

# Seas and Seashores in the Book of Mormon

by

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The East Sea is not the Atlantic Ocean, the narrow neck of land is not the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and the whole land northward is not North America. We must let the land and legends speak for themselves, and not over-constrain our search for a solution to Mormon's puzzle by assumptions that have no relevance to Mormon's perspective of his world. The archaeologists can show us the candidate locations. The native writings and legends can provide residual names and exact locations. And, the Book of Mormon tells us the places and activities of most interest to us with great detail about their inter-relationships.

Almost all of the relevant places have now been found by following this approach. One should let the findings guide the search and the findings will make evident the paradigm shifts required to get our minds in line with Mormon's perspective. The present article is not a casual read and to facilitate understanding, one needs a map and the Book of Mormon in hand or on the screen. An excellent zoom-able map can be downloaded free from the website, MormonTopics.com.

The disgusting infighting among the tour guide companies and the book peddlers is presenting a damaging view to the non-Mormon world. Based on Clay Christensen's "Innovator's Dilemma," they will not change their minds until their businesses shut down. To entertain a new idea about their models, could be financially damaging.

The urgency is upon us in this, the bottom of the last inning. Now it is time to prepare the earth for the coming of the Savior. See that our faults and mistakes do not cause others to condemn the things of God.

Yes, the Book of Mormon is a book of faith, but all the faith concepts could be covered very well in just three pages. The rest of the book is for the convincing of Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations. Many good people have rejected the Book of Mormon because they believed their mistaken, misguided, or lying pastors.

Many researchers find ambiguity in Mormon's geographical descriptions – if you are finding ambiguity, you are not walking in Mormon's shoes. A significant measure of confusion has been introduced because "our English world" is not "Mormon's Hebrew world." This was probably intentional and serves the Lord's purposes. The first harvest is for those who will believe on faith. The proof phase follows so that none will be left with a leg to stand on. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Christ's judgment is just.

## Seas and Seashores

In Lehi's Hebrew (New American Standard Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon), there is a word *yam* {yawm} meaning "sea" as in "Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, Dead Sea, Sea of Galilee, sea (general), **mighty river** (Nile), the sea (the great basin in the temple court), seaward, west, **westward**." It would appear that almost any body of water could be called a sea in old Hebrew. Another word, *chowph* {pronounced as khofe}, means "seashore, coast, or shore." It would appear this word could represent the "shore" of any ocean, sea, lake, or reservoir. There is yet another word *saphah* {pronounced as saw-faw'} which means "lip, edge, **shore**, or bank (of cup, sea, river, etc.)." This appears to be the "edge" of any water body, be it a cup, sea, river, stream, or ocean.

Who knows what Mormon's Hebrew was like? We just know that they changed it some and that the roots went back to Lehi's knowledge base at the time Lehi left Jerusalem. We will take advantage of these known definitions to postulate how we may understand Mormon's use of the words "sea" and "seashore", and even "seaward" and "westward." Also, the words "ocean" and "lake" are not found in either the Book of Mormon or the Old Testament.

When discussing postulated geography models with a friend, he was adamant that Joseph Smith and Mormon definitely knew the difference between oceans and inland lakes and that they would have distinguished between "seas" and "inland lakes". Certainly, translating by the "Gift and Power of God", if He so desired, He certainly could have made it so. This friend had too much personal investment in his position to see objectively. He was equating all of Mormon's uses of "seas" with "oceans" – something that we do not do today in English and something they did not do then in Old Testament Hebrew, yet he was unfairly holding Mormon to the requirement to select better words to distinguish "seas as inland lakes" from "seas as oceans." His argument was that Mormon did not distinguish and therefore there must not have been any difference requiring differentiation modifiers.

The author has identified almost all of the Book of Mormon cities by simple pattern recognition: comparing Mormon's names, Old Hebrew definitions, names and their meanings in ancient native writings, names as they appear in modern times, and how these modern names evolved during the Spanish conquest to present times. The Book of Mormon provided the linkages to identify fertile ground to search for the cities in the network.

## Northward – And now, on your left hand, we have the land Desolation

As noted above, in Hebrew, westward, is toward the sea. Standing on the Mediterranean seashore facing toward Israel: **Behind** is *yam* {yawm}, meaning not only sea, but also seaward, west, and **westward**. In **front** we have *qidmah* {kid-maw'}, meaning: forward, front, antiquity, East, in front of, over against, front, on the east of, **east**. On the **left hand** is *smo'wl* {sem-ole'} meaning: the left, the left hand, the left side, left, left hand, and **north** (as one faces east). On the **right hand** we have *yamiyn* {yaw-meen'} meaning right, right hand, right side, right (of direction), **south** (the direction of the right hand when facing east). The Quiché language shares a similar convention with left hand being ceremonial north and right hand being ceremonial south. Once the Land Northward and the Land Southward received their names, their directional relativity loses significance. One can now travel southward from Mexico until he arrives at the Land Northward.

