

GLYPH

Notes

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Hansen and Crew Uncover Scenes from the *Popol Vuh* at El Mirador

By Sherrie Kline Smith

In the May/April 2009 issue of glyph notes on page seven is a report about a new discovery at El Mirador in Guatemala—an astonishing water management system dating to 300-200 BC. It's a series of pools with two waterfalls that fall into another pool with sides richly decorated with what appears to be scenes from the Popol Vuh.

This October, CNN was the first commercial company to visit and report on this find. They posted several video clips on their Web page about El Mirador and the discovery. Dr. Richard Hansen, the archaeologist and project director of the Mirador Basin Project for more than 20 years, says in the video, "This is the creation story, and it goes back to at least 300, 200 B.C." Then the CNN reporter, Brooke Baldwin, comments. "For decades, historians believed the *Popol Vuh* was tainted by the Catholic views of Spanish conquistadors. Finding this frieze changes everything because it predates the Spanish arrival by more than a millennium."

Why did historians believe the *Popol Vuh* was tainted by the Catholic views of Spanish conquistadors? Why does this newly discovered sculptured panel change "everything"? Baldwin gives no explanation.

What is the *Popol Vuh*?

Written around 1558 by a K'iche' Maya (Quiché in Spanish) who had learned to write the K'iche' language in Latin letters, the *Popol Vuh* is the K'iche' Maya myth of creation and is often referred to as the Mayan Bible. It's a three-part (or four-part according to some writers) document; the first section tells about the creation of the Earth and its first inhabitants; the second relates the story of the Hero Twins and their amazing feats of valor; and the third is a historical list of lineages of the four founding brothers of the K'iche' people. It is not an "easy read," and includes—what appears to us—strange happenings, like the decapitation of One Hunahpu, ballgames in the Xibalba, the underworld, myths how the animals got certain attributes, and much more.

Because the *Popol Vuh* was written after the arrival of the Spanish priests and *because* elements of the

CORRECTION: The photo in the September/October 2009 issue of *glyph notes* on page six is Stela D not Stela C.



Don Beebe

Dr. Richard Hansen, archaeologist and project director of the Mirador Basin Project, says, "This is the creation story, and it goes back to at least 300, 200 B.C."

East side of Stela C from Quirigua, Guatemala, with the account of the very first moments of creation. Translation is in Figure 1 on page 4.



Scenes From the Popal Vuh at El Mirador (cont. from page 1)

Popol Vuh have strong Christian components, scholars felt that the Maya shamans, who wrote the *Popol Vuh*, had unconsciously been influenced by the priests who brought Christianity to the New World. Some of the similarities are: creation occurred by the power of the spoken word; gods worked together to bring about creation; the creation of the three principal domains: earth, heaven, and seas; an all encompassing flood destroyed the people who would not worship the gods; language changed; the struggle against good and evil or lords of the underworld; and the general theme of resurrection and blood sacrifice.

In the last 20 to 30 years, however, as the Maya hieroglyphs were deciphered, scholars realized that the native writers of the *Popol Vuh* had *not* been influenced by the Spanish priests. The inscriptions, carved on stone more than a thousand years earlier, long before the arrival of the Spanish, revealed some of *the same basic elements* about the *first moments* of creation as described in the *Popol Vuh* in the first section.

For example, creation occurred by the power of the spoken word. Allen Christen-

sen's translation of the *Popol Vuh* reads like this. "Then the earth was created by them. Merely their word brought about the creation of it. In order to create the earth, they said, 'Earth,' and immediately it was created..." (Christenson 2003:71). Dennis Tedlock translates this portion as, "And then the earth arose because of them, it was simply their word that brought it forth. For the forming of the earth they said 'Earth'" (Tedlock 1996: 65). And in an earlier translation: "Then the earth was created by them. So it was, in truth, that they created the earth. 'Earth!' they said, and instantly it was made" (Goetz, Morley, and Recinos 1950: 83).

See Figure 1 for my interpretation of the creation inscription on Stela C at Quirigua, Guatemala, based on the translation given by epigraphers. I keep tweaking it to reflect a "scriptural" tone. I use "laid the foundation" in place of the more literal translation of a "stone was set up or planted."

