] also sent orders unto [Teancum] that he should **fortify the land Bountiful, and secure the narrow pass** which led into the land northward, lest the Lamanites should obtain that point and should have power to harass them on every side. (Alma 52:9)

This fortified line, located on the line between the land of Bountiful and the land of Desolation, was part of the Nephite strategy of “hemming in the Lamanites on the south” of the lands of Zarahemla and Bountiful and then defending the lands to the north as a last-chance region where the Nephites, if facing being “overrun,” “might have a country whither they might flee, according to their desires” (Alma 22:32-34).

Mormon describes the Nephite-fortified defense line as extending across the narrow neck of land “from the west sea, even unto the east.” It would have been impossible to prevent the movement of the Lamanites into the northern lands by a fortified line if the defense system only extended across part of the total width of the narrow neck of land. The “narrow pass” and the northern extent of the land of Bountiful—ordered by captain Moroni to be secured and fortified by Teancum—were integral to the defense line spanning the narrow neck of land.



Proposed fortified defense line across the “narrow neck of land” between the land of Bountiful and the land of Desolation.

The Length of the Fortified Defense Line

In one of the best-known geographical descriptions in the Book of Mormon, Mormon reports the distance of the fortified “line” in journey time:

And now, **it was only the distance of a day and a half’s journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea;** and thus the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla were nearly surrounded by water, there being a small neck of land between the land northward and the land southward. (Alma 22:32)

Note that Mormon uses the phrase “only the distance of a day and a half’s journey.” We suggest the word “only” implies and possibly emphasizes that this distance was relatively short compared to typical Nephite military journeys extending for multiple days. Later in his abridgment Mormon states this fortified distance could be travelled in a single day:

And the Nephites and the armies of Moronihah were driven even into the land of Bountiful; And there they did fortify against the Lamanites, from the west sea, even unto the east; it being **a day’s journey for a Nephite, on the line** which they had fortified and stationed their armies to defend their north country. (Hel. 4:6-7)

Possibly over time the trail along the defense line was improved or even the line was repositioned, allowing a reduced travel journey from a day and a half down to one day. We note the travel time of “a day and a half’s journey” was recorded by Mormon while relating events between 90 to 77 B.C., whereas his reference to “a day’s journey” was included in a description of events that happened in 34 B.C., some 43 to 56 years later.



The trail along the proposed defense line in the “narrow neck of land.” The mountainous area is southward.

Mormon in the above reference indicates the defense line “defended their north country,” by extending “from the west sea, even unto the east.” This suggests the constricted seacoast boundaries of the narrow neck of land provided the best location

for devising the shortest possible fortified line, a line which was designed to stop the Lamanites from capturing territory in the land northward (Alma 22: 32-34). The Nephite numbers throughout most of their history were about one-half the Lamanite population (Jarom 1:6; Mosiah 25:3; Alma 43:51; 58:2, 15, 18, 36). This population disparity would have compelled the Nephite defenders to employ effective strategies, with their more limited personnel, such as stationing their armies within the minimal span of the narrow neck of land. Mormon calls these strategies the “wisdom” of the Nephites (Alma 22:33-34; 49:5, 15).

Our proposed “narrow neck of land” in Baja California is about 40 miles wide, with a walking distance of some 50 miles over readily traversed terrain. At a rate of three to

four miles per hour, a seasoned hiker can walk this distance in 13 to 16 hours—a journey which fits well within the daylight hours of a day and a half, any season of the year, and matches the walkable hours of light, of even a single day, during many months of the year. A power walker could increase the pace to about four to five miles per hour reducing the travel time to 10 to 13 hours. Understandably, a race walker or a long distance runner could further reduce these times, but a typical hiker can comfortably cross the narrow neck of land in Baja California within Mormon’s recorded journey times of a day, or a day and a half. Traveling between the Sea of Cortez on the east and the Pacific Ocean on the west, we have crossed this “narrow neck of land” multiple times by vehicle in little over an hour’s driving time.