## Sea Divides the Land

Lib built a great city by the **narrow neck of land**, by the place where **the sea divides the land** (Ether 10:20). Some say the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is not where the sea divides the land, but where the land divides the sea. What does Mormon's water feature divide? It divides the land northward which the Nephites called Desolation from the land southward, which was a wilderness the Nephites called Bountiful (Ether 10:21, Alma 22:31). What does this water feature between these two lands look like? Mathematically it can always be approximated as a straight line (see the Mean Value Theorem from Calculus). Mormon calls it a "line" running from the "east" end to the "west sea". The "west sea" is the Pacific Ocean – no credible model states anything different about the west sea. The "east" end is the place where the land Desolation and the land Bountiful no longer share a common boundary – be it a wilderness, a sea, an ocean, or a third country. The length of this dividing line formed by the water feature is "only the distance of a day and a half's journey for a Nephite" (Alma 22:32) – a Nephite, not a marathoner or anyone sharing such a sickness. What is a water feature that looks like a line? The Kaqchikel language defines "river", *raqän ya'*, as "long water" – could that be the needed water feature?

Recall the Hebrew word for **sea**, *yam*, includes a "**mighty river**" and specifically mentions the Nile as an example. Mormon's description, and his linguist roots based in Old Testament Hebrew, give license, to un-shackle ourselves from "isthmus" being the only credible explanation – a shackle that has kept the Mormon lands hidden since Martin Harris lost his farm paying for the publication of the Book of Mormon.

The most credible description of where the "sea divides the land northward from the land Bountiful would be a large river with a tidal estuary. According to Wikipedia, because of the fertility in such regions, about 60-percent of the world's population lives along estuaries and the coast.

This water feature on the west sea was where Hagoth set sail (Alma 63:5). As this water feature was where the lands Desolation and Bountiful share a common boundary, this would also be the Mulekites "place of their first landing" (Alma 22:30-33). After stating that this was "the place of their first landing" in verse 30, Mormon states in verse 31 that they (the Mulekites) "came from there up into the south wilderness (Bountiful)", and then in verse 32 he drops them back down to the west sea when he gives the description of the line which divides Bountiful from the land Desolation as beginning at some point in the east and extending a day and a half's journey (about 30 miles) to the west sea. This west sea connection is reaffirmed in verse 33 where it states that the Nephites had inhabited the land Bountiful from the **east** (boundary?) to the **west sea**. The land Bountiful must border the west sea (Pacific Ocean). And all the action took place within 30 miles of the west sea. This does not give the model developers license to let Hagoth set sail here but require Mulek to land 128 miles away on the gulf of Mexico.

Sorensen jumps immediately to ultra-marathoners and leaves all reality behind. Mormon says a Nephite – any old un-qualified Nephite. He did not say only the fastest of the young bucks who has trained for six months and then about dies at the finish line. If one can't do it today and then again tomorrow on the return trip, then it is out of the ordinary and would require modifiers. In Alma 8:6 when he "had finished his work at Melek he departed thence,

and traveled three days' journey on the north of the land of Melek; and he came to a city which was called Ammonihah." Is anyone going to use Sorenson's misguided logic to say that Alma traveled (3x128=384) 384 miles from Melek to Ammonihah (uphill all the way) in just three days. "It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts (Sherlock Holmes)."

It is very clear that the Mulekites landed on the west seashore. There is no justification for models which place the Mulekites "first" and only "landing place" on the Gulf of Mexico or the Gulf of Honduras. There is simply no first level evidence supporting such models in the Book of Mormon. Those who promulgate such claims use extensive arm waving and many pages to justify their deficient assumptions. Until the author and translator (Mormon and Joseph) surface again, the final word when defending or refuting can and should be accomplished by citing chapter and verse from the Book of Mormon – that is the box this puzzle came in.

No credible models question the west sea landing for Lehi and the west sea departure for Hagoth, nor do they challenge the west sea as being the Pacific Ocean. The Mulekites landed from the west sea. The model developers are trapped. Alma 22:30-33 leaves them no wiggle room. These four simple verses destroy their models. Their models are not anchored in any residual place names. Without any anchors, they scatter city names with impunity across the landscape – defending their choices vehemently when their academic pride is on the line or there is a need to defend their book sales and tour guide routes.

