

# glyph notes

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## Turning Faith into Knowledge: Arrival, Population, and Writing

By Lyle L. Smith

*This article is an examination of how current Maya archaeology correlates with The Book of Mormon account in the areas of arrival, population, and writing for the period 600 B.C. to 200 B.C. It is*

important to remember that The Book of Mormon is the benchmark/primary source and does not change from its translation and printing in 1829/30. The material here includes quotes from archeologists and epigraphers who have excavated, researched, and written current articles and text books in use at universities today. These scholars *are presenting Maya history* that mirror closely the account found in The Book of Mormon.

To help visualize where Book of Mormon history took place, please refer to the map on page 5. It has an overlay of the land of promise with the Maya area known as Mesoamerica. The map includes the probable landings of the people of Lehi and of Mulek and the narrow neck of land, and the lands northward and southward. The Maya civilization comprises part of Mesoamerica. The map also includes major Maya cities, especially those mentioned in the article.

*Cont. on Page 2*



*The people of Kaminaljuyu constructed large canals to irrigate the fields; the first one was made around 600 B.C. This proved so effective that in the following centuries a large network of canals and offshoots were built as the population grew. The Miraflores Museum in Guatemala City, shown in the photo above, has an example of the canals. Some of these canals were discovered near the museum.*

Lyle Smith

*We'll  
examine  
three major  
topics  
found in  
The Book  
of Mormon  
supported  
by current  
Maya  
research in  
the time-  
frame 600 to  
300 B.C.*

## Turning Faith (Cont. from Page 1)

Mesoamerican archaeologists have noted what they call a great mystery about the Maya area before 600 B.C.

One of ancient Mesoamerica’s great mysteries is the absence of significant human populations in Yucatan, Belize, and the Guatemalan Peten before 800 BC. Earlier remains have been identified at various places in the northern Peten and Belize, but the entire area was very lightly settled until 600/500 BC (Diehl 2004:150).

Scattered evidence of people in the Maya area previous to 600 BC has been found . . . but Maya urban life came into existence in the sixth century BC. The Maya appear to have arrived on the scene without too much antecedent.... Maya civilization banged into existence in its own way and time.... It is unsettling.... It violates the rules of diffusion and evolution...” (Robertson and Freidel 1986:Preface:x).

The Book of Mormon provides an answer to this great mystery. In reference to the Jaredites, an ancient prophet wrote:

And they [the Jaredites] 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 [ca. 1500 B.C.] the whole face of the land northward was covered with inhabitants...” (Ether 4:68-70 [LDS 10:20-21]).

About a thousand years later, just after 600 B.C., when the colonies of Lehi and Mulek arrived, the land north of the narrow neck was still highly populated and the land south of the narrow neck had minimal population.

### Arrival and Population

In the first year of the reign of Zedekiah—around 600 years before the coming of Christ—prophets, including Lehi—began to warn the people of the destruction of Jerusalem if they did not repent. Soon thereafter, Lehi and his family, with Ishmael and his family, made the journey to the land of promise. At the same time, not long after 600 B.C., the people of Mulek were also led by the hand of the Lord to the land of promise.

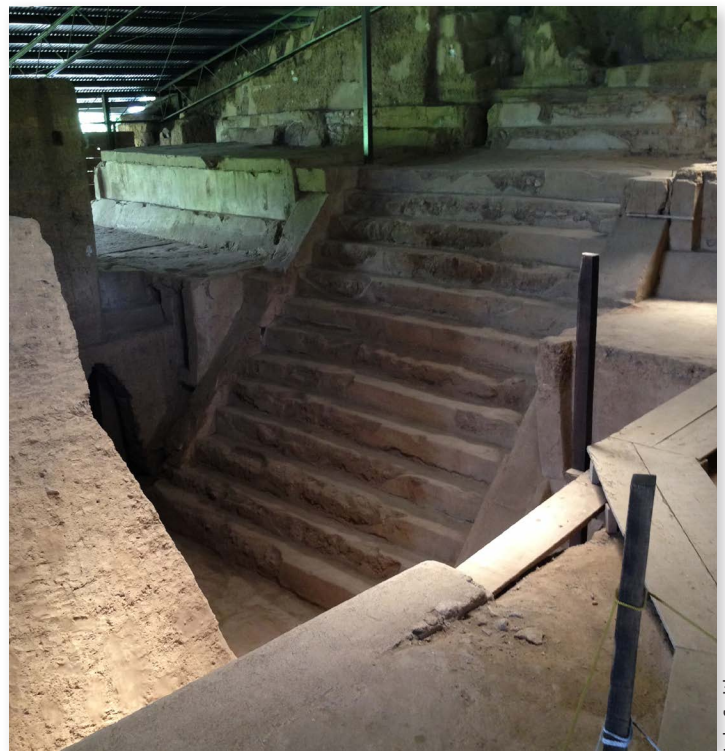
Although both groups arrived around 600 B.C., they were led to different areas. “Now the land south