In these same two references Mormon curiously mentions the traveling time across the narrow neck of land as a “journey for a Nephite” (Alma 22:32; Hel. 4:6-7). Much speculation has centered on this phrase. We suggest that this qualifying statement merely reflects the status of the fortified defense line as a Nephite-controlled military zone, and, therefore, only a Nephite would have been allowed to make a journey of any



Following natural water courses, the walking distance from the sea east to the sea west is approximately 50 miles.

speed or duration between the two seas at this contentious period of conflict between the Lamanites and the Nephites (38 to 30 B.C.; see Hel. 4). Note the text says a “journey *for* a Nephite,” and not a “journey *of* a Nephite.” If allowed, certainly a Lamanite could have travelled this distance at the same rate of speed as a Nephite. Mormon’s travel times, and the resultant calculated distance of some 50 miles, provide a basis for the approximate width of the narrow neck of land. A 50-mile width, by implication, also provides the relative dimensions and scale of the adjoining Book of Mormon lands of Bountiful and Desolation and possibly the relative width of the similarly named, “narrow strip of wilderness,” farther to the south.

Two Natural Passes leading to the Land Northward

The Book of Mormon account describes two north–south trending passes within the narrow neck of land. One is an inland narrow passage, and the other is a narrow pass along the seacoast at the eastern end of the Nephite defense line (Morm. 2:29; and Alma 50:34; 52:9; Morm. 3:5).



A Narrow Pass by the Sea

Mormon in two references identifies a pass within the narrow neck of land which led “into the land northward.” He calls this pass, “the narrow pass which led by the sea.”

And it came to pass that [Lehi’s army] did not head [the people of Morianton] until they had come to the borders of the land Desolation; and there they did head them, by **the narrow pass which led by the sea** into the land northward, yea, by the sea, on the west and on the east. (Alma 50:34)

And [captain Moroni] also sent orders unto Teancum that he should fortify the land Bountiful, and secure **the narrow pass which led into the land northward**, lest the Lamanites should obtain that point and should have power to harass them on every side. (Alma 52:9)



The “narrow pass by the sea” at Bahia Los Angeles on the east coast of Baja California. This defensible “pass” is less than a half mile wide. The camera location is at the seashore.

A pass is “a place on a way or route which affords a strategically important point for attack, ambush, or defense, especially one affording an entrance to or exit from a region or city.” In older English a pass was “a point on a road which cannot be passed except by fighting the person who defends.” A narrow pass by the sea where an army could be stopped—at a location that led into the land southward and the land northward—suggests a pass with steep-sided mountains on one side and the sea on the other. The pass would have funneled travelers

from the south, such as a military force, into the land northward at this point. The encounters mentioned in these references—involving the armies of Moroni, Lehi and Teancum and the people of Morianton—took place along the east sea by the narrow neck of land, confirming the eastern location of “the narrow pass which led by the sea” (see Alma, chapters 50 to 53; especially verses, 50:13-15; 51:21-22, 25-27, 32; 52:15, 22-23). This defensive confrontation along the east sea gives further support to the assertion that the eastern extent of the narrow neck of land was not an inland point or location but a seacoast.

The Nephites “secured” this pass at the eastern end of their fortified defense line to stop the Lamanite armies from advancing into the land northward, thus preventing them from having “power to harass them on every side” (Alma 52:9). As Mormon reminds us, it was “the narrow neck which led into the land northward” (Alma 63:5). The Lamanites at this time controlled lands that surrounded the Nephites in the land of Zarahemla virtually on three sides—on the south, west and east (Alma 22:27-34, especially verse 29; see also, Alma 50:11-12). It would appear the Nephites were terror-



View of east sea (sea of Cortez) from a point near the “narrow pass by the sea” in the narrow neck of land.

stricken by the potential consequences of being completely surrounded in their lands of Zarahemla and Bountiful, a situation that would have developed if they ever surrendered the northern frontier to the Lamanites—the fourth side.

While reporting military battles some 400 years later, Mormon mentions a “narrow pass which led into the land southward”:

And it came to pass that I [Mormon] did cause my people that they should gather themselves together at the land Desolation, to a city which was in the borders, by **the narrow pass which led into the land southward**. (Morm. 3:5)

In this reference, the “city which was in the borders, by the narrow pass,” was the city of Desolation in the land of Desolation (Morm. 3:6-7). The city of Desolation was near the city of Teancum, and “the city Teancum lay in the borders by the seashore” (Morm. 4:3). Triangulating the locations mentioned in these references places the city of Desolation and the city Teancum along the eastern coast of the the narrow neck of land, north of the fortified defense line in the southern borders of the land of Desolation (Morm. 3:5-7; 4:3). Thus this “narrow pass” in Mormon’s military account (Morm. 3:5) is “the narrow pass which led by the sea into the land northward” and, understandably, into the land southward (see also, Alma 50:34; 52:9). We suggest this pass along the seacoast of the sea east formed the eastern terminus of the fortified defense line.