Without the correct landing point, the lands Desolation, Bountiful, and Zarahemla fade back into the jungle. In the wrong drainage, the Sidon River is lost. There is no model. It is almost sad – sad to have spent so much of one's life letting stray facts and academic novelties obscure what the Book of Mormon is saying.

And, it is back to the Book of Mormon to try to find which of their interpretations and assumptions were not correct.

Start looking for a narrow neck of land as something other than an isthmus. Land the Mulekites on the west sea shore, as the book says. Find where the coastal plain and piedmont is thirty miles wide (about a day and a half's journey) from the east wilderness to the west sea (Pacific Ocean). Find a Garden of Eden on the west coast where a civilization of appropriate size and time has left its archaeological footprint. There is but one such site and it is the Cotzumalhuapa Culture on the south coast of Guatemala. Open your eyes and you are looking at the Bountiful piedmont and the land of Zarahemla with the volcanoes Agua (Hanaphu-Amnihu) and Pacaya (K'ib-Riplah) in the background. You will find a people that loves the marimba, who are beautiful weavers, who have left more ancient writings than any other of the peoples in all of North and South America combined, who say their ancestors sailed from a place near Babylonia, a people that has two Mormon missionaries in their modern historical mural in their National Museum of Archeology and Ethnology, a people who has Teancum (Tecum) as their national hero. Their legends of Tecum Uman (the grandson of Tecum) are based on Captain Moroni's dear friend, Teancum.

## **East Sea**

The east sea has been a source of confusion for model developers. The first interpretation has been that the west sea was the Pacific Ocean and the east sea was some gulf on the

Atlantic Ocean. It is an easy trap to fall into, but the models that have resulted are ridiculous as one marches through the many wars. Militarily and logistically such models are nonsense.

Having located almost all of the cities and fortresses by name without the aid of an Atlantic east sea the author is prepared to say what the east sea was. The fortress cities were the easiest to identify using simple pattern recognition. They were Mulek as Mukulick, Lehi as Xe-Lahu, Nephiah as Nahuala', Moroni as Moloni, Manti as A-Mati-tlán, Noah as Chi-nau-tla, Cumeni as Cuajini, Judea as Jutia-pa, and Antiparah as Atiquipake. These fortress cities quite completely surround the Pacific coastal piedmont of Guatemala. The civilization which occupied this area from Olmec or Epi-Olmec times through to terminal Maya is today called the Cotzumalhuapa Culture.

Most of these fortress cities are located in mountain valleys along the backbone of the Sierra Madre Mountains and all are still occupied. They are a mere 200 miles from the nearest waters of the Atlantic Ocean – a bit far for a breechcloth and sandals.

Again, Mormon's description, and his linguist roots based in Old Testament Hebrew as well as our own English language, give license, to un-shackle ourselves from "east sea" as the Atlantic Ocean being the only credible explanation. The words "ocean" or "lake" are not used in the Old Testament. The word "sea" covers it all, be it an inland lake, an ocean, a sea, a mighty river, or the brasen sea and ten lavers of Solomon's temple.

We know the Mediterranean Sea, the Sea of Galilee, and the Dead Sea; now let's get acquainted with Mormon's sea east. All references to the "east sea" are to inland lakes, of which there have been many. And, seashores can be river banks. The valley of Quetzaltenango (fortress Lehi) was a high mountain volcanic lake that drained down the Samalá River (it was buried with ash in about 930 AD when the top blew off Volcano Cerro Quemado. The famous Lake Atitlán is a trapped water impound and drains only by percolation through the substrate. The native name for Antigua Guatemala is Panchoy which means "by the lake" – legends remain that it was once a lake. The fortress city Moroni was by this lake. It was called Moloni by the Mexican warriors, Mek'ina in Quiché, Bulbuxyá in Kaqchiquel, and Almolonga by the conquistadors. There was a lake at Guatemala City (Ammonihah) that is known to have drained in two phases because of the water control structures for irrigation that have been found in the Miraflores (Kaminal Juyú) area. There is Lake A-mati-tlán (Manti). And, on the border with El Salvador is Lake Güija (waters of Sebus). Most, if not all, of these high mountain, volcanic lakes have geothermal hot springs with them. All of these lakes in the mountain valleys are in a straight line along the backbone of the Sierra Madre Mountains.

Which "east sea" is which? Mormon describes how the Nephite lands were separated from the Lamanite lands and goes on to close the loop around Bountiful and Desolation (Alma 22:27-34). The east sea in verse 27 appears to be Lake Amatitlán (Manti).