The Genesis account in the King James Version of the Bible relates that "God said . . . and it was so." The Inspired Version is clearer. "And this I did by the word of my

The *Popol Vuh* was written around 1558 by "anonymous members of the Quiché-Maya nobility... [who] wrote that the contents were based on an ancient book from across the sea" (Christensen 2003: 26 and 32). It is not known what happened to the document after its creation, but in AD 1701, the Spanish priest, Francisco Ximenez, found the original manuscript in the Santo Tomás convent in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. Ximenez copied the K'iche' from the original manuscript (now lost) and then wrote the Spanish translation next to it. This copy eventually ended up at the Newberry Library in Chicago, Illinois.

Since then many translations have been made. Three are of particular note. The first is the 1950 English version by Delia Goetz and Sylvanus G. Morley from the Spanish translation of Adrián Recinos. This remained the benchmark work until Dennis Tedlock published his version, first in 1985 and then a revised and expanded edition in 1996. Allen J. Christensen's 2003 two-volume work is a direct translation from the K'iche'. It includes not only the literal poetic translation and transcription, but the introduction covers the history of the K'iche', discusses the pre-Columbian *Popol Vuh*, authors of the *Popol Vuh*, history of the manuscript, and an in-depth discussion of the poetic nature of the *Popol Vuh*, including the prevalent practice of couplets and chiasmus. A companion DVD, *Popol Vuh Electronic Library*, "provides the user with a comprehensive tool for the study of the *Popol Vuh*," with high resolution scans of the original manuscript, and more.

REFERENCES

Christenson, Allen J. *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya*, vol. 1 & 2. New York: O Books, 2003.
 Tedlock, Dennis. *Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings*, rev. & exp. ed. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
 Goetz, Delia and Sylvanus G. Morley. *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiché Maya*. English version from the translation of Adrián Recinos. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950.
 See also: Coe, Michael D. *The Maya*, 7th ed. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005, pages 65-66.

In the last 20 to 30 years, scholars realized that the native writers of the Popal Vuh had not been influenced by the spanish priests.



http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Popol_vuh.jpg

power; and it was done as I spake” (Genesis 1:8). In The Book of Mormon Jacob teaches the people, “by the power of his word, man came upon the face of the earth; which earth was created by the power of his word” (Jacob 3:12-13).

What’s astonishing is that even though

the *Popol Vuh* incorporates much that is *not* in the Scriptures, it still has the fundamentals of creation as known to the people in The Book of Mormon who lived 1200 years earlier.

So why is the new discovery at El Mirador the creation story? It’s a representation of a
Continued on Page 4



The modern-day K’iche’ live in the Central highlands, Totonicapán, southern El Quiché, eastern Sololá, and eastern Quezaltenango departments.



Lyle Smith



Lyle Smith

Exotic cut flowers of all colors — calla lilies, birds of paradise, as well as gladiolas — are sold on the steps leading to the church which was built on top of a Pre-Columbian temple platform. The 18 steps, still venerated today, represent each of the months of the Maya calendar. The sights, sounds, and smells of the crowded, colorful square assault the senses. But for me, on our visit in 1991, it was the marvelous singing in the church that deeply stirred my soul.

The Maya villagers were standing wall to wall, singing with the most beautiful blending of voices I’d ever heard. Unfortunately, I entered the church just as the singing finished, and the people quietly left by the side door. Although Santo Tomás is a Catholic church, ancient Maya traditions dominate the services. Yet, that moment is forever engraved in my memory because I strongly felt God’s Spirit in this incredibly lovely sound of music.

On Sundays and Thursdays — market days at Chichicastenango — temporary stalls pack the plaza in front of the Iglesia de Santo Tomás (Church of Santo Tomás) where the *Popol Vuh* manuscript was found. The church, a simple, white-washed building, dates from 1540.



Lyle Smith



Scenes From the Popal Vuh at El Mirador (cont. from page 3)

part of the *second* portion of the *Popol Vuh* that deals with the Hero Twins, much of which is not found in the Genesis account or The Book of Mormon. And this discovery does not change “everything” as reported by CNN. The change in how historians viewed the *Popol Vuh* and other Conquest documents—from native scribes incorporating elements of the Christian account of creation in their works to acceptance that the writers were not influenced by the priests—came with the decipherment of the hieroglyphic inscriptions, especially at Quirigua and Palenque. Perhaps what the CNN reporter meant was that the stucco frieze of the Hero Twins is the earliest example of a part of the *Popol Vuh*.

But here is something curious. The site of El Mirador, in the northernmost extremity of present-day Guatemala, existed from around 500 BC to AD 100. Since El Mirador began as a Mulekite city, the scenes of the *Popol Vuh* on the waterpool walls were probably created by the Mulekites.