A Narrow Passage

In the following reference Mormon mentions a “narrow passage which led into the land southward”:

And the Lamanites did give unto us the land northward, yea, even to the **narrow passage** which led into the land southward. And we did give unto the Lamanites all the land southward. (Morm. 2: 29)

Note this is a “narrow passage” and not a “narrow pass” by the sea. We suggest the use of the term “passage” instead of “pass” is significant and implies a second narrow way through the narrow neck of land at another location. The phrase, “narrow passage,” as a landscape feature refers to a narrow corridor with steep-sided terrain on both faces, unlike the single steep face of a “narrow pass” by the sea.



View looking north along the “narrow passage” in the narrow neck of land in central Baja California.

At this point in his record (A.D. 350), Mormon is describing military campaigns under his command to the north of the narrow neck of land among his own people. The geopolitical perspective had changed from the time of captain Moroni some 400 years earlier. Mormon’s concern was holding only the northern lands for his people—lands north of the “narrow passage which led into the land southward.” This “narrow passage”

would have been located within the narrow neck of land, the only location where the Lamanites could give the Nephites “the land northward,” and the Nephites could give “the Lamanites all the land southward” (Morm. 2:29). The “narrow passage,” in this context, served as a known point for dividing their lands and not as a strategic pass to be held at any cost.

Thus in the Book of Mormon account there are two natural passes positioned within the narrow neck of land. The land surrounding these two passes—land that extended from sea to sea—appears to be rugged and lofty wilderness terrain that served as a

barriers to travel, forcing both the Lamanites and the Nephites through the passes to advance towards the land northward or the land southward.

Our proposed narrow neck of land in Baja California has two distinct narrow passes, in locations matching the Book of Mormon record—one along the eastern seacoast and the other inland on the western side. These passes could be readily defended as choke points for the movement of people traveling north and south through the narrow neck

of land. The two passes breach rugged wilderness terrain that would otherwise be difficult to traverse from north to south and are inline with our proposed location for a fortified Nephite defense line. The “narrow pass by the sea,” where “the sea divides the land,” funnels down to a minimal width of less than a half mile with a north–south length of the same extent. The steep mountains forming the inland or western side of this



View looking south along the “narrow passage” in the narrow neck of land in central Baja California.

narrow coastal pass soar abruptly to a height of over 5,000 feet. In contrast, the “narrow passage” on the western side of the peninsula is a “V”-shaped gorge with a minimal width at its lowest elevations of about a hundred yards. Its length stretches for about one mile, and a source of water meanders through the narrow route.

It would appear that these two natural passes—serving as migration and fortified defense routes for the Nephites and Lamanites—were conspicuous landmarks and, therefore, could not be ignored by the Book of Mormon record keepers when describing military campaigns. And these two passes cannot be ignored when attempting to locate the narrow neck of land on the surface of the earth today, nor can they simply be placed on a map where we wish them to be. They are where they are. If the record says two passes were located within the narrow neck of land, with one of the passes by the sea, we should be able to match the Book of Mormon account to actual defendable passes in rational locations along a plausible route of a fortified defense line. Indeed the successful matching and aligning of these two natural passes and a route for a defense line within the narrow neck of land in Baja California on

Google Earth, and especially while viewing them on the ground, was an incredible and defining moment for us.

A Natural Harbor for Launching Ships into the Sea West

The Book of Mormon record mentions only limited shipping. Nephi with the Lord's instruction built a ship to transport his family to the promised land. But it is not until 55 B.C., some 550 years after their arrival, that there is any mention of shipping: Hagoth, "an exceedingly curious [in older English, skillful] man ... went forth and built him an exceedingly large ship, on the borders of the land Bountiful, by the land Desolation, and launched it forth into the west sea, by the narrow neck which led into the land



northward" (Alma 63:5). The ship was built to carry people and provisions from the land southward to the land northward (Alma 63:4-10). This description places the launch location on the western coast of the narrow neck of land, "on the borders of the land Bountiful, by the land Desolation."