27 And it came to pass that the king sent a proclamation throughout all the land, amongst all his people who were in all his land, who were in all the regions round about, which was bordering even to the sea, on the east (Amatitlán) and on the west (Pacific Ocean), and which was divided from the land of Zarahemla by a narrow strip of wilderness, which ran from the sea east (Amatitlán) even to the sea west (Pacific Ocean), and round about on the borders of the seashore (Amatitlán), and the borders of the wilderness which was on the north (Sierra Madre Mountains) by the

land of Zarahemla, through the borders of Manti (Amatitlán), by the head of the river Sidon (Michatoya), running (the river that is) from the east towards the west—and thus were the Lamanites and the Nephites divided.

The south wilderness (which blends into the east wilderness and then the north wilderness) extends from the Pacific Coast up to Volcano Pacaya (K'ib, Riplah), around Lake Amatitlán, where it joins the north wilderness (Sierra Madre Mountains) where are found the fortress cities Manti (Amatitlán), Moroni (Moloni/Antigua - land of Gideon), Nephihah (Nahualá), and Lehi (Xe-Lahu). The north wilderness is indeed true north of the lands Zarahemla, Bountiful, and Desolation – all of which have the Pacific Coast (west sea) as their southwest boundary.

Alma 50:8 states that the land of Nephi (Nephi-1, the land of their first inheritance) did run in a straight course from the east sea to the west. This east sea would be Lake Güija (waters of Sebus) and the west would be the Pacific Ocean.

Alma 50:13 states that the city Moroni was by the east sea. This east sea would be the extinct lake at Panchoy (Antigua). Teancum did not head Morianton's group until they had come to the borders of the land Desolation; and there they did head them, by the narrow pass which led by the sea (where the sea divides the land –Samalá River) into the land northward, yea, by the sea, on the west (Pacific) and on the east (extinct lake by fortress Lehi, Quetzaltenango) (Alma 50:34). In Alma 52:11-13, Moroni is fighting by the west sea. This would be on the southern front on the Pacific side. The Nephites were also being harassed by the east sea. That would be the southern front on the east side near Manti (Amatitlán).

The Nephites did multiply and spread, and did go forth from the land southward to the land northward, and did spread insomuch that they began to cover the face of the whole earth, from the sea south (Pacific Ocean where the Guatemala coast runs straight east/west) to the sea north (inland seas at Quetzaltenango, Atitlán, Antigua, and Amatitlán), from the sea west (Pacific) to the sea east (inland lakes) (Helaman 3:8).

Because the Hebrews also called “mighty rivers” seas, an alternate interpretation might be as follows: The Nephites did multiply and spread, and did go forth from the land southward (Zarahemla and Bountiful) to the land northward (Desolation), and did spread insomuch that they began to cover the face of the whole earth, from the sea south (Pacific Ocean where the Guatemala coast runs straight east/west) to the sea north (inland seas at Quetzaltenango, Atitlán, Antigua, and Amatitlán), from the sea west (Samalá River, where the sea divides the land) to the sea east (Michatoya River) (Helaman 3:8).

A source of major confusion is Alma 51:26 which states: “And thus he went on, taking possession of many cities, the city of Nephihah, and the city of Lehi, and the city of Morianton, and the city of Omner, and the city of Gid, and the city of Mulek, all of which were on the east borders by the seashore.” All of these fortress cities have been found and identified. Because of the skewed reference frame which follows the Pacific coastline (Hebrew left hand, right hand), these fortress cities are said to be on the “east borders of the seashore.” They are on the eastern extreme of the greater land Bountiful/Zarahemla, at the north western end of the land, where the line Bountiful/Desolation extends from the east (wilderness) to the west sea (Alma 22:30-33). The “east borders by the seashore” where these fortress cities are located are

the north wilderness. The seashore they are near could be the Samalá River and/or the extinct lake at Quetzaltenango or the present Lake Atitlán.

No amount of intimidation by linguists, archaeologists, anthropologists, or tour guides can deprive one of the right to look for patterns in names, histories, legends, ruins, and topography. To determine how well a proposed model measures up to the standard, all one needs is the proposed real map of real places (established known ruins and modern occupied cities) and the Book of Mormon provides the rest. Don't sell yourself short. You don't need someone to tell you what you are permitted to believe. You are capable of determining the closeness of the fit. An 800 page book will contain a lot of arm waving, trying to convince you of something that is probably based on incorrect assumptions. If it were true, it could be explained most simply by chapter and verse. It is preferred to stay with the Book of Mormon and use its descriptions of where Mormon walked.

