

lowing comment more than once: "It's an interesting subject, but it really doesn't matter that much—my salvation isn't dependent on knowing where The Book of Mormon took place." This statement reveals a lack of knowledge of the message and purpose of The Book of Mormon and shirks the ultimate responsibility of those who believe in it—that those who possess The Book of Mormon are actually caretakers entrusted with a special mission.

This mission requires a setting for The

bread! (It is astonishing to me to consider that 175 years after its coming forth, believers are still divided over the location of the lands of The Book of Mormon!) A brief capsule of the two main geography theories may shed some light on where we stand today. Both views have their roots in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They both center around identification of the narrow neck of land which divided the Land Northward from the Land Southward and is the key to proper identification of Book of Mormon lands.

The first view hearkens back to a series of maps

## Why Book of Mormon Geography is Important

By Shirley R. Heater

Christians cannot imagine the Bible without places—Israel, Egypt, Jerusalem. All are foundational to the events recorded.

We take the location of Bible lands for granted because of the long-known history in that area of the world. Yet over the years, Bible scholars and biblical archaeologists have differed as to the accuracy or even the historicity of some of the events. Did the walls of Jericho really fall down? Were the Israelites slaves 400+ years in Egypt? What about the Exodus and parting of the Red Sea? Or Noah's Ark? There are even those who relegate the Bible itself to myth status and question the resurrection! In recent years some critics have tempered their criticisms as archaeology contributed confirmation of scriptural accounts, many converted to its message.

Today, even more turmoil surrounds The Book of Mormon—in addition to the anti-Book of Mormon segment. Even within the ranks of professed believers, some question whether or not it is important to know where the recorded events took place. Others have taken the path of some Bible scholars, questioning the historicity and just considering it a good story, albeit with some good principles. I have heard the fol-

lowing comment more than once: "It's an interesting subject, but it really doesn't matter that much—my salvation isn't dependent on knowing where The Book of Mormon took place." This statement reveals a lack of knowledge of the message and purpose of The Book of Mormon and shirks the ultimate responsibility of those who believe in it—that those who possess The Book of Mormon are actually caretakers entrusted with a special mission.

This mission requires a setting for The Book of Mormon. It is as essential to The Book of Mormon believer as it is to those Bible believers who do not take for granted specific locations in the Bible. The Bible and Book of Mormon share the same purpose concerning prophecies of the restoration of the House of Israel in the Last Days—The Book of Mormon relating to a specific branch. But before I explore this important topic, let's first review the subject of geography.

Where something took place is always important when reading historical material. For The Book of Mormon, as with the Bible, this necessitates a map. There are actually two kinds of maps—internal and external. An internal map places lands and cities in relation to each other based on the text, without locating them in a specific geographical area. An external map places those internal references in a specific geographic location. While internal maps are helpful in establishing relationships between places, it is the external map that brings reality to the events.

produced by an archaeology committee commissioned by the 1894 RLDS General Conference (published in 1898). Those maps identified the narrow neck as the Isthmus of Panama. That would stretch Book of Mormon lands over 8,000 miles, way beyond the more rational smaller area required by Book of Mormon events. In addition, the Darien Gap—Panama's isthmus—is a swampy, impassible corridor which was rejected for the plan to build a Pan-American highway.<sup>1</sup> It is also possible that this swampy area was underwater during the time of The Book of Mormon. Travel by individuals, and especially by large groups as recorded in The Book of Mormon, would have been impossible or extremely difficult at best through such an area that is nearly impenetrable even today. These conditions tend to rule out the Panama location as the narrow neck. Other requirements which also do not match are discussed below.

Nineteen years after the committee maps were published, a second view was presented by Louis Hills in 1917. Hills had been studying and teaching his proposed geography for several years before his map was published in *Geography of Mexico and Central America*. Glenn Scott observes that because the knowledge of Central America