Hagoth launched his ships into the west sea at the "narrow neck of land" between the lands of Bountiful and Desolation.

Mormon includes this account of Hagoth's ships carrying people to the land northward as an explanation of why the sacred records of his people were transferred unexpectedly from Shiblon to his nephew Helaman.

Shiblon had received the records

from his brother, Helaman, who received them from their father, Alma. Mormon explains that Shiblon died only three years after receiving the sacred records from his brother Helaman. Shiblon's brother, Corianton, should have received the records, but "Corianton had gone forth to the land northward in a ship, to carry forth provisions unto the people who had gone forth into that land. Therefore it became expedient for Shiblon to confer those sacred things, before his death, upon the son of Helaman, who

was called Helaman, being called after the name of his father” (Alma 63:10-11; see also, 50:38; 63:1-2, 12-13). This Helaman, the son of Helaman (the brother of Shiblon), was Shiblon’s nephew (Alma 31:7; 49:30). He is the Helaman the Book of Helaman is named for (see heading to the Book of Helaman).

Hagoth “built other ships. And the first ship did also return, and many more people did enter into it; and they also took much provisions, and set out again to the land northward. And it came to pass that they were never heard of more. And we suppose that they were drowned in the depths of the sea. And it came to pass that one other ship also did sail forth; and whither she did go we know not” (Alma 63:8).

There is no mention of the fate of Corianton, the brother of Shiblon. Other ships were used by the Nephites to “send forth” people, timber and provisions, “by the way of shipping,” to the land northward (Hel. 3:10; see also, Alma 63:10; Hel. 3:14). The Nephite’s seafaring abilities appear to have been fairly modest, not only from the scarcity of shipping information in the record, but also by the stark reality that one of the small number of ships mentioned did not reach its northern destination and was “never heard of more,” and another “did sail forth; and whither she did go we know not.”



Maritime port facility at Santa Rosalillita on the west coast of Baja California. This bay is a potential site for launching Hagoth’s ships at the “narrow neck of land.”

Where Hagoth would have launched his ships “forth into the west sea,” the narrow neck of land in Baja California is flanked by a beautiful sweeping bay that has long-served as the location of commercial fishing villages and recently as the construction site of a maritime port facility for launching yachts and other vessels into the Pacific Ocean. The north to south longshore currents along this coast sometimes produce treacherous sailing conditions, and in historic times these Pacific waters have become the graveyard for dozens of vessels. One such doomed ship, the *Black Warrior*, is commemorated by the Spanish name of the largest town and the gray whale calving lagoon at the southern end of the long, sweeping fishhook-shaped bay that forms the

Pacific side of the narrow neck of land: *Guerrero Negro*. This American whaling ship grounded near the coast in the 1850s.

The Changing Role of the Narrow Neck of Land

Mormon records the changing dynamics of the widespread migration to the northern lands in 29–28 B.C. and the sudden intermixing among the Lamanite and Nephite populations. This change came with the conversion to the gospel of large numbers of Lamanites in the area surrounding the land of Zarahemla and the larger land of Nephi to the south. These conversions came about through the missionary work of the two sons of Helaman—Lehi and Nephi (see Hel. 5-6).

And it came to pass that when the sixty and second year of the reign of the judges *had ended, all these things had happened and the Lamanites had become, the more part of them, a righteous people, insomuch that their righteousness did exceed that of the Nephites, because of their firmness and their steadiness in the faith. (Hel. 6:1)

And it came to pass that many of **the Lamanites did go into the land northward**; and also Nephi and Lehi went into the land northward, to preach unto the people. And thus ended the sixty and third year.

And behold, there was peace in all the land, insomuch that **the Nephites did go into whatsoever part of the land they would, whether among the Nephites or the Lamanites.**

And it came to pass that **the Lamanites did also go whithersoever they would, whether it were among the Lamanites or among the Nephites**; and thus they did have free intercourse one with another, to buy and to sell, and to get gain, according to their desire.