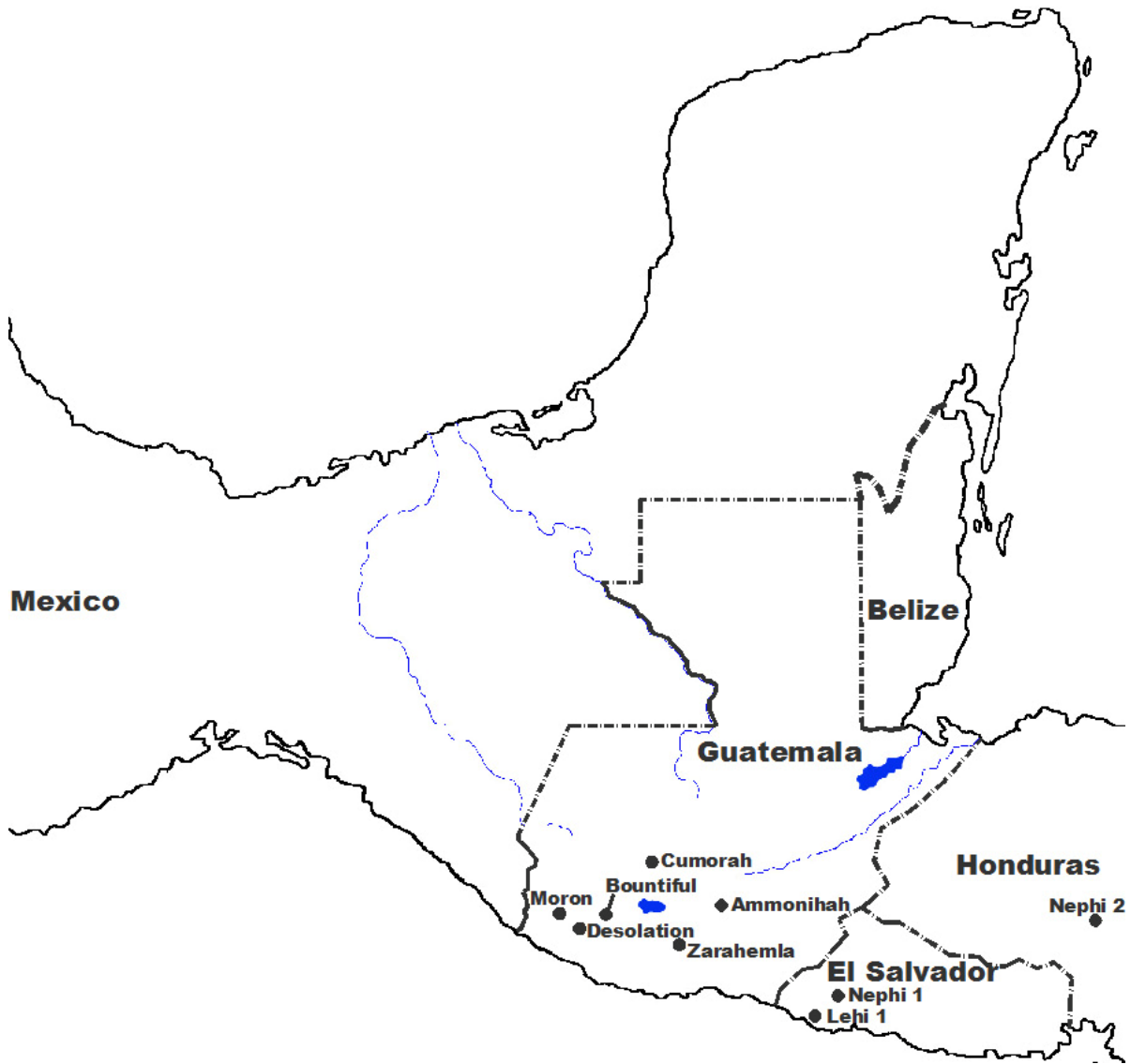
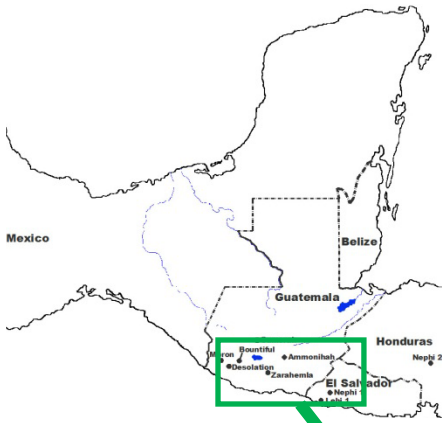


Figure 1. Mormon's lands in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador





○ Extinct Lakes



Figure 2. Existing and extinct lakes. (see zoom-able map at [mormontopics.com](http://mormontopics.com))

References:  
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle