

GLYPH

Notes

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Does The Book of Mormon Provide Accurate Information about Israel at the Time of Lehi?

*W*hen published in 1830, *The Book of Mormon* included Hebraic cultural traits and linguistic conventions at the time of

By Lyle L. Smith

Lehi, ca. 600 B.C. Critics scoffed at some of these, saying they couldn't possibly be true. Recent work by archaeologists at a couple of digs in Israel, though, substantiates six of these cultural and linguistic statements in *The Book of Mormon*.

1. Laban, a military commander ca. 600 B.C., had custody of religious records.
2. Nephi built a temple in the land of promise.
3. Nephi, a Hebrew-speaking person, wrote his record in Egyptian.
4. Mulek was the son of King Zedekiah.
5. The words "and now" were employed as opening phrases.
6. Joseph Smith proclaimed that the record (*The Book of Mormon*) was written on metal plates.

Before looking at each of these six points, it would be well to lay some groundwork for this examination by citing an example of how archaeology can validate cultural

history. The article "Daniel and Belshazzar in History" by Alan Millard does this rather well.

Much like *The Book of Mormon*, the *Book of Daniel* in the Bible has received a good deal of criticism. Since about the third century A.D., "the *Book of Daniel* was judged a product of the second century B.C., concocted to encourage nationalism and faith. Its stories of Babylon, Daniel and various kings were believed to be fiction, or, at best, old folktales, historically worthless" (Millard 1985:74).

Does this sound familiar?

Until 1854, the last known king of Babylon was King Nabonidus, while King Belshazzar, who figures prominently in part of the *Book of Daniel*, was unknown. Therefore, the book was considered to be "fiction." But an 1854 archaeological

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Some years ago, I was requested to write an article about archaeology and *The Book of Mormon*. Much new information had come to light, and I couldn't decide on the topic. I sought the Lord in prayer, asking him to help with the decision. A few days after I had prayed specifically for help in choosing a topic, I had my answer.

At this time, my wife Sherrie and I rode together to work. That day she had brought along the newest issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* (BAR), and while riding to work, she read several of the articles. As she read, the Spirit bore witness that this was what the Lord wanted me to write about. The resulting article, "With Power and Great Glory," was published in *The Witness*, October 1987. The article here is a revision of that initial article and updated with additional material.

ARAD

An Ancient Israelite Fortress with a Temple to Yahweh

EVAN HARRIS
 NICHOLAS LEHRER
 ANDREW J. RAINY



Accurate Information *(Cont. from Page 1)*

discovery of several small inscribed clay cylinders in southern Iraq proved otherwise. Nabonidus, king of Babylon from 555 to 539 B.C., had commissioned these inscriptions which were words of a prayer for the long life and good health of Nabonidus and his eldest son—Belshazzar!

Millard points out that

archaeological discoveries like these [the finding and translation of inscriptions] cannot, of course, prove that the narratives in Daniel report events that actually occurred in the sixth century B.C., but they, and other finds like them, do indicate *that those narratives preserve correct information about Babylon at the time they were supposed to have occurred* (emphasis added, Millard 1985:78).

This concept is of major importance in understanding the role of archaeological evidence and how it relates to The Book of Mormon.

Do the six points listed above preserve correct information about Israel in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. during the time of Lehi, and if so, what does archaeology reveal? The archaeological site of Arad, south of Jerusalem on the borders of the dessert, provides support for the first five points. Proof for the sixth point, Scriptures written on metal plates, comes from a tomb in Jerusalem.

The work at Arad was unusual in that the archaeologists dug the entire hilltop down to bedrock (not the usual few test pits), including the fortress, one square meter at a time. They found everything that was left to find.

The Israelite fortress at Arad is unique in the Land of Israel. It's the only site excavated with modern archaeological methods that contains a continual archaeological record from the period of the Judges (c.1200 B.C.) to the

Babylonian destruction of the First Temple (586 B.C.) (Herzog, Aharoni, and Rainey 1987:17).

