

“You Don’t See What I See”

Response to “Examining the Environmental Explanation of the Book of Mormon,”
Gary F. Novak’s review of *Joseph Smith’s Response to Skepticism*.¹

By Robert N. Hullinger

“As far as Mormon scholarship is concerned,” wrote William Mulder in 1976, “I am, as they would say in church, ‘inactive.’” This explained why he had produced little in publishing on Mormon history since 1958. “I am a Rip Van Winkel lost in slumber for twenty years (dreaming much of that time in far-off India), but awakening now to a changed scene at home.”²

I borrow Mulder’s words to introduce my belated response to Gary F. Novak’s 1995 review of my book(s)³: I’ve been “inactive” in Mormon studies since the publication of the 1980 edition, with a brief startup to help with the 1992 edition. Now, like Mulder, I have awakened to a “changed scene” in Mormon studies, and I encounter some of that change in Novak’s review.

I’ll respond to his critique in the following subject order:

- A. His initial assessment
- B. Historicity
- C. My reading of the Book of Mormon
- D. Novak’s misreading of Wesley P. Walters’s 1980 Foreword
- E. Explanation of Revelation
- F. Indians or Lamanites?
- G. The Ethan Smith theory
- H. Ancient American geography and antiquities

I. Environmental Explanations Alive and Well

A. His initial assessment

Mr. Novak did not like what he read. The book is: “less than consuming reading”; “simplistic”; “limitations in Hullinger’s research base are not uncommon”; “represents only a fraction of the bad reasoning and sloppy reading”; “if we cannot expect accuracy, we can at least expect charity”; “poisoning the well against any possible refutation of the Ethan Smith theory”; “revealing.” The fact is, he did discover a couple mistakes.

CONCESSION #1 Inaccuracy

I confused the picture of the ten lost tribes on p. 2 [1992 ed.] by referring to the “remaining descendants of the lost tribes of Israel” as the “American Indians.” I got back on track on p. 4: “When Indians, Jews, and gentiles were persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, then the Lord would bring Israel’s lost tribes back from their hiding places (Morm. 5:12) *American Indians were a segment broken off from these ten tribes.*” [Empasis added here.]

CONCESSION #2 Editing Error

Novak caught an editing error that was repeated in both editions and needed cor-

rection. I had mistakenly cited 2 Nephi 15:15-18 as support for the statement: “The Book of Mormon would also help in bringing Jews to accept Jesus as Messiah... If they accept this, then God would restore them to their own land; for unbelief has kept them dispersed” [1980 ed., p. 6; 1992 ed., p. 3]. The citation should have been 2 Nephi 25:15-19.⁴

CONCESSION #3

Limited updating

Except for some updated notes, citations of some Signature Books published research since 1980, there was little updating. The claim is not made “to inform the reader of the relevant literature since 1980.” In that, the reviewer is correct.

ONE HE DID NOT CATCH

On p. 122, 1992 edition, [p. 121, 1980 edition] for the second Book of Mormon citation, I cited 2 Ne. 18:5-6; it should be 2 Ne. 28:5-6.

In particular, Novak thought I should at least have noted Bushman’s *Joseph Smith and Skepticism* as “relevant to the title of Hullinger’s book, if not its content. *Joseph Smith and Skepticism* is not cited at all.” In fact, in the 1992 edition, I wrote: “Richard Bushman, a Mormon historian, suggested ways in which Smith himself responded to skepticism but did not discuss this subject in the context of the Book of Mormon. He found that the first vision story was designed to meet rationalistic demands for evidence.” The footnote reads: “Bushman found that William Paley’s arguments were used—that

Smith was a neutral observer of the vision and became committed to it in spite of persecution and personal loss.”⁵

B. Historicity

Novak asked, “Why bother reviewing a book that can best be described as less than consuming reading?” Because, he wrote, it questions the “historical authenticity” of the Book of Mormon. In fact, Hullinger “doesn’t try to weigh the evidence for or against the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon.” Books like this “make it more difficult to accept varying and conflicting interpretations of how Joseph may have, knowingly or unknowingly, fabricated the Book of Mormon.” However, there was no chance that such acceptance was possible. Novak maintains that “Joseph Smith’s own story of how he received and translated the Book of Mormon remains the most coherent and sensible explanation.”

I do not see “historical authenticity” as a category applicable to the Book of Mormon. It is a claim set forth by Joseph Smith, Jr. He invites us to accept his story that an angel revealed to him an ancient record, which is unavailable, which no one could understand, which he translated by divine aid, which he offers us as the Book of Mormon. Beyond that, Smith “said that it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the book [sic] of Mormon, & also said that it was not expedient for him to relate these things &c.”⁶ Accepting the Book of Mormon is a “faith experience,” which cannot be validated in usual ways that test

historical authenticity.