*Continued on page 2.*

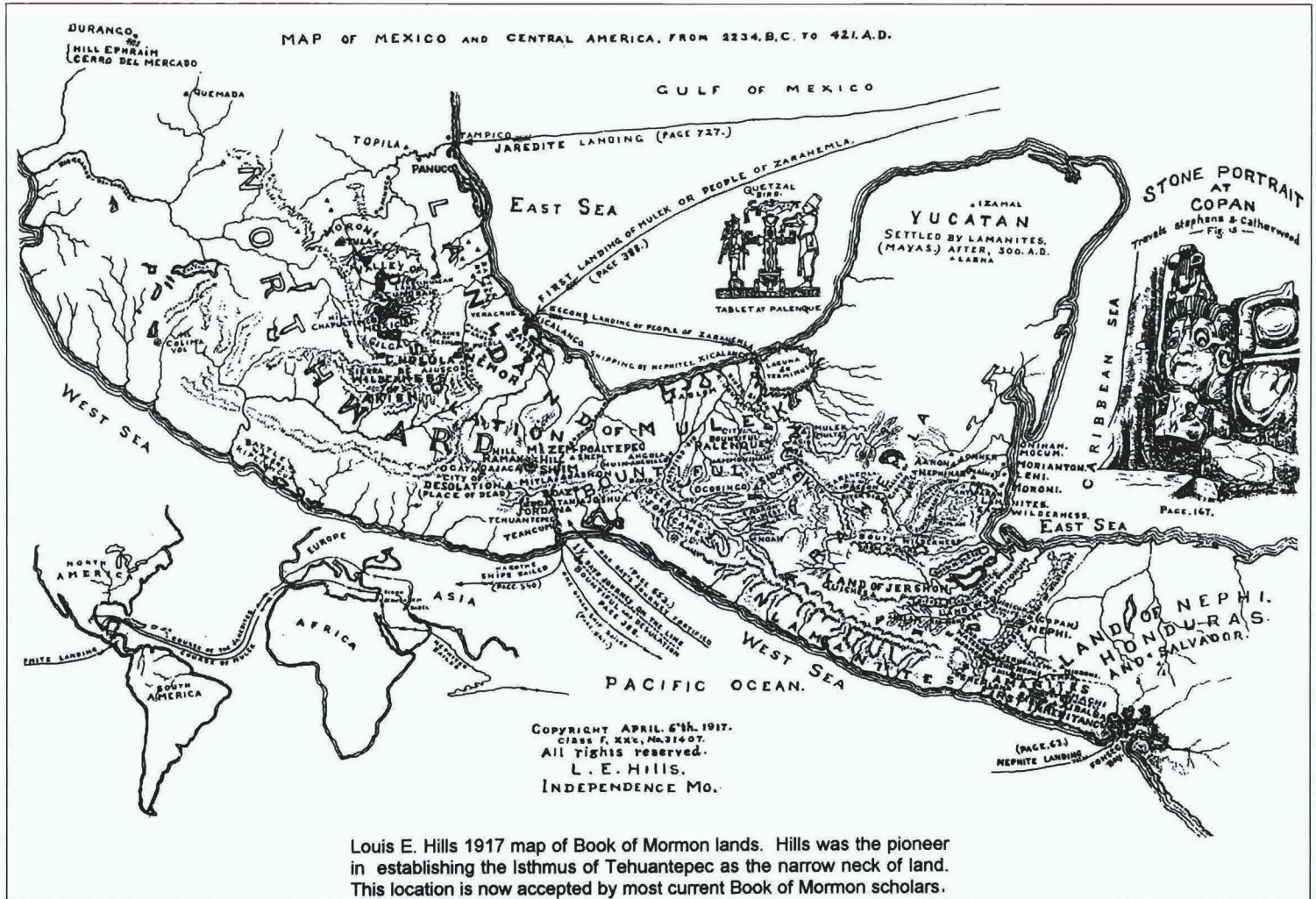


2 glyph notes

Book of Mormon Geography

From page 1.

Voices from the Dust, 3rd Edition, Glenn A. Scott, p. 6. Map used by permission.



Louis E. Hills 1917 map of Book of Mormon lands. Hills was the pioneer in establishing the Isthmus of Tehuantepec as the narrow neck of land. This location is now accepted by most current Book of Mormon scholars.

was sketchy at the time, his “analysis must have been inspired because it has held up amazingly well under the test of time and the scrutiny of many scholars.”<sup>72</sup> Hills’ map identifies the narrow neck as the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (see illustration). While the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is much wider than

the Darien Gap, the Tehuantepec location is rising and was much narrower in the past than today.

With the Isthmus of Tehuantepec as the narrow neck, Hills successfully matched all the physical requirements of adjacent areas—mountain ranges in their proper place, a major river flowing north into the sea, highlands, lowlands, a large land area nearly surrounded by water, and great cities. Today, the area encompassing both sides of this isthmus is known as Mesoamerica, a cultural and archaeological designation. In the last fifty years, it is the only area in the New World where archaeology and the science of carbon dating has filled in an impressive number of evidences which parallel or converge with The Book of Mormon account.