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” (Helaman 2:129 [LDS 6:10]). It is believed that the people of Lehi and Ishmael arrived on the south Pacific coast of Guatemala or El Salvador. The scripture indicates that the Mulekites first landed in the land northward but shortly left and came to the northern part of the land southward, to the land of Zarahemla (Alma 13:73-74 [LDS 22:29-30]). These two colonies grew independently for almost 400 years.

Archaeology supports the different colonies thriving in what is called the lowlands (northern area) and the highlands (southern area). “All available evidence would have the evolution of Classic Maya civilization from diverse and intermeshed origins in both the **southern** (highland and Pacific plain) and **northern** (lowland) settings (Sharer 1989:166, emphasis added).

Within 200 years after arriving, the Lehi colonists covered most of the land in the highlands.

And now, behold, two hundred years had passed away, and the people of Nephi had waxed strong



Lyle Smith

In his book *Voices from the Dust*, Glenn Scott suggests that Kaminaljuyu—a major city in the southern highlands until after the time of Christ—was the city of Nephi. The photo above was taken summer 2016 and shows part of the ruins at Kaminaljuyu. The roof has been added to protect the building.

in the land.... And they were scattered upon much of the face of the land; and the Lamanites also. And they [the Lamanites] were exceeding more numerous than were they of the Nephites..." (Jarom 1:10, 14-15 [LDS 1:5-6]).

It seems very probable that the Nephite colony settled in what is now Guatemala City which is built over the ancient Maya city of Kaminaljuyu. Nephi wrote that after separating from the Lamanites they "began to prosper exceedingly, and to multiply in the land" (2 Nephi 4:18 [LDS 5:13]). He goes further to describe how skillful and industrious they were. (See 2 Nephi 4:15-26 [LDS 5:11-17]).

Recent excavations at Kaminaljuyu appear to corroborate Nephi's account.

Our excavations in the Miraflores area indicate that Kaminaljuyu underwent a significant population growth and a spectacular architectural development, accompanied by sophisticated systems of hydraulic engineering beginning in the Providencia phase [600-400 B.C.] (Valdés 2006:71).

Approximately 200 years later, the Nephites, led by Mosiah, left the highlands and "came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla. And they discovered a people.... And at the time Mosiah discovered them, they had become exceeding numerous" (Omni 1:19-28 [LDS 1:12-17]).

Many archaeologists agree that the population of the Maya area grew extensively after 600 B.C.

Slow, uneven population growth occurred from 1000 to 500 B.C. (Middle Formative), resulting in the proliferation of small farming communities throughout the (Yucatan) peninsula. There are indications that this erratic population growth became an explosion after 550 B.C. The reasons for the apparent jump in numbers are obscure (Adams 2005:132).

"The Late Preclassic that followed (400 BC to 250 AD) was characterized by 'a rapid growth in population and

in the development of stratified organizations..." (Bricker 2008:164).

"The Late Preclassic (400 BC to AD 300) witnessed a population explosion in the San Bartolo-Xultun territory as well as in other parts of the Maya lowlands" (Garrison and Dunning 2009:538).

"The transition of Calakmul from a small village-type settlement to a significant dwelling probably took place in the second half of the Middle Preclassic, during a three hundred year period between 600 and 300 BC" (Delvendahl 2008:28).