The archaeologists described their discoveries in a series of articles in the March/April 1987 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* mentioned in my testimony at the beginning of this article. The format for presenting these six points will be to first state what is in The Book of Mormon and then follow with supporting evidence from Arad and Jerusalem.

Narrative #1

The Book of Mormon: Laban, a military commander ca. 600 B.C., had custody of religious records (1 Nephi 1:61; 159-164 [LDS 3:3; 5:11-14]).

The reference in The Book of Mormon that a military commander had charge of historical and religious records has often been under attack. Critics said that the military would not have records, and, in fact, it was believed that military commanders probably could not even write at 600 B.C.

Archaeological Evidence: Military commanders did keep records.

Because special care was taken to insure that nothing was overlooked, about 80 Hebrew inscriptions were unearthed at Arad. "Moreover, unlike the rare collections of inscriptions found at other sites in Israel, the Arad inscriptions range over a period of 350 years, covering six different strata" (Rainey 1987:36-37). The inscriptions included correspondence, ca. 600 B.C., archaeologists labeled the "Eliashib letters." Eliashib was probably the commander of the Arad fortress at the time of Lehi.

As of 1987 when the articles in *BAR* were written, the Eliashib letters and other inscriptions discovered at Arad comprised "the most valuable corpus of ancient Hebrew inscriptions from the period of the Israelite monarchies" (Rainey 1987: 39). These inscriptions included "political, administrative, and



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... *religious documents*" (emphasis added; Herzog, Aharoni, and Rainey 1987:16). Further, the "archive demonstrates that ... writing was common at administrative and military centers in Judah and Israel" [at, and before, 600 B.C.] (Rainey 1987:38).

Although these inscriptions do not refer to Laban specifically, they do support The Book of Mormon account that Laban, a military commander, did have charge of religious documents/records in Judah at 600 B.C.

Yes, The Book of Mormon is culturally correct in this narrative.

archaeological excavation" (Herzog, Aharoni, and Rainey 1987:28). Until this dig at Arad, there had been no archaeological evidence, and only Book of Mormon supporters had believed that those of the House of Israel would build a temple, during this era, in a place other than Jerusalem. (Some years later, another Jewish temple was discovered at Elephantine Island in Egypt.)

Once again we see that The Book of Mormon preserves correct information about Judah at the time it was supposed to have occurred (i.e., members of the House of Israel building temples in places outside of Jerusalem).

Narrative #3

The Book of Mormon: Nephi, a Hebrew-speaking person, wrote his record in Egyptian (1 Nephi 1:1[LDS 1:1-2]).

Nephi's statement that he wrote his record in Egyptian has long been doubted by critics of The Book of Mormon. They have not believed that Hebrew records would have been written in another language. It's like writing the history of the United States in French.

Archaeological Evidence: A Hebrew-speaking scribe wrote records in Egyptian.

An ostrakon [potsherd] was found written entirely in Egyptian hieratic (cursive) script.... [It] was written by a Hebrew-speaking scribe. Indeed, Egyptian symbols for numerals and measures, as well as for commodities, are found in Hebrew inscriptions, not only from the southern kingdom of Judah but even from the northern kingdom of Israel (Rainey 1987:37).

Record keeping was done in Egyptian, not just Hebrew, and Hebrew scribes were writing documents in Egyptian. For the third time, evidence from Arad indicates that The Book of Mormon presents correct information ca. 600 B.C. when Nephi wrote his record in Egyptian.

Narrative #4

The Book of Mormon: Mulek was the son of King Zedekiah.

"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"

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Sherrie Kline Smith

Signs designate the temple area at Arad. The inset is a close up of the Holy of Holies.

Narrative #2

The Book of Mormon: Nephi built a temple in the land of promise (2 Nephi 4 [LDS 5]).

