

SECTION 4: PROPHECY AND SCRIPTURE (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

Editor's Note: This is a summary of the full paper, Section 4: Prophecy and Scripture, available http://www.fairlds.org/DNA_Evidence_for_Book_of_Mormon_Geography/. This paper was last updated 13 September 2008.

This document is a partial analysis of the scholarly merits of the evidence and research used by Rodney Meldrum¹ in his firesides and DVD presentation, *DNA Evidence for Book of Mormon Geography*.² Neither FAIR nor this document take any position on the geographic location of Book of Mormon events.³ It is important, however, that Meldrum's theories be analyzed according to the same standards by which other Book of Mormon geography theories are evaluated. To avoid confusion, this paper refers to Meldrum's geographic model as the Limited North American Model, or LNAM.⁴ This document is just one in a series of such analytical documents.

In this document we examine the use to which Meldrum puts the statements and prophecies of Joseph Smith, other prophets, and scripture in general. This examination addresses, specifically, Part 4 of the DVD presentation, which is titled "The Promised Land: Scriptural Evidence Indicating the 'Promised Land' of the Book of Mormon" and Part 5, titled "Prophecies and Promises: Book of Mormon Qualifications."

The DVD presentation attempts to use a kind of "scripture chain" to establish the location of the Book of Mormon lands. The chain presented in the DVD is essentially as follows:

¹ This paper follows the scholarly custom of referring to an individual, at first reference, by full name and then subsequently referring to the individual by last name only. We fully recognize Rodney as a brother in the gospel, but in discussing secular issues (such as scholarly research and geographic models) it was felt that continually prefacing his name or the name of any other referenced scholar or individual with "Brother" or "Sister," while accurate, would distract from the readability of the paper.

² Rodney Meldrum, *DNA Evidence for Book of Mormon Geography: New scientific support for the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon; Correlation and Verification through DNA, Prophetic, Scriptural, Historical, Climatological, Archaeological, Social, and Cultural Evidence* (Rodney Meldrum, 2008). The DVD is in sections; citations in this paper reference the DVD's section number and title, followed by an approximate time stamp from the DVD.

³ FAIR recognizes that faithful individuals and scholars can honestly disagree on where Book of Mormon events took place; there is no revealed or officially accepted geography. FAIR provides an online reference to over 60 different geographic models at http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon_geography (click on Book of Mormon Geographical Models).

⁴ Meldrum's model places Book of Mormon peoples in an area roughly covering the Atlantic seaboard to the Rocky Mountains. This name was chosen as descriptive of the general model. We recognize that Meldrum may pick a different name at some point and would invite him to do so.

1. Missouri is the New Jerusalem (established using the D&C)⁵
2. The New Jerusalem is Zion (established using the Articles of Faith)⁶
3. Missouri is the Land of Promise (established using D&C 57:1–3)⁷
4. The New Jerusalem will be upon “this land” (where the prophet was standing, relying upon Ether 13:6)⁸
5. The Land of Promise is a “choice land” (“a land where people would choose to live,” relying upon 2 Nephi 1:5)⁹
6. The choice land will be lifted up by God above all other nations because God approves of the political system (“nation”) on the choice land (established using 1 Nephi 13:30–31)¹⁰
7. The gentiles mentioned in 1 Nephi 13 are Joseph Smith’s ancestors (American colonists) because he brought the book forth spoken of in the chapter¹¹
8. Where the Book of Mormon comes forth will be a land of liberty with no kings, fortified against all other nations, and God will be the King of the people of the land (established using 2 Nephi 10:11–14)¹²

This chain of reasoning supposedly provides sturdy, interlocking support and protection for the idea that the Book of Mormon took place in the present-day United States of America. Only a few of these links will be examined in this summary; a fuller exposition is provided in the full paper.

ZION, THE NEW JERUSALEM, AND THE LAND OF PROMISE

The presentation’s first link is unassailable; it is certainly true that the city of New Jerusalem will be built in Jackson County, Missouri.¹³ The problems crop up beginning with the second link. Note that it tries to equate the New Jerusalem with Zion. While this is true in some cases, we must remember that there are many uses of the term “Zion.” Bruce R. McConkie provided a good overview that showed six different uses for the term.¹⁴ The presentation, however, only recognizes one use for the term: as a synonym for “New

⁵ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, “Promised Land,” 0:00-2:00.

⁶ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, “Promised Land,” 2:01-3:00.

⁷ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, “Promised Land,” 3:01-4:00.

⁸ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, “Promised Land,” 3:30-4:45.

⁹ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, “Promised Land,” 4:40-5:15.

¹⁰ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, “Promised Land,” 6:00-7:34.

¹¹ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 1:12.