The above six archaeologists have confirmed some of the details found in The Book of Mormon account about the land of promise: sparse population with village life in the Maya area prior to 600-500 B.C. with a population explosion about 550 B.C.

## Writing

The Book of Mormon has many references to writing and records. The people of Lehi brought the Brass Plates with them to the promised land and Nephi started his own set of plates inscribed on metal. "I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 1:1 [LDS 1:2]; see also 1 Nephi 1:161 [LDS 5:12]).

While the Mulekites did not bring records with them there is no reason to believe that they could not read or write. I do believe that from the very beginning of the colonies, 600 B.C. onwards, many people were literate.

What about the history of writing in the Maya area during this period of 600 B.C. to 200 B.C.?

Before 1989 it was known that the Maya had writing as early as 500 B.C. "Salama Valley monuments . . . dating to an era (ca. 500-200 B.C.) in the Maya highlands that almost surely saw the emergence of the earliest Mesoamerican writing systems..." (Sharer 1989:169). In 2005, though, a major discovery occurred in the lowlands. In the rubble of the pyramids was a small block with what is referred to as the "earliest" example of writing in the Maya area. It was found at San Bartolo, a small site near the northern border of Guatemala and Mexico.

*Cont. on Page 4*



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## Turning Faith (Cont. from Page 3)

The San Bartolo block achieves importance because it narrows the time in which writing first appears in Mesoamerica. Most early finds, regardless of region, now come close to the *midpoint* of the first millennium B.C. (Houston 2006:1249).

The writing appears on preserved painted walls and plaster fragments buried within the pyramidal structure known as “Las Pinturas...” Samples of carbonized wood that are closely associated with the writing have calibrated radiocarbon dates of 200 to 300 BC. This early Maya writing system was in use centuries earlier than previously thought... (Saturno, Stuart, Beltrán 2006:1).

In conjunction with the importance of this early writing found in the lowlands is the fact that the execution of the glyphs exhibits a well-developed writing system.

The text from San Bartolo commands attention less because of what it records, than because of its striking date and sophistication. The glyphs are hardly the work of a neophyte or an inventive genius from antiquity. The sure execution and balancing of brush width indicate several



B. Beltrán

This photo— showing the San Bartolo block with the earliest writing yet discovered in the Maya area—was part of the online article “Early Maya Writing at San Bartolo, Guatemala” at [Scienceexpress.org](http://Scienceexpress.org), January 5, 2006.

centuries of prior development... (Houston 2006:1249).

Of even more importance for believers in The Book of Mormon is the realization that, although the Maya hieroglyphs do not look like Old World scripts, the writing system has proven to be identical in many ways to Old World systems such as Egyptian. (See Coe 2012 and Smith 2002.)

In this article, we have briefly examined three major topics found in The Book of Mormon supported by current Maya research by archaeologists/epigraphers in the timeframe 600 to 300 B.C.) Maya civilization banded into existence at about 550 B.C. with the establishment of cities and the people of Lehi and the Mulekites arrived at the same time. 2) Population grew rapidly, with the Maya having a population explosion beginning about 550 B.C. The Book of Mormon indicates high growth in the first 300 years after arrival. 3) The people of Lehi could read and write having a knowledge of Hebrew and Egyptian. It is important to realize that, although the Maya hieroglyphs do not look like Old World scripts, the writing system functions much like Old World writing systems such as Egyptian. From new evidence, Maya archaeologists/epigraphers have pushed back the beginning of writing in the Maya area to at least 500 B.C.

Once more, discoveries like these help turn faith into knowledge.

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This short passage of writing from San Bartolo is one of the earliest examples of writing found in the lowlands. Archaeologists are confident that radiocarbon dates of material in the same context with this writing put it between 300 and 100 B.C. The forms are different from later glyphs, and deciphering them at present eludes epigraphers.



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Lyle Smith & Aaron Presler Map may be photocopied for educational purposes.