And it came to pass that they became exceedingly rich, both the Lamanites and the Nephites; and they did have an exceeding plenty of gold, and of silver, and of all manner of precious metals, **both in the land south and in the land north.** (Hel. 6:6-9)

This pent-up migration to the northern lands was motivated and sanctioned by the sudden collapse of the containment strategy of the Nephites, allowing Lamanites and Nephites of all persuasions to migrate northward. With the conversion of the Lamanites there was no longer a need to “hem them in” on the south. The geopolitical role of the narrow neck of land quickly changed from being a barrier spanned by a fortified defense line to a narrow corridor of travel and freedom for all.

Mormon then interposes two names for orienting the lands of the Lamanites and Nephites—names that do not appear elsewhere in the Book of Mormon record.

Now **the land south was called Lehi, and the land north was called Mulek**, which was after the son of Zedekiah; for the Lord did bring Mulek into the land north, and Lehi into the land south. (Hel. 6:10; see also, Alma 22:30-31)

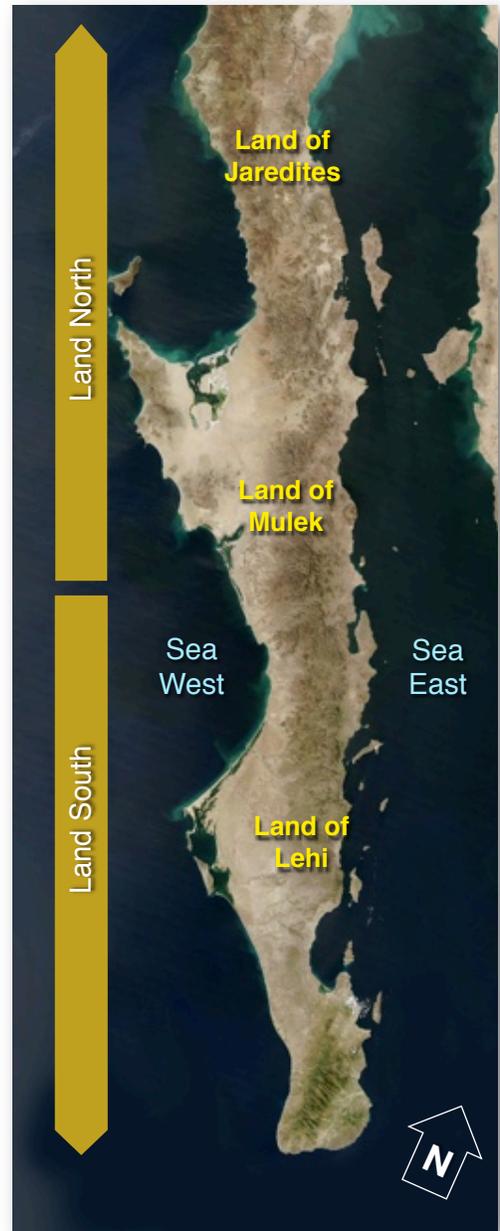
Mormon explains why the “land south was called Lehi, and the land north was called Mulek” but does not indicate if these are new names or names that had been in use by his people for some time, but unmentioned in his record. (For a commentary on the people of Mulek, see, “Historic Setting of River Sidon Area” in our topic article, *The River Sidon—A Key to Unlocking Book of Mormon Lands*)

Mormon resumes his narrative of this unrestrained migration within the Lamanite and Nephite lands:

And behold, there was all manner of gold in **both these lands**, and of silver, and of precious ore of every kind; and there were also curious workmen, who did work all kinds of ore and did refine it; and thus they did become rich.

They did raise grain in abundance, **both in the north and in the south**; and they did flourish exceedingly, **both in the north and in the south**. And they did multiply and wax exceedingly strong in the land. And they did raise many flocks and herds, yea, many fatlings.

Behold their women did toil and spin, and did make all manner of cloth, of fine-twined linen and cloth of every kind, to clothe their nakedness. And thus the sixty and fourth year did pass away in peace. (Hel. 6:11-13)



Starting in 55 B.C., some 26 years before this newly sanctioned migration to the land northward, the Nephites and “many of the people of Ammon, who were Lamanites by birth,” had migrated to the land northward suddenly and in substantial numbers (see Alma 63:4; Hel. 3:12; and the section, *Historic Setting of the Narrow Neck of Land*, above). The people of Ammon were Lamanites who joined the church through the missionary labors of the four sons of Mosiah. We suggest these righteous Ammonites and their descendants—the first Lamanites, according to the record, to locate north of the narrow neck of land—were not considered a threat to the Nephite defense strategy of hemming in “the Lamanites on the south” with “their guards and their armies” (Alma 22:33).

