

SECTION 8: CHRONOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Editor's Note: *Due to the brevity of this paper, no executive summary is necessary. See http://www.fairlds.org/DNA_Evidence_for_Book_of_Mormon_Geography/ for more information. This paper was last updated 1 November 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 Meldrum's research and conclusions relative to chronological evidence. This examination addresses, specifically, Part 9 of the DVD presentation, which is titled "Chronological Evidence: Primary Nephite Expansion 100 B.C. to 400 A.D."

The LNAM tries to associate the Nephites with the Hopewell mound builders. The chronological evidence provided by the DVD presentation is very limited in nature, resting almost solely on a supposed parallel between the centuries during which the Hopewell culture flourished and the period during which the Nephites flourished. According to the DVD, this period was between 100 B.C. and 400 A.D.

One of the ways that I sorted this was by the first time that an area was mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Well, it turns out—and I had no idea

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.

about this. How many of you knew that for the first 400 years in the Book of Mormon there were only two cities even mentioned?

I had no idea about that. That's what this is. It was Nephi and Zarahemla. They're the only ones even mentioned.⁵

This parallel is forced, however. The Book of Mormon chronology covers a period from roughly 600 B.C. to 400 A.D. According to the LNAM, the Nephite culture was so limited during its first 400 to 500 years that they only succeeded in establishing two cities. This is not what a careful reading of the Book of Mormon itself would have us understand.

The Book of Mormon text up to the book of Mosiah (which begins around 130 B.C.) comes from the small plates of Nephi. These plates were a religious record, not a political one. Because of the nature of this record, it is not unexpected that virtually nothing at all is said about geography in the small plates, and wars are not detailed, only mentioned in general terms.

The small plates also tell us very little about temporal matters between Nephi's death and Mosiah's flight to the land of Zarahemla. The books of Second Nephi and Jacob are concerned almost exclusively with religious matters. From roughly 421 to 130 B.C. the small plates cover less than five modern printed pages.⁶ With so little space devoted to almost three hundred years, it is unrealistic to presume that the absence of city names means there were actually no cities.

Even though there may be a lack of named cities in those few pages, there is some textual evidence that there actually were cities. Jarom recounts that "we...began to fortify our cities" against Lamanite attacks around 399 B.C. and also notes that the "Lamanites...were exceedingly more numerous than they of the Nephites" (Jarom 1:6-8). It is reasonable to conclude that if the Nephites had cities to fortify and the Lamanites were more numerous than them, the Lamanites must have at least as many and probably many more cities.⁷

The DVD presentation claims that:

The population was kind of going along and it reached a critical mass and it started to grow exponentially. And as it was growing, this is what caused the primary Nephite expansion on the Promised Land. And that primary Nephite expansion began 100 years before Christ and ended at 400 years after Christ.⁸

This conclusion likely owes more to the thin record before Mosiah rather than the facts on the ground. The Lamanites outnumbered the Nephites, but Jarom also reports that the Nephites "multiplied exceedingly and spread upon the face of the land" (Jarom 1:8).

⁵ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 9, "Chronological Evidence," 0:20-0:50.

⁶ This paper uses the date estimates used in the footings of the modern LDS edition of the Book of Mormon.

⁷ Since the Nephites are outnumbered by the Lamanites, this also doesn't bode well for Meldrum's claim that the Lamanites were nomads. (For this claim, see the review of the DVD's section on *Buffalo Evidence*.) Non-agrarian, nomadic societies are unlikely to maintain the population numbers or density required to numerically threaten the agrarian Nephites.

⁸ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 9, "Chronological Evidence," 1:15-1:40.

Furthermore, the fierce and repeated wars described throughout the end of the small plates make it unlikely that there were only small populations at this time.⁹

Unfortunately, the chronological evidence used to bolster the LNAM is forced and weak; it does nothing to further the claims made by the DVD.

⁹ See, for example, Omni 1:3.