# Promises

By Patricia J. Beebe

At the writing of this appeal, the outcome of the 2016 Presidential Election is not known. Upon receipt of your issue of *glyph notes*, the outcome will have become reality. As you continue to read, please reflect on the past year of rhetoric to which we have been bombarded from seemingly every aspect of our lives. It has been a troubling time, fraught with indecision and loss of trust for the leadership in our country. History reiterates that many, if not most, of the promises made in the political arena (the basis for our political choices) will not be kept. And unfortunately many, if not most, in our great nation—a land of promise—will find themselves discouraged, fearful, and “digging in their heels,” attitudes which are detrimental to individual health and the health of our nation.

***Of one thing we can be assured. The promises in The Book of Mormon will all be fulfilled.***


Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it, shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ who hath been manifested by the things which we have written (Ether 1:35).

Wherefore the promises of the Lord are great unto the Gentiles, for he hath spoken it, and who can dispute? (2 Nephi 7:16).

Each year that passes, the importance and urgency for sharing the good news of the gospel as found in

The Book of Mormon becomes apparent. The promise in The Book of Mormon is for all. From the Preface we read: “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.” No one is left out.

Pre-Columbian Studies, Inc., made a promise to its readers and supporters at its inception “to assist in bolstering your faith in The Book of Mormon, hoping that you will remember its purpose for your life and help share its message to all who will hear.” There are few things more exciting than being a part of a vibrant organization whose primary goal is to share research findings and testimonies relating to The Book of Mormon. There is no greater power than the words of Christ as found within the pages of the book to dispel discouragement and fear.

Despite all of the problems in our world, it is indeed inspiring to observe charity or the pure love of Christ in the lives of those who *choose* to help bolster the faith of others. Won't you please join with PSI in this exciting adventure? Your support through donations provides the resources to increase the number of newsletters mailed quarterly, to attend seminars and conferences, and to publish—and now—to branch out with new publications. A self-addressed envelope is enclosed with this issue for your convenience to update your subscription and, if possible, to add a little extra for those who may not be able to contribute in a monetary form. May we work together in this goal to keep our promise “to assist in bolstering our faith.” 



**glyph quotes** *And they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel. —2 Nephi 6:55 [LDS 9:26]*

By Eric English

Restoring things has long been popular, but seems to have gained in popularity in recent years in the realm of home ownership. Some of the most watched shows on TV include such titles as *Fixer Upper*, *Rehab Addict*, *Flip or Flop*, and the list goes on. Each one takes a different approach but with the same goal in mind, fixing up and restoring a house that is worn down or in some state of disrepair.


One of the prevalent themes of The Book of Mormon is the fact that our God is in the restoration business also. But his approach to restoration is far superior to adding a new coat of paint or repairing a wall or foundation that is crumbling. Our God

defines his plan of restoration in very clear and simple terms in the nineteenth chapter of Alma. In this passage, Alma counsels his son Corianton and teaches him about the resurrection. He explains that the purpose of the resurrection is to fulfill the plan that God has had since the very beginning to restore mankind.

We learn that God has planned to counteract the effects of sin through restoring the soul back to a perfect body, that he has planned to restore all of creation to “its proper order,” and that ultimately he desires to restore all of mankind to a right relationship with him for eternity. Alma goes into great

detail to explain how God’s restoration plan satisfies the demands of justice and the grace of mercy. He also shows us that there will still be a judgment for each of us based upon our choices and actions; that we are ultimately our own judge based upon the agency that God has given each one of us. Alma said, “For behold, they are their own judges, whether to do

good or do evil” (Alma 19:70 [LDS 41:7]).

The Book of Mormon truly is a restoration manual. Not only does it clearly explain God’s great plan to restore all mankind to him, but it was and remains a crucial component to his plan to restore his church in these latter days and it contributes to his promise to restore the house of Israel. 

## Join with us in these new projects!

### **The Adventures of Beezrom: Book of Mormon Stories for Children**

Originally a feature page in *glyph notes* for the last five years, Beezrom’s adventures are **now available** as a stand-alone book and is a wonderful gift for children ages 5 through 10. Take note **grandmothers!** This professionally done book is a super gift for grandchildren. Introduce them to the prophet Nephi, the great king Mosiah, church leader Alma, missionary Ammon, and others. Each chapter can be read as a stand-alone story or as the next installment in the larger story of Book of Mormon history.