Two Mesoamerican known cultures fit The Book of Mormon—the Olmec (the oldest) believed to be associated with the Jaredites, the earliest Book of Mormon group and the Maya (the later culture) asso-

ciated with the Nephites, Lamanites and Mulekites. A comparison of the rise and fall of these two Mesoamerican civilizations with The Book of Mormon over two thousand years produces a mirror image timeline—perhaps the strongest of all evidences. Other parallel elements include high population, intensive agriculture, a complex writing system with links to the Old World, extensive warfare and fortifications, use of cement, building of highways, city/state sys-

*Continued on page 2.*

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## Book of Mormon Geography

From page 2.

tem, kings, a knowledge of proper cardinal directions, and more.

Locating the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mesoamerica as the narrow neck is the linchpin in the conclusion that there is only one possible location that fits all the criteria—Mesoamerica—making it the most widely held view by Book of Mormon scholars today. We can confidently move forward knowing that just as the Bible has an identified location, so does The Book of Mormon.

Let us now return to the subject of the title, why geography is important. In these Last Days, we are poised on the threshold of the culmination of both Biblical and Book of Mormon prophecies. This understanding leads us to the main reason we need to know the geographical setting—to identify Lehi's descendants who are part of the House of Israel. This broken-off branch, whether those in the heartland of The Book of Mormon lands or those who may have migrated northward into the United States two thousand years ago,<sup>3</sup> must be brought back into the mother tree as part of the restoration of the House of Israel.

All who read The Book of Mormon can be blessed by its testimony of the Lord and by its teachings on faith, and many other significant subjects. Read The Book of

Mormon for your own personal edification and rich blessings. But in addition to that (perhaps even more so as a result of our relationship with the Lord and with this book), realize the responsibility inherent in embracing it. We are caretakers of this record, and in God's great scheme of things, it must go to the descendants to whom and for whom it was written and preserved.<sup>4</sup>

What is your response? I challenge each of you to look for those promises and blessings to the remnant and to make this a matter of prayer. When our voices are united, our faith is magnified 10,000 times (a type for this is found in Leviticus 26:8 and Deuteronomy 32:30). We will see the posterity of Lehi, Nephi, Alma, Mormon and Moroni restored to their inheritance—expect it!

### Recommended Reading

For more in-depth discussions on the subjects of Book of Mormon geography and archaeology, consult the following:

*Voices from the Dust*, by Glenn Scott  
*Peoples, Places and Prophecies*, by Verneil W. Simmons  
*Exploring the Lands of The Book of Mormon*, by Joseph L. Allen

<sup>1</sup>The Pan American Highway is to extend over 16,000 miles to unite North and South America, from Alaska to Argentina. The Darien Gap is one of three segments still not completed, although the technology now exists to overcome the previous difficulties and may someday become a reality.

<sup>2</sup>See *Voices from the Dust*, by Glenn A. Scott, page 7, for discussion of Joseph Smith's comments that Zarahemla was north of the Isthmus of Darien in "Guatimala" [sic], in addition to more detail on Hills' map and the narrow neck of land requirements.

<sup>3</sup>The Maya people in Guatemala and surrounding areas are the largest indigenous group in the New World—over seven million people. They are also becoming more populous in the US as they continue to migrate today, joining their brothers and sisters who left over two thousand years ago.

<sup>4</sup>As an aid to begin your study on this purpose, as well as other purposes, refer back to an earlier article in *glyph notes*, "Purposes of The Book of Mormon," by Lyle Smith, May/June 2005, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 1-3.

## glyph clips

### ◆ Workshop

If you are interested in learning more about the Maya and Maya writing you may want to attend this workshop. Look for more workshop information in coming issues of *glyph notes*.

### Maya Meetings in Texas

Last year, 2005, Maya writing scholar David Stuart, formerly of Harvard, was appointed Director of the Maya Meetings once led by charismatic Linda Schele. The theme is The Palenque Mythology: Old Gods and New Readings. It will be held March 14 - 19, 2006. Check out the website (<http://www.utmaya.org/index.html>) for details.

"We invite one and all to attend the 2006 Maya Meetings at Texas, on the beautiful campus of the University of Texas at

Austin. Scholars and enthusiasts of the ancient Maya worldwide meet here every year to share new discoveries, debate the latest theories, and teach the art and science of reading Maya iconography and hieroglyphs.