Rocks “Rent in Twain” and “Found in Seams and in Cracks”

Samuel the Lamanite prophesied that at the time of the Savior’s crucifixion there would be extensive destruction “upon the face” of the Book of Mormon lands. During the devastation the sun would be “darkened,” for the “space of three days,” and “thunderings and lightnings” would last “for the space of many hours” (Hel. 14:20-21). Also there would “be great tempests,” and “many mountains” would be “laid low, like unto a valley,” and “many places” which are “called valleys” would “become mountains, whose height is great” (Hel. 14:23). Mormon later recorded that there was “more great and terrible destruction in the land northward” (3 Ne. 8:11-12).

Samuel also predicted that during this horrendous destruction,

... the earth shall shake and tremble; and **the rocks** which are upon the face of this earth, which are both above the earth and beneath, which ye know at this time are solid, or the more part of it is one solid mass, **shall be broken up**;

Yea, **they shall be rent in twain** [split in two], **and shall ever after be found in seams and in cracks, and in broken fragments** upon the face of the whole earth, yea, both above the earth and beneath. (Hel. 14:21-22)

Thus Samuel foresaw that for “ever after” these shattered rocks would “be found in seams and in cracks, and in broken fragments.” This suggests the rock formations and surface seams and cracks would be prominent and conspicuous today. Cracks are “fissures or openings formed by the cracking, breaking, or bursting of a hard

substance.” Seams, in older English, referred to the “intervening strips” between the cracks rather than serving as a synonym for the word, “cracks.”



This central region of Baja California near Cataviña contains extensive rock fields laced with innumerable “seams and cracks.” The rocks in this vast area are “rent in twain.”

In his account of the three days of destruction, Mormon confirms the fulfillment of Samuel’s prophecy:

And thus the face of the whole earth became deformed, because of the tempests, and the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the quaking of the earth.

And behold, **the rocks were rent in twain; they were broken up** upon the face of the whole earth, **insomuch that they were found in broken fragments, and in seams and in cracks, upon all the face of the land.** (3 Ne. 8:17-18)

As we have noted above, the “face of the land” in older English and in Hebrew refers to the “upper or outer surface” of the land (earth) and not its periphery or its general shape or its extent.

During the three days of darkness, the voice of the Lord enumerates by name the cities destroyed by fire, sinking or being covered up by the depths of the earth and then declares the cause of the devastation (3 Ne. 9:1-12):

Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen! (3 Ne. 9:2)

And many great destructions have I caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and their abominations. (3 Ne. 9:12)

Mormon assures that some escaped the destruction:

And [the more righteous part of the people] were spared and were not sunk and buried up in the earth; and they were not drowned in the depths of the sea; and they were not burned by fire, neither were they fallen upon and crushed to death; and they were not carried away in the whirlwind; neither were they overpowered by the vapor of smoke and of darkness. (3 Ne. 10:12-13)

Mormon then describes the conditions that prevailed “in the morning” after the three days of devastation:

And it came to pass that thus did the three days pass away. And it was in the morning, and the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land, and the earth did cease to tremble, and **the rocks did cease to rend**, and the dreadful groanings did cease, and all the tumultuous noises did pass away.

And **the earth did cleave together again**, that it stood; and the mourning, and the weeping, and the wailing of the people who were spared alive did cease; and their mourning was turned into joy, and their lamentations into the praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer.

And thus far were the scriptures fulfilled which had been spoken by the prophets. (3 Ne. 10:9-11, 16; see prophecies of Nephi, 2 Ne. 26:3-9; Zenos, 1 Ne. 19:10-12; and Zenock, Alma 33:15)

Greater Destruction in the Land Northward

Mormon in his account of the widespread destruction throughout their lands, records that even though,

... there was a great and terrible destruction in the land southward ... **there was a more great and terrible destruction in the land northward**; for behold, the whole face of the land was changed, because of the tempest and the whirlwinds, and the thunderings and the lightnings, and the exceedingly great quaking of the whole earth” (3 Ne. 8:11-12).