Best of all, the book is spiral bound for easy reproduction and each chapter has an activity to enhance the lesson, making it ideal for use in Sunday schools or home schools, camps, or other outreach purposes. (In fact, 50 copies are already on their way to minister to the children in Kenya!)

**Already available** at the Restoration Bookstore and The Book of Mormon Foundation.

### **glyph notes Online**

One of our goals is to put all past issues of *glyph notes* online. The years of valued information and positive testimony found in *glyph notes* will be easy to access, and puzzling questions can be answered in a timely and meaningful way. We now mail around 2500 issues of *glyph notes*; online we can reach more readers, especially the younger generations so used to receiving information in this format.

### **Devotional Book**

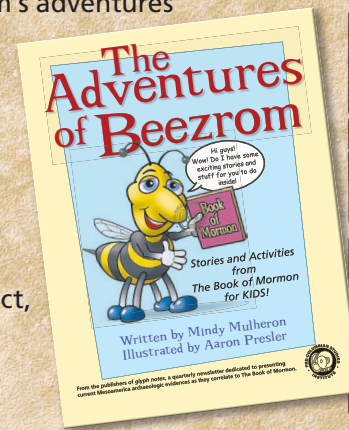
Another immediate goal is to publish articles from the *glyph notes*’ column “glyph quotes” as a collection to provide strength and practical help in our daily walk with God. Like “Doubt not, but be believing,” “Opposition in all things,” “Suffer none of these things to enter into your heart,” “This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God,” and “Be steadfast and immovable.”

Authors include Kevin Anderson, Eric English, Joy Muir, Clyde Noren, Sherrie Kline Smith, and others.

### **Compilation of Many Articles from *glyph notes* into a Book**

One other goal for PSI is publishing a compilation of selected articles from *glyph notes* that explore archaeological, epigraphic, and scientific evidences about The Book of Mormon. Many of the articles provide a look at the amazing parallels between The Book of Mormon account and current archaeological evidence for the Maya and Olmec in Mesoamerica, supplying ample evidence of the truth of The Book of Mormon and its testimony of Christ. These articles will be quite useful for Sunday school classes, personal study, and sermon preparation and can help turn faith into knowledge.

*Please share with us in these exciting avenues of outreach with your prayers and financial support.*



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## Devoted In Memoriam: Margaret Noren

Pre-Columbian Studies Institute (PSI) has lost another cornerstone in the passing of Margaret Noren on September 13, 2016. Margaret and her husband Clyde Noren were among the first volunteers in 1994 when PSI came into existence. Clyde preceded her in death in 2013. Together, their contributions to PSI were integral in forming a solid foundation for the institute, and their talents were greatly appreciated.

The word “devoted” aptly describes Margaret’s character and was easily observed in her role as a companion, as a friend, and as a co-worker.


**Devoted** (Thesaurus: English):  
*Loyal, dedicated, dutiful, faithful,  
staunch, committed, caring, loving,  
supportive, enthusiastic*

Margaret served as secretary for several years, writing letters of thank you and appreciation in behalf of the organization. She was a staunch supporter of The Book of Mormon along with her husband. They attended seminars and conferences to glean information that could be used in witness for this precious book. Margaret

taught classes for the children at many Book of Mormon Days sponsored by PSI. As a teacher of special education in the public schools, her expertise, caring, loving, and enthusiastic nature was reflected in all her endeavors.

Traveling to Mesoamerica to visit the lands of The Book of Mormon was also important to Margaret. Her dedication and commitment to learn more about the book and to gain greater insights is reflected best in her response to family discouragement to travel in her later years because of recurring health issues.

Her quick response was, “if I die in the jungle, I will die happy. I want to go and I need to go.” On one trip to Mesoamerica, Margaret injured her foot and ankle. The injury slowed her determination only slightly in getting the most from the experience. It was not until she returned to the United States that she learned that she had actually broken her foot. Margaret nurtured an enduring spirit.

The words from Proverbs 3:15, “She is more precious than rubies” apply to Margaret. Indeed, she was a jewel in the eyes of Pre-Columbian Studies Institute, and will be greatly missed. 



*Margaret, and her husband Clyde, traveled on several PSI Tours. This was taken at the site of Becan, January 1999.*