It was believed that members of the House of Israel would not have built a temple to Yahweh anyplace other than Jerusalem because no other temple had ever been discovered besides the one in Jerusalem.

Archaeological Evidence: An unexpected temple was discovered outside of Jerusalem.

At Arad archaeologists found a "unique Israelite temple dedicated to Yahweh—the only temple dedicated to the Hebrew God ever found in an



Sherrie Kline Smith

Sherrie Kline Smith



These examples of eighth-century B.C. jar handles are displayed at the Wohl Archaeological Museum in the Herodian quarter of Jerusalem. From the time of King Hezekiah, the jar handles bear seal impressions containing the inscription LMLK, “belonging to the king.”

Accurate Information *(Cont. from Page 3)*

(Helaman 2:129 [LDS 6:10]). “Will ye say that the sons of Zedekiah were not slain, all except it were Mulek” (Helaman 3:56 [LDS 8:21])?

Archaeological Evidence: *LMLK* means “belonging to the king.”

In a well 65 feet from the Arad fortress, several pottery sherds were discovered.

The most interesting sherd was a broken jar handle bearing the impression of a seal *LMLK HBRN*. This handle was one of a type archaeologists call *LMelek* handles because they all bear an inscription saying *LMelek* (“belonging to the king”) of some place.... The handles are known to date to the eighth century B.C. (Amiran, Goethert, and Ilan 1987:42).

The inscription *LMLK HBRN* means “belonging to the king of Hebron.” The “L,” or *lamed* in Hebrew, translates as “to” but is understood as “belonging to.” *MLK* means “king,” and thus the *LMLK* on the jar handle inscriptions can usually be translated as one of the following.

- “[belonging] to the king” (of Judah)
- “[belonging] to King” (name of a person or deity)
- “[belonging] to the government” (of Judah)
- “[to be sent] to the King”

This is like our government offices. Each item of equipment used to have a stamp on it saying “Property of the United States Government.” Now, barcodes are used.

In 1999, another *BAR* article reported on the discovery of a royal seal of King Hezekiah. *MLK* is part of the inscription which reads, “Belonging to Hezekiah, (son of) ’Ahaz, King of Judah.” Due to the

limited space on the small seal, the phrase “son of” has been omitted (Cross 1999:42-45).

At the time of Lehi, written Hebrew did not include vowels. Therefore, *MLK* could also be transcribed as *Mulek* as well as *Melek*. In effect, when Joseph Smith transcribed King Zedekiah’s son as Mulek, it was the son’s title.

Narrative #5

The format for Narrative #5 is reversed.

Archaeological Evidence: “And now” is a standard opening and transitional phrase.

In the article “The Saga of Eliashib,” Rainey writes about the office files of the commander of the fort. He states that the phrase “and now,” which generally follows the salutation in correspondence, is used so often they call it a “standard opening” (Rainey 1987:36-39).

To Eliashib, And now [the standard opening] give the Kittiyim three baths of wine, and write the name of the day (brackets in the original).

To my lord Eliashib, May Yahweh seek your welfare. And now . . . as to the matter which you commanded me....

The Book of Mormon: The phrases “it came to pass” and “and now” are used throughout the record.

Most readers of *glyph notes* know the phrase “and it came to pass” is used extensively in The Book of Mormon, but what about “and now”? This was a new thought for me, so I decided to check all the chapters in The Book of Mormon (1908 edition). Much to my surprise and delight, 60 of the 114 chapters begin with “And now.”



Sherrie Kline Smith

Exhibited at the Israel Museum, this Arad ostrakon is a letter written in ink on pottery, ca. sixth century B.C. The museum label includes the translation of the Hebrew. The beginning of the letter is: “To my lord Eliashib, may the Lord seek your welfare, and now: Give to Shemaryahu....”

Warren Bennett took the study further and found “and now” also employed as a “transitional phrase” to transition from historical background information to a conclusion. In total, the phrase is used 645 times in the book. (See the July/August 2013 issue of *glyph notes*, pp. 2-6.)