The Book of Mormon writers tell us very little about this group

of people. The only person in the group that left Jerusalem that is known for certain was the infant son of Zedekiah. Who brought him to the Promised Land? How many came with him? Were they all Israelites? Or were Phoenicians among the group? These and other questions remain a mystery.

With the new find at El Mirador, it is almost certain that some of the mythology in the *Popol Vuh* comes from Mulekite sources or may even have been learned from remnants of the Jaredites (Olmecs). Whatever the case, the origins of the sixteenth-century *Popol Vuh* appear to have been very ancient.

In the last 10 to 15 years, more archaeological discoveries have been made of sites and buildings dating to the 500 BC to AD 100 era than ever before. While some of these finds present us with some mysteries and challenges, we look forward to increasing our knowledge about this time-frame and learning of more evidences to reaffirm that The Book of Mormon is a true historical account.

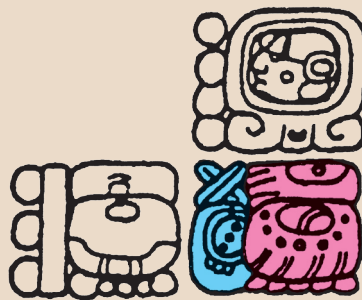


Don Beebe

Figure 1



Creation Text as it appears on Quirigua Stela C.



4 Ahua

JAL (jal) "to say"; "to manifest"

K'o-b'a (k'ob'a) "image"

On August 13, 3114 they spoke and the image appeared.

Three stones were set up/planted/laid.

It came to pass that the Paddler Gods laid the foundation for the jaguar throne in Heaven.

It came to pass that Ek' Nah Yax laid the foundation for the serpent throne on Earth.

And it came to pass that Itzamna laid the foundation for the Waters throne.

It came to pass at lying-down sky, the first three-stone place.

The Raised-up Sky Lord created these things when 13 baktuns ended.

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GLYPH *Quotes*

He cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men, even through faith, on his name. - Mosiah 1:103.

The Last Word

By Clyde W. Noren

The plan of salvation was in God's mind since the beginning of time and was effected when Jesus told God he would redeem mankind all for the glory of the Father (Genesis 3:2-3 IV). God's redemption of mankind and the promise of salvation were proclaimed by John the Baptist when he said, "And all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:11 IV). The same acclamation was given by Simeon at Jesus' blessing recorded in Luke 2:30, "For mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

Salvation has its beginning and ending with our accepting Jesus through repentance and baptism and our commitment to live a righteous life until called before His judgment bar.

The judgment bar will have the names of the righteous people written in the book of life. The Book of Mormon in Alma 3:100 states, "for the names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life; and to them will I grant an inheritance at my right hand."


The Book of Revelation has the additional requirement of works as necessary for salvation. "And another book was opened which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in books, according to their works"

(Revelation 20:12). "Blessed are they that do his [the Lord's] commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14). Jesus also told his disciples about works when he said, "that men shall come before me to judgment according to their works" (Matthew 7:31). The work could even be a cup of water given in His name (Mark 9:38) or assisting the poor, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked as encouraged by King Benjamin in Mosiah 2:43.

The fate of those who totally and absolutely do not follow the commandments of the Lord face the sentence declared in the words of Revelation 20:15. "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

The anticipated joy of being blessed at the judgment time is best expressed in Alma 3:32. "Can you imagine to yourselves that you hear the voice of the Lord saying unto you,

in that day, Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?"

At the time of judgment, the best and last words a true believer in Christ can hear are similar to those pronounced in the parable of the talents found in Matthew 25:23, the commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." 



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From Omni to Mosiah: A Book of Mormon Timeline

The charts on the following pages were prepared by Eric English to help a church-school class studying The Book of Mormon have a visual picture to keep what can be a confusing story line straight. Feel free to copy and place with your copy of The Book of

Mormon to help as you study.

The timeframe covered in these charts correlates to part of the same timeframe as the massive site of El Mirador (see lead article this issue) and others such as Nakbe, San Bartolo, Uaxactun, and many sites in

the El Mirador Basin of Guatemala, and Cerros, Caracol, Colha, and Lamanai in Belize. Archaeological investigations in these sites help to flesh out the history found in The Book of Mormon.