It stands to reason that the northern half of the narrow neck of land, as an integral part of the land northward, would not have escaped this “more great and terrible destruction.” It would be difficult, however, to discern which specific mountains and valleys would have been formed during the devastation—there are many hundreds of such landforms visible today—or to readily evaluate the lasting effects from quaking, whirlwinds and tempests on the landscape of Baja California.

Nonetheless, while traveling through the northern half of the narrow neck of land, and the extended area to the north, one suddenly and stunningly encounters a massive area of “rent” rocks with extensive surface cracks and seams. This vast area of thousands of square miles of broken rocks—going on for mile after mile—is covered with boulders the size of marbles up to the size of houses, all broken in



Rocks that have been “rent in twain” are strewn over a vast area in central Baja California near Cataviña.

“twain” and “in seams and in cracks.” The surface of this area, known as the *Cataviña* boulder field, has the appearance of shattered glass when viewed with satellite imagery. This rugged but scenic area has the greatest number of endemic cactus species found anywhere the world. Some like the *Cardon* and the *Cirio (or Boojum)* extend to 60 feet in height, with a life span measured in hundreds of years. These cacti are interspersed among the rock formations, appearing to grow right out the rocks. This botanically and geologically intriguing area within the *Desierto Central de Baja*

California has been designated a protected environmental reserve. On local maps the jumbled area of cracked rocks and seams is named, *Roco, Roco, Roco*, which translates from Spanish as *Rocks, Rocks, Rocks*.

This renown boulder-strewn landscape in northern Baja California is a testament to the fulfillment of Samuel's prophecy, that these rocks "shall be broken up" and "shall ever after be found in seams and in cracks, and in broken fragments upon the face of the whole earth, yea, both above the earth and beneath" (Hel. 14:22). And these broken rock formations provide another landmark for matching the Book of Mormon account to a narrow neck of land in Baja California.



El Pedregoso is a singular pile of broken rocks in central Baja California near Cataviña in the northern half of the "narrow neck of land." This pile of massive rocks is some 300 feet high.

The Jaredites and the Narrow Neck of Land

The land northward was also the former domain of the Jaredite record keepers. The Jaredites were essentially located to the north of the narrow neck of land during their tenure on the promised land, and at the time of their destruction, the “bones [of the Jaredites] lay scattered in the land northward” (Omni 1:22; Alma 22:29-31). The descendants of the families of Jared and his brother and the numerous families who came with them, however, could have dispersed to more distant locations (see “Arriving in the Promised Land” in our topic article, *Jared, his Brother and their Friends: A Geographical Analysis of the Book of Ether*; section on “Cement” in our topic article, *Searching for Book of Mormon Ruins—What should we expect to find?*). Two challenging events in the Jaredite record took place in the narrow neck of land:

Drought, Famine and Serpents upon the Land

Because of iniquity among the people, a widespread catastrophe beset the Jaredites in the land northward. The unforeseen calamity was of such a magnitude that it was deemed worthy of placement in Moroni’s highly abridged record. There was a great dearth (shortage of food) “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). Iniquity was the cause, and no rain (a drought) was the heaven-sent retribution. “And there came forth poisonous serpents [large snakes] also upon the face of the land, and did poison many people. And it came to pass that their flocks began to flee before the poisonous serpents, towards the land southward, which was called by the Nephites Zarahemla. And it came to pass that there were many of them which did perish by the way; nevertheless, there were some which fled into the land southward” (Ether 9:31-32). The



Proposed locations of Jaredite settlement in Baja California.

land southward comprised the contiguous Nephite lands of Bountiful and Zarahemla located south of the narrow neck of land. The narrow neck of land was situated



Rattlesnake (*crotalus catalinensis*) found in Baja California.

between the land Bountiful on the south and the land Desolation on the north. The land Desolation was an integral part of the Jaredite lands and later became a Nephite land after 55 B.C. (Ether 7:6; Alma 22:29-34). Today, the corresponding area of Baja California is rife with snakes of many kinds in a conducive environment.