Until the articles in *BAR* about Arad, I never had considered the importance of the words “and now” as a witness that the authors of The Book of Mormon implemented the same phrases as those commonly found among Hebraic writers ca. 600 B.C.

Narrative #6

The Book of Mormon:

Joseph Smith proclaimed that the record (The Book of Mormon) was written on metal plates.

When Joseph Smith Jr. in 1830 announced to the world that The Book of Mormon . . . was translated from ancient metal plates bound with rings, which he found in a stone box near Manchester, New York, he unleashed a firestorm of criticism which has not ceased to this day. All of the “authorities” of his day laughed and said that there was no evidence of ancient peoples ever having left inscribed metal records... (Scott 2011:1).

They were right. There was no evidence in 1830.

Archaeological Evidence: A multitude of metal plates with writing have been discovered.

Beginning about 100 years ago, archaeologists began to find metal plates with writing on them around the Middle East and lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. At least 50 examples have been found, thus corroborating that The Book of Mormon provides correct information that Israel and other Middle East countries wrote records on metal in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. Glenn Scott’s article in the May/June 2011 issue of *glyph notes* includes a list of some of



Sherrie Kline Smith

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Left: Perched on a ridge overlooking the Hinnom Valley, St. Andrew’s Memorial Church and Guest House was completed in 1930. The church was built as a memorial to Scottish soldiers killed during World War I. In the foreground, portions of the tombs can be seen. Right: Looking down the hill from the church steps, one can see the tombs. The fine stonework at the top of the photograph is part of the Menachem Begin Heritage Center in Jerusalem.

the metal plates found in the Middle East since 1830. None of these plates, however, had Scriptures or sacred writings engraved on them. Only recently were two examples discovered. The archaeological evidence came from one of the tombs that honeycomb the mountains and hills around Jerusalem. Just below and under St. Andrew’s Scots Memorial Church and Guest House in Jerusalem are the Ketef Hinnom tombs. Visitors to the church or guest house can look down the hillside upon the entrance to Cave 24, which includes burial chamber 13 from the seventh century B.C, the time of Zedekiah, Jeremiah, and Lehi.

The plaster ceiling of burial 13 had collapsed centuries ago, completely covering the many treasures buried there. When archaeologists recently sifted through all the dust, a quantity of jewelry was discovered along with two small silver scrolls. These amulets had been worn as either a pendant or charm on a bracelet. When the scrolls were unrolled, they were found to be engraved—with



Sherrie Kline Smith

This silver scroll, used as an amulet, is one of the two engraved with the scripture from Numbers 6:24-26. They both are displayed in the Israel Museum.

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Scripture! They are the first examples of Scriptures written on metal plates found to date and are considered one of the most important archaeological discoveries in Israel over the past 34 years (Smith 2012:1-2). The engravings on both amulets included verses from Numbers 6:24-26 in the Bible. “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”

The discovery of these silver scrolls with Scripture written on them prove religious records were written on metal plates. It further proves that at least parts of the Bible were written as early as 700 B.C. to 600 B.C. Many scholars have contended that the Bible was only oral tradition until being written down about 300 to 200 B.C. Also, it proves that portions of the Bible are remarkably consistent over a 2700 year period. It is trustworthy.

And last but not least, finding a tomb of a wealthy person that lived contemporaneous with Lehi provides evidence that Lehi’s riches were not something out of the ordinary. (For more information about the tomb and silver scrolls, see the July/August 2012 and the Sept./Oct. 2013 issues of *glyph notes*.)

Joseph’s testimony that The Book of Mormon was written on metal plates is culturally correct.

Conclusion

Let’s review the cultural and linguistic evidences.