¹² Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 1:12-5:00.

¹³ See D&C 84:1-4.

¹⁴ See Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, second edition (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 854-855.

Jerusalem.” This places the chain in serious trouble—the New Jerusalem is Zion only in some senses, not all.

In his third chain link Meldrum asserts that Missouri is the land of promise, and that it is tied to the land of promise spoken of in the Book of Mormon. Missouri is certainly *a* land of promise. The prophets and apostles have consistently been clear, however, that Missouri is not the *only* land of promise, nor the only area to which Book of Mormon promises apply.¹⁵ Meldrum’s assertion that Missouri is the same as the promised land of the Nephites is directly at odds with such statements.

In today’s world “America” means the great land of hope and liberty, the United States of America. But Meldrum does not recognize that this usage has not always been followed—even by Americans! Noah Webster’s dictionary from 1828 defined “America” as synonymous with what we, today, call the western hemisphere.¹⁶ Yet Meldrum tries to state that the land of promise is located in what is now the United States of America.

The DVD distorts the meaning of the Doctrine and Covenants when it insists that because the Nephites had a land of promise and the Saints in Missouri had a land of promise, that they must be one and the same. This can’t be the case, because those same Saints also received *other* lands of promise, as taught by the prophets. The term “land of promise” refers to whatever land the Lord has granted to His people, and upon which they are commanded to gather.

A CHOICE LAND

The DVD presentation uses the term “choice land” in a very unusual way to refer to the United States: a “land where people would choose to live.”¹⁷ This definition risks offending those who choose to live in other places (such as Brazil, the Philippines, Italy, or Japan) since it implies that no one would “choose” to live anywhere but the United States. Such a view is hardly compatible with our international Church, whose leaders have repeatedly encouraged members to *choose* to stay and raise their families in their country of origin—to build up Zion where they are. “Choice,” rather, means “select, precious, very valuable.”¹⁸

The United States of America is one of God’s gifts to mankind. It is a land of great value, and its liberties are precious beyond measure. It is the chosen home of millions, and millions more would like to call it home. But that is not the point when we are considering claims about where Book of Mormon events took place. According to many Church leaders, claims about the choice land to *all* of North and South America, not just what the LNAM proposes.

Meldrum’s argument hinges on the claim that the United States is all that is referred by the Book of Mormon phrase “this choice land.” Restricting the label to just the United

¹⁵ The full version of this paper provides a dozen authoritative statements in this regard.

¹⁶ Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 volumes (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v., “America.”

¹⁷ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 4, “Promised Land,” 5:10.

¹⁸ Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v., “choice.”

States is not consistent with statements by prophets and apostles¹⁹ and the scriptures don't teach it. For example, one commonly misunderstood passage in the Book of Mormon is the following:

And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even *unto the seed of my brethren*, who were *in the promised land*. (1 Nephi 13:12, emphasis added)

This passage is generally interpreted as referencing Christopher Columbus “discovering” America.²⁰ This does not mean he discovered the United States of America, however. History shows that Columbus never made it even as far north as Mexico; he first made landfall in what is now the Bahamas.²¹

So, 1 Nephi 13:12 cannot be talking about *just* the United States, because some of the lands discussed *cannot be* the United States. Of course the United States is included in these promises, and as the cradle of the Restoration is one of the choice parts of the choice lands. The choice lands, as the prophets and apostles have taught, occupy most or all of the hemisphere—not because people choose to live there (though they do), but because they are precious.

EQUATING THE PROMISED LAND WITH THE UNITED STATES

Relying upon his scripture chain, Meldrum boldly states that “the promised land is the United States of America.”²² The chain of scriptures established by Meldrum to prove that every reference to a blessing upon a promised land refers to, and only to, the United States doesn't exist. Yet, he steers his audience toward just such a conclusion, asking “Anybody want to take a guess what land we're talking about?” An audience member answers “USA” and Meldrum replies “OK. The only nation that fulfills every Book of Mormon requirement to be the promised land is the United States of America.”²³ It is bothersome that not only is Meldrum in error, but he leads others into error as well.

It is troubling when Meldrum declares, “the promised land is the United States of America.”²⁴ At another point in the presentation he elaborates, “I'm not just trying to be

¹⁹ See the full paper for specific examples of such statements.

²⁰ The first known application of these verses to Columbus was a footnote in Orson Pratt's 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon [Nephi L. Morris, July 1, 1928, radio address, reproduced in *Deseret News* (July 7, 1928)]. Other authors who have made the association include Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 427, and Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 577.

²¹ Meldrum mistakenly claims that Columbus arrived in Cuba. See Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 7, “Weather and Climate,” 1:30.

²² Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 8:50.

²³ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 5:00-5:15.