The Lord caused “the serpents that they should pursue them no more, but that they should hedge up the way that the people could not pass, that whoso should attempt to pass might fall by the poisonous serpents” (Ether 9:33). The people followed “the course of the beasts, and did devour the carcasses of them which fell by the way, until they had devoured them all. Now when the people saw that they must perish they began to repent of their iniquities and cry unto the Lord” (Ether 9:34). The term “beast” in older English referred to any four-legged animal, either wild or domesticated.

The people humbled themselves and the Lord sent “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 9:35). The word “fruit” in older English included vegetables and nuts. These calamitous events of drought, famine and a plague of snakes occurred where the southern lands of the Jaredites and the later northern lands of the Nephites spatially overlapped north of the narrow neck of land. The “north countries” mentioned by Moroni are the lands to the north of the narrow neck of land, which included the land Desolation and the adjoining lands to the north.

Hunting Wild Game

Some years later, in the days of Lib, a Jaredite king, “the poisonous serpents were destroyed. Wherefore they did go into the land southward, to hunt food for the people of the land, for the land was covered with animals of the forest. And Lib also himself became a great hunter. And they built a great city by the narrow neck of land, by the place where the sea divides the land. And they did preserve the land southward for a wilderness, to get game. And the whole face of the land northward was covered with inhabitants” (Ether 10:18-21). The

“land southward,” where the Jaredite hunters went “to hunt food for people,” could not have been too far from the “land northward” which was “covered with inhabitants.” The meat from game animals would be difficult to haul long distances and would spoil beyond a short time. The Nephites called this area the land of

Bountiful, a wilderness “filled with all manner of wild animals of every kind, a part of which had come

from the land northward for food” (Alma 22:31). Today, the corresponding area of Baja California continues to be a highly favorable habitat for wild game, such as deer, pronghorns, wild goats, bighorn sheep, mountain lions, game birds and rabbits.



The *desert pronghorn* is endemic to Baja California but under international protection because of encroachment into its habitat. The pronghorns above are young animals.

A Touchstone of Book of Mormon Geography

As we have noted, the image of a narrow neck of land is possibly the most prominent geographical feature in the mental maps of Book of Mormon readers, and this reality has elicited much discussion as to its location on the earth’s surface. Ever since the Book of Mormon was first published, identifying the narrow neck of land on the earth’s surface has been a touchstone of its geography, a criterion by which something is judged or recognized.

Our proposed touchstone, a narrow neck of land on the peninsula of Baja California, links two land areas matching the geographical descriptions in the Book of Mormon, including the required wilderness areas that comprise its terrain. It is positioned between the Pacific Ocean on the west and the Sea of Cortez on the east. The 50-mile width of this neck of land could be readily spanned by a fortified defense line. And there are two passes in required locations that breach the rugged wilderness areas. There is no need to twist the wording of the Book of Mormon text to match the physical environment of this narrow neck of land, nor do we need to ignore any recorded features.



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 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 the narrow neck of land with the prophetic words of Captain Moroni—proclaimed in 73 B.C. during dark days of dissension and iniquity, a time that required the rallying of the people in the defense of the nation, the gospel of Jesus Christ and their way of life (Alma 46). Moroni, “chief captain over the armies of the Nephites,” named all the land south of the land Desolation “a chosen land, and the land of liberty.” At that time, this fought-for land of liberty was bordered on the north by the defense line in the narrow neck of land, the fortified line between the land of Desolation and the land of Bountiful. The land of Bountiful and the adjoining land of Zarahemla on the south—both occupied by the Nephites, but nearly surrounded on three sides by the Lamanites—formed this chosen land. Moroni decreed that those who take upon them the “name of Christ” shall not be destroyed upon this land of liberty unless by their “own transgressions.” This solemn message should fortify our resolve and serve as a warning for today.

And it came to pass that [captain Moroni] rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it—In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children—and he fastened it upon the end of a pole.

And he fastened on his head-plate, and his breastplate, and his shields, and girded on his armor about his loins; and he took the pole, which had on the end thereof his rent coat, (and he called it the title of liberty) and he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so long as there should a band of Christians remain to possess the land—

...

And it came to pass that when he had poured out his soul to God, he named all the land which was south of the land Desolation, yea, and in fine, all the land, both on the north and on the south—A chosen land, and the land of liberty.

And he said: Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trodden down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions. (Alma 46:12-13, 17-18)

And thus it was.

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