C. My reading of the Book of Mormon

My purpose in researching the book was to understand how the Book of Mormon could fulfill its goals as stated on its title page. In assessing those intentions, however, I found that they could not be accurately discovered apart from Joseph Smith's authorship. I was primarily concerned with the ongoing rationalistic debates and assessing, as far as possible, how Joseph Smith reacted to, or participated in, those debates. As historicity issues arose out of this procedure and understanding, they were not ignored. The real point at issue seems to be that Novak sees the Book of Mormon's purposes engraved in gold in antiquity, whereas I see the text revealing *Joseph Smith's* purposes. What moved Smith to want to defend God I touch upon, but the deeper search into his personal dynamics was left to others.⁷

Novak objects to the idea that anyone could discover Smith's intentions having only a "text or text analogue" that shows a "remarkably simple, or simplistic," method that has been "largely discredited." Citing David E. Bohn's essay, Novak seems to be getting at thoughts like this: "It is not at all clear that it is possible to verify historical accounts objectively against historical evidence or the historical record. The point certainly should not be conceded on the basis of self-evidence.... Rather it is arrived at through interpretation that is always led by some kind of preunderstanding. In a sense, visual objects, like a text, are 'read' and 'interpreted.'"⁸

"The historical record does not interpret itself: it is the reader who explores the possible meanings of the texts, who interprets the text from within the language of his or her own time. Hence history is necessarily in part a discovery and in part an invention or creation."⁹

Novak tries to show why it was unlikely that I could discover Smith's motive for writing the Book of Mormon. Bohn's thesis, however, shows the strength of the environmental orientation in understanding how the Book of Mormon could achieve its goals. The nineteenth century culture—its social, political ideals, and religious concerns, and hopes—provide the background for people to assimilate the Book of Mormon's message into their "previous understanding" of the biblical message.

Next, Novak questions the probability of discovering Smith's motives because everyone has a bias, or "preunderstanding." Only if I could apply literary analyses would there even be a *theoretical* possibility—but an *actual* impossibility—to discover Smith's motives. Literary analyses are important tools in the scholar's toolkit, but I think that Smith meant for the Book of Mormon to be "remarkably simple" to read. Novak's way of reading it seems to deny its simplicity. After including Isaiah 12-24 (2 Ne. 12-24), Nephi explained that Isaiah was hard to understand, but when he, Nephi, prophesied, his words would be plain and simple to understand.¹⁰ Throughout the Book of Mormon the point is that the message of salvation has been and remains the same as it was in the beginning,

from age to age, to the last days. Literary analyses may add to understanding the purposes, but they do not change the “plain and simple” message. The book itself proclaims its purposes.

The Book of Mormon title page goals have outside corroboration in Joseph Smith’s revelations, which repeat the goals.¹¹ It is not only a text or text analogue that reveals the purposes of a text claiming to be ancient, but also Joseph Smith’s 19th century revelations dictated to scribes as coming directly from God. In the July 1828 revelation, given after the loss of the 116 page translation effort, and in those given after the publication of the Book of Mormon in March 1830, the book’s goals are given in “plain” words that *do* “account for the arrangement of the various speeches, the changing setting in which they are presented, the character of the people to whom they are attributed, and the audience to whom they are addressed.” The resulting understanding seems pretty much the same.

D. Novak’s misreading of Wesley P. Walters’s 1980 Foreword

Since Novak’s review included both books, he started with the 1980 edition. My expression of “special gratitude” to Wesley P. Walters for “his standard of scholarship and detail,” Novak thought, was “revealing.” Walters was “the notorious anti-Mormon.” The book, therefore, will follow “a well-established route.” There may be those who dislike Walters’s work, but he won grudging admiration for his painstaking research from

Richard L. Bushman and Larry C. Porter in their reviews of a book he co-authored with H. Michael Marquardt.¹²

Then Novak misrepresented Walters, leaving one to conclude that Walters made an assertion without any specific support, making it sound as if “the notorious anti-Mormon” was only lukewarm about my findings. Novak wrote: “Although Walters finds some reasons *not to* [emphasis added] ‘accept Mr. Hullinger’s main argument,’ he still finds ‘this work of great value.’”¹³ But Walters did not give “some reasons not to ‘accept’” my “main argument.” Here’s what Walters wrote: “Mr. Hullinger provides a strong and considered case for Smith as a defender of revealed religion against the attacks of the infidel...Even if one does not accept Mr. Hullinger’s main argument, he will still find this work of great value.”¹⁴ Walters gave his opinion that a person *might not accept my main argument, but still—in his opinion—find this work of great value.*”