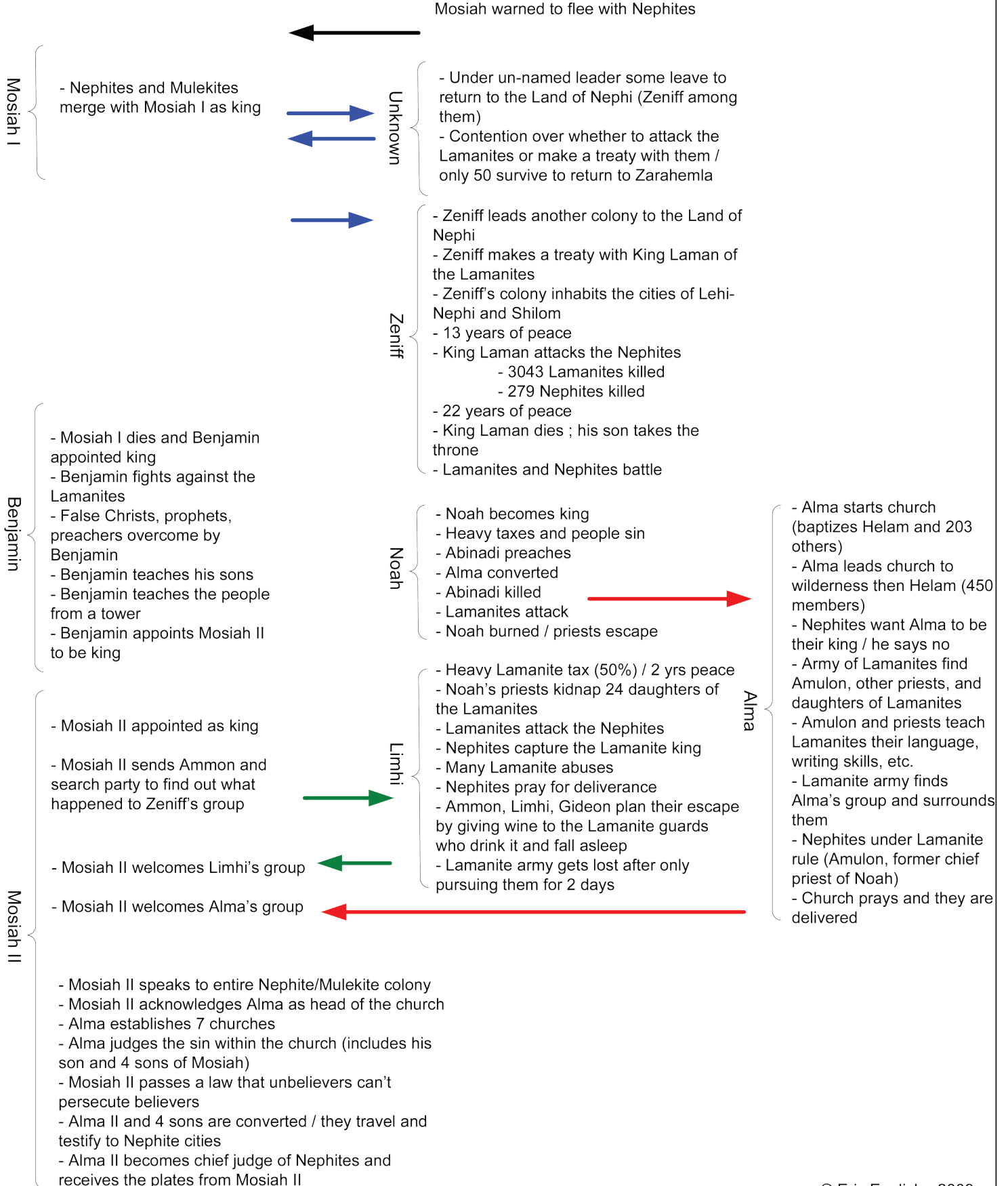
Continued on Page 6

Major Events – Omni to Mosiah

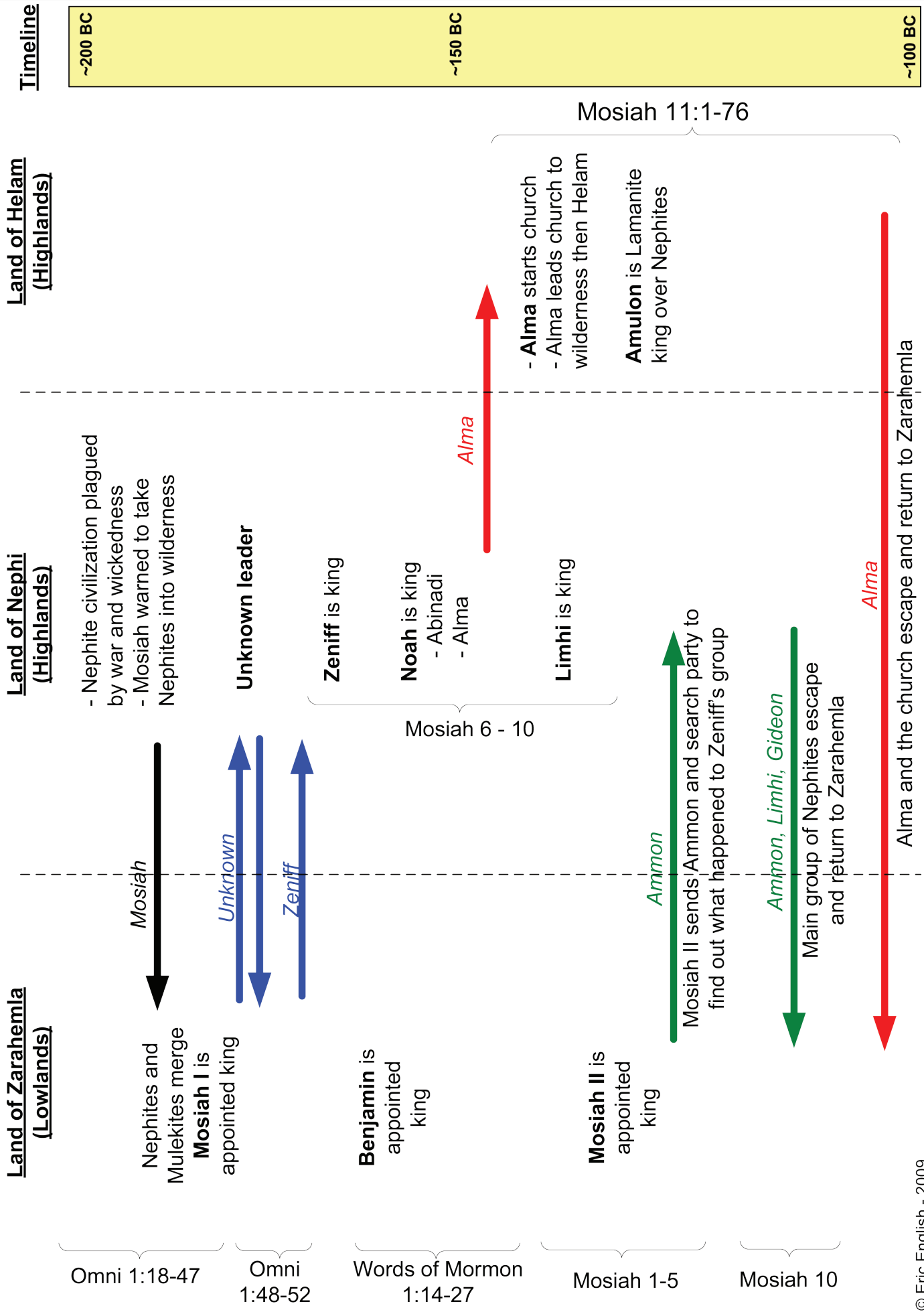
Land of Zarahemla (Lowlands)

Land of Nephi (Highlands)

Land of Helam (Highlands)



Overview of Travels – Omni to Mosiah



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The Roads Lead to Chaco Canyon – From *True West*

For those interested in the Four Corners Region (New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah) and the ruins there of the Pueblos and Chaco Canyon, see the November/December 2009 issue of *True West*, pages 34-41. Your local library should have a copy. A map of the sites and national parks, lots of photos and sidebars, and a timeline tell of the Anasazi or the Ancestral Puebloans that once lived there. Today the area is occupied by the Hopi and Navajo tribes.

The article does not talk about the Hopi, whose reservation is in northeast Arizona, but these Native Americans are unique. The name *Hopi*, according to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, is a shortened form of *Hopituh Shinnu-mu* meaning “The Peaceful People” or “Peaceful Little Ones.” “Hopi is a concept deeply rooted in the culture’s religion.... The Hopi religion is anti-war” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hopi>, November 17, 2009).

This religious belief leads those who believe in The Book of Mormon to wonder if the Hopi are not descendants of the People of Ammon, those converted Lamanites who buried their weapons of war and refused to fight. See Alma 14: 25-47 and Alma 20: 11-12. Some of the People of Ammon migrated northward (Helaman 2:11). The Hopi could very likely qualify as descendants of this group of Lamanites, originally called Anti-Nephi-Lehi. ©