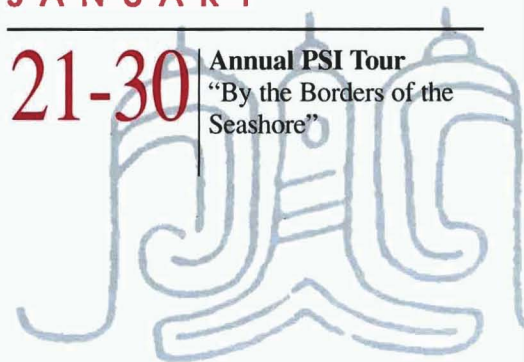
The 2006 Maya Meetings, our Thirtieth Anniversary, will be devoted in part to the key religious and mythological texts from Palenque, Mexico, revisiting the original topic of Linda Schele's first presentations in Austin. We will feature several new archaeological finds and new decipherments, showing what they reveal about ancient Maya religion as it was expressed in Palenque's art and inscriptions in the 7th and 8th century A.D.

As is often the case, many of the ideas will be presented and discussed for the first time."

## glyph calendar

JANUARY

21-30 Annual PSI Tour  
 "By the Borders of the Seashore"



The *glyph notes* staff want to wish you a blessed New Year. May we all resolve to study more and to share more of our knowledge with others.



# glyph quotes

“He is the light and the life of the world” — Mosiah 8:82



By Clyde Noren

For years, many Christian believers, including Restorationists, have asked themselves this question with various interpretations: “What does the Nativity mean to me?”

Today, Christmas is a holiday celebration with the giving of gifts one to another. And in most cases, those gifts are placed under a decorated Christmas tree. The origin of the Christmas observance of Christ’s birth as a festive occasion was believed to come from a pagan custom starting sometime during the 4th century. The use of the Christmas tree was said to

begin early in the 17th century. People embellished the celebra-

tion with much excessive attention to the point where the Christmas Season has become a highly commercial event. Elaborate and expensive gifts, especially for the children, have overshadowed the real meaning of the Nativity event.

Scriptural evidence points to a totally different meaning of the importance of the birth and mission of Christ. Luke wrote, “For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). The birth of Christ so permeated the world that time has been measured

from this date. The years before Christ are labeled BC and years after Christ, AD [anno Domini, in the year of the Lord]. Jewry had looked forward to a Messianic King or Prince who would deliver them from their enemies and solve all the political and economic problems of their time. This King would be a militant person, the God of setting the kingdom in order and executing justice and righteousness in fulfillment of the Jewish Law. However, these desires were never achieved because the advent of Christ brought in a new era going beyond the old Law and bringing in a new aura of religious worship.

Writers such as O. Henry in “The Gift of the Magi” and Charles Dickens in “The Christmas Carol” depict the feelings bound

“For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11)

up in Christmas events, but fail to catch the true meaning of Christmas, *the teachings of how to live a life for a future that lasts forever.*

In the Bible, Isaiah called the name of the Christ Child, “Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father and The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). In Book of Mormon scriptures, another prophet, Samuel, prophesied of Christ’s birth. Samuel’s first attempt to preach repentance was not received well, and he was cast out of the city of Zarahemla. The Lord, howev-

er, told Samuel to return again and prophesy unto the people. Samuel was not allowed to enter the city, so he stood on a wall and prophesied of Christ’s forthcoming birth (Helaman 5:55-56). He also said at the time of Christ’s birth there would be no darkness in all that night, and a new star would arise, the like of which had never been seen before. In addition there would be many signs and wonders in heaven. Christ’s message was so far-reaching that it included children and their importance to the Kingdom, as emphasized in The Book of Mormon (III Nephi 8:23-26).

When Jesus started His ministry of the promise of the Kingdom of Heaven, people saw a Great Light in Capernaum (Mat 4:15-16). The first disciples and His followers, namely Paul, Timothy and the other disciples eventually realized the importance of the Great Light. That Great Light has been extended forward to our day through the ministry of Joseph Smith, Jr. and his faithful followers. No greater testimony can be given of Jesus than the “works that followed Him.”

The Birth and Life of Christ is a *beacon* to me and a way for me to conduct my life. **All have the same opportunity to choose this Pathway of Light to a Glorious Future!** Does the Birth of Christ mean this to you?

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