1. Military commanders kept written records. The narrative about Laban is culturally correct.
2. An Israelite temple was discovered outside of Jerusalem. Nephi was doing what others had already done in building a temple outside of Jerusalem.
3. Hebrew scribes wrote records in Egyptian. When Nephi wrote in Egyptian on the plates, he was doing what others of his time did.
4. *LMLK* means “belonging to the king.” When Joseph Smith translated the name “Mulek” in The Book of Mormon, he didn’t know he was using the title “king.”
5. “And now” was employed as a standard opening and transitional phrase in Hebrew writing ca. 600 B.C. The Book of Mormon uses “and now” as a standard opening and transitional phrase numerous times.
6. The seventh-century B.C. Ketef Hinnom tombs revealed Scripture inscribed on metal.

The sacred writings of The Book of Mormon were written on metal plates

Consider this question. How could Joseph Smith have known these six cultural and linguistic traits of Israel ca. 600 B.C. and accurately narrate them in The Book of Mormon? Today, not only are we probably better educated than Joseph Smith when he translated the record but also we have access to 100 years of modern archaeological exploration. Still, could you have correctly identified these six items from 2600 years ago? The answer is very likely not.

I choose to believe that the records written on metal plates known as The Book of Mormon were translated by the “gift and power of God.” In all the ways that I have studied this book, over the past 50 plus years, I find that it is accurate and true in its theology as well as in its cultural and linguistic narratives.* Further, the archaeology of Israel supports The Book of Mormon narratives as giving correct information about Israel at the time of Lehi.

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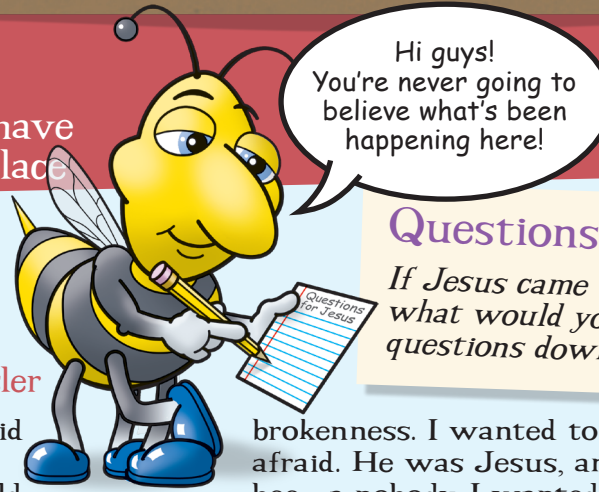
*See “An Account of Those Ancient Inhabitants: Nephites” in the July/August 2011 *glyph notes* and “An Account of Those Ancient Inhabitants: Jaredites” in the May/June 2012 *glyph notes*.

Glyph Dwellers

Dwellers – to live and have a home in a particular place

The Adventures of Beezrom

By Mindy Mulheron
Illustrations by Aaron Presler



Questions for Jesus

If Jesus came to earth to talk with you, what would you ask him? Write your questions down on a piece of paper.

Last time we talked, things did not look good; it was gloomy and scary, and I didn't know if I would make it. But then the storms ended and the sun came out again. And I'm sure you remember the best part: GOD SPOKE TO US! He did! We were just sitting there, and this voice came out of nowhere and it was God! It was so amazing! I thought that would be the highlight of my life, but I was wrong. Something big happened next. Something REALLY big.

After God finished speaking, we marveled—which means we talked about how cool it was. Even though we were all there, it was still hard to believe. The changes in the land all around us were crazy enough, and then on top of that we heard God's voice. It was a lot to think about and discuss.

So there we were, chatting about how amazing our God is, and we began to be aware that someone was talking—and not just anyone... This sounded like the same voice we had heard before... Could it be? Could God really be talking to us again?!

All of a sudden I knew it was him, and I was so excited I almost passed out. I forced myself to calm down and listen to the voice: What was he saying? I heard the voice say, "Behold, my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name, hear ye him." I looked around, and my eyes lifted upward as a bright light appeared.