Novak continued: “Walters does not indicate exactly what that evidence [“strong and considered case”] is.”¹⁵ To the contrary, Walters named several points of the evidence: 1) “His [Hullinger’s] study of Thomas Paine’s deistic propositions and Smith’s answer to them in the Book of Mormon is very important.” 2) “Smith does seem to have had some idea of removing criticism from biblical materials when he turned to revising the Bible soon after completing the Book of Mormon.” 3) “Deistic objections to language as an unfit medium for revelation...explain why Smith, elsewhere and in his book,

stressed the purely mechanical means of translating by ‘interpreters’” 4) “Deists found the Bible unreliable because the authors of some biblical books are unknown. That explains why Smith has every author in the book of Mormon named and precisely dated.”¹⁶

E. Explanation of Revelation

Novak: “Hullinger does not provide an explanation of revelation. Revelation is simply a means to Joseph’s end. Joseph invented revelations when it suited his purposes in discrediting or responding to Skepticism.”¹⁷ My own definition had no significance in the analysis. The book is about Smith’s response to skepticism. Paine’s *Age of Reason*¹⁸ served as a catechism of such thinking. In chapters 3-4, I traced the spread of rationalistic and deistic thought. On p. 25, I summarized the influence of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke on deism: “Revelation teaches matters which reason may not have discovered but which reason can comprehend. Revelation, therefore, communicates knowledge.” I identified several cultural and religious developments as avenues of skeptical thinking by which Joseph Smith may have tuned into this far-reaching debate. Chapters 9-12 suggest how Smith’s development of his ideas of revelation seemed to neutralize many objections of skeptics. It was the contrast between *Smith’s* and *rationalism’s* definitions of revelation that was at issue.

Paine wrote that “Revelation is “something communicated immediately from God to man. Another person’s account of revelation is only hearsay. Language is ruled out as

a medium of God’s word. Instruments of human communication cannot convey God’s word because there is no universal language, translations are subject to error, and copyists and printers make mistakes or purposely alter words. Revelation must disclaim any contradiction, for that shows the story is false. Agreement does not make a story true, since the whole may be false, but disagreement absolutely disproves it.”¹⁹

F. Indians or Lamanites?²⁰

Novak made my identification of American Indians with Lamanites a major point of his review. I cited D&C 3:20 in support of my assertion that the Book of Mormon “would inform the Indians of God’s promises.” He objects: “While it does mention the Lamanites, the scripture [D&C 3:20] says nothing of Indians.” Farther on: “There is no easy identification, within the Book of Mormon itself, of Lamanites with Indians. This may be a fine distinction, and not precisely central to Hullinger’s thesis, but it...permeates his work in a subtle way and actually makes a difference for how one understands the Book of Mormon.”²¹ It’s a criterion that Novak does not apply across the board, however. Richard L. Bushman, in both his 1984 and 2005 books,²² uses “Lamanites” and “Indians” in much the same manner as I.

Unfortunately, Novak misread the text and misrepresented what I wrote. To use his words, that “permeates his work in a subtle way and actually makes a difference for how one understands” his review. To demonstrate,

I'll use the paragraph he cited (found on pp. 2-3 of the 1992 text) and emphasize the points he critiques.

The Book of Mormon would speak to native Americans, to Jews, to gentiles, to the world. It **would inform the Indians⁵ of God's promises** (D&C 3:20) and covenants with their ancestors, that they were members of the House of Israel (ibid., Morm. 7:1-2). It would convince them of the error of their forbearers' [sic] traditions and iniquity (Alma 37:8-9; Mosiah 28:12). If Indians were to learn how their Nephite-Lamanite ancestors slaughtered each other until only Lamanites were left, they might believe the gospel that missionaries would bring them (Morm. 5:9, 11, 14). The Book of Mormon would convince them that the message of the Bible is true, and when they believed the biblical message, they also would accept the Book of Mormon (1 Ne. 13:39). When the Indians accepted the new scriptures, they would come to a knowledge of God and the redemption of Jesus Christ.⁶ **The Book of Mormon would lead them to end their hatred of others, to befriend each other, and to stop their contentions** (Alma 26:9). Their faith in Jesus and restored covenant with God would bring peace and thus fulfill God's promises to Israel. In return, the Indians would become a "delightful people" (W. of M 8).

This paragraph refers to the nineteenth century Indians who would read or hear the message of the Book of Mormon. In endnote

5, p. 6, I equated "Indian" to "Lamanite." because the promises in the above paragraph—all nearly 1500 years removed from the final demise of the Nephites—refer to the "latter days" before the millenium. Novak suggested that I overlooked 4 Nephi, which describes a nearly two-hundred-year time of sinless behavior when there were no Lamanites. No, instead I had gone to Mormon 5:15. The time is 384-85 A.D. Mormon writes of the conquering Lamanites: "this people shall be scattered, and shall become a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people, beyond the description of that which ever hath been amongst us, yea, even that which hath been among the Lamanites, and this because of their unbelief and idolatry."

In Morm. 7:1-2 (385 A.D.), after the battle at "the land of Cumorah, by a hill which was called Cumorah" (6