²⁴ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 8:50.

rah-rah here. This is from revelation. This is from the scriptures.”²⁵ He insists that *his* reading “is from revelation,” and so to differ with him is to be cast in the role of rebel against the revealed word. But what is being presented is not the revealed word; it is Meldrum’s word, and it is wrong.

WHAT KIND OF LIBERTY?

What kind of liberty did the Book of Mormon have in mind for the promised land? Jacob explains in one of his discourses in 2 Nephi:

Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are *free to act for yourselves*—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life.
(2 Nephi 10:23, emphasis added)

The Book of Mormon authors were very concerned about “freedom,” but Meldrum makes the mistake of presuming that what the Nephites thought was important when they said “liberty” is what *he* thinks is important. It isn’t. The important question is how did the Nephites understand it? When Mosiah decided to set up the reign of the judges, he told the people that he wished to do so because it would be fairer. But, Mosiah did not think the existing system was unfair to the people—he thought it was unfair to the kings!²⁶ The “inequality” he wants to get rid of is the *greater* responsibility borne by the kings for the spirituality of the people.

This is exactly backward from how a modern US citizen would think about it (or a US citizen in Joseph Smith’s day), but Mosiah’s reasoning makes perfect sense when we understand what kind of freedom he valued—it was the freedom to be responsible for one’s own acts, “to act for yourselves,” as Jacob put it.

The Book of Mormon doesn’t even seem to think that having a democracy is necessary for this freedom. Alma agreed with Mosiah who said it would be good that we “should always have kings to rule over” us if certain conditions of righteousness were met.²⁷ The Book of Mormon does not talk of political liberty as is embodied in the United States, but of moral liberty—the ability to make one’s own choices and be responsible to God for those choices.

LOCATING ZARAHEMLA

The LNAM also appeals to D&C 125:3, in which the Lord tells Joseph to have the Saints “build up a city unto my name upon the land opposite the city of Nauvoo, and let the name of Zarahemla be named upon it.”²⁸ “When I show people this,” Meldrum tells us,

²⁵ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 5:10-5:25.

²⁶ See Mosiah 29:30-32 and note that the sins and iniquities would be visited upon the heads of the people, not the kings.

²⁷ See Mosiah 23:8 and 29:13.

²⁸ This passage is discussed in Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B.H. Roberts, volume 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1972), 311-312.

a lot of times they don't believe that this is real. But in Doctrine and Covenants section 125, the Lord gave a revelation to Joseph....This is God saying Zarahemla. Now, is it the same Zarahemla? We don't know that for sure. But one thing I do know is that when God names places...it means something.²⁹

Notice the cautionary remark at the beginning of the statement: We are not sure that this scripture means that God has identified the area across from Nauvoo as the Nephite Zarahemla. Unfortunately, within ninety seconds, the presentation has already transformed an uncertainty into a revealed truth:

Now, this is the Book of Mormon geographic, what I call, map anchors. These are places that you can put in there that are, *by revelation, known to be firm places* for establishing a geographic map of the Book of Mormon...we *know where Zarahemla is, from the revelation* we just saw.³⁰

Meldrum was correct in the first instance—we have no way of knowing if the Lord's intent was to identify the city across from Nauvoo as the site of the Nephite Zarahemla, and many reasons to be cautious about such a conclusion. But, he has now declared that this is an “anchor...by revelation, known to be firm...from the revelation.” Meldrum has again asserted that his interpretation of this scripture is certain—that we *know* his view is right.

Unfortunately, it is not his place to provide authoritative interpretations of scripture, especially when no prophet or apostle has read this verse as he has.³¹ It is fine for a person to propose Book of Mormon geographies that span the globe, if that is their predilection, but it is inappropriate for a private member to claim that we have revelatory certainty when apostles and prophets have taught otherwise.

CONCLUSION

The material which treats prophecy and revelation is relatively simple—the Book of Mormon's teachings are quite clear, and there can be little doubt about what Joseph Smith and later prophets and apostles taught. Even a brief review shows them to differ with Meldrum's reading on many points. Many points that the DVD claims as facts firmly established by revelation are mere opinions that face scriptural and geographical difficulties.

Again, this paper is a summary of information presented in the full paper, *Section 4: Prophecy and Scripture*. If you are interested in a longer exposition on the matters covered here, please see the full paper. The full paper also provides additional points at which the theories in *DNA Evidence for Book of Mormon Geography* should be rejected.

²⁹ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 6:01-7:00.

³⁰ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 5, “Prophecies and Promises,” 8:12-8:45, emphasis added.

³¹ The full version of this paper provides two examples of statements by prophets and apostles that indicate nobody knows the location of Zarahemla.