This next part is very hard to put into words. I saw it happen, but it's difficult to describe accurately. It is a moment I will never, ever forget—because when I looked up, I saw Jesus. So many emotions flooded me all at once: awe, majesty, praise, and wonder. There was Jesus! My Savior! My best friend! Jesus, my Lord who died for me. Me!

What could I do? I fell to the ground, keenly aware of my sins, my failures, and my

brokenness. I wanted to run to him, but I was afraid. He was Jesus, and I am just me, a lowly bee—a nobody. I wanted to hug him and thank him for all he had done. But I was afraid I didn't deserve it and that just maybe he didn't really do it for me—just other people who lived better and did nicer things than I.

I'm not sure how long I was on the ground. It felt like years, as I praised and mourned at the same time. I heard him say, "Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands, and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world."

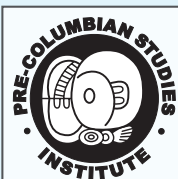
And then I knew: he did do it for me—for me and you and everyone else. We didn't deserve it. We never will. And we can never do enough to earn it—because you can't earn love. It's always a gift. And Jesus loves you—so much. So much that he gave you the best gift you'll ever get from anyone. A gift that is better than an iPad, better than a new bike, and better than the coolest tree house in the world. Jesus gave you the gift of life. Because he died for you, you are able to live. And because you live, it's important that you honor him by living *for* him.

There's much more to tell, but I'll save that for next time. Until then, love others because he first loved you. Be kind to your friends and

family. Show your gratitude for his gift every day. Allow his love to change your heart for the better. You'll never be sorry you let Jesus into your heart and lived for him. Promise.

Take care. See ya next time!
Scriptural reference:
3 Nephi 5:1-14 [LDS 11:1-14]

Congratulations to Mindy Mulheron, our "Beezrom" columnist, on obtaining her Masters of Arts in Education. She's not just graduating, but doing so summa cum laude!



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GLYPH *Notes* PRE-COLUMBIAN STUDIES INSTITUTE MAY/JUNE 2014 VOLUME 21 NUMBER 3

GLYPH *Quotes* Doubt not, but be believing...* —Mormon 4:93 [LDS 9:27]

By Sherrie Kline Smith

In the fourth chapter of Mormon, Moroni ardently appeals to the generations in the latter days—that’s us—trying to convince unbelievers to believe. He strongly condemns unbelievers and warns them to “doubt not, but be believing.”

You may not think this simple yet profound advice by Moroni applies to you. Probably most who read *glyph notes* believe in the truth of The Book of Mormon and its testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. So why reiterate it here? Because—in its simplicity, we miss its significance.

I believe Moroni was most assuredly elaborating on counsel given nearly five to six hundred years earlier by the wise King Benjamin. In his sermon, which was written down so everyone could read and study it later, King Benjamin instructed his people to “believe in God; believe that he is...” (Mosiah 2:13 [LDS 4:9]). He advised further that they should believe that God “created all things both in heaven and in earth” and believe that “he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth.”

He then added a most important admonition. “Believe that man doth not comprehend all things which the Lord can comprehend.” If we believed this, we

would save ourselves many agonizing hours in trying to “comprehend” the incomprehensible in our lives.

In the New Testament, Paul wrote to the Romans that “Abraham *believed* God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3).

He [Abraham] staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief . . . being fully persuaded, that what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness (Romans 4:20-22).

The reason this was written of Abraham, Paul explains, was not for his sake alone, “but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, *if we believe* on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Romans 4:24).

What all this means for us is that when we hear statements challenging the truth of The Book of Mormon or that God created all things or that Jesus was born of a virgin, we need to “*doubt not, but be believing.*”

It’s not a sign of weakness when doubt creeps in. Satan’s lies, which many times are half-truths, cause us to stop and wonder and ponder and, yes, even to doubt. But when we remember the words written by Moroni, King Benjamin, and the Apostle Paul, we overcome our doubts and affirm our belief. We will “doubt not, but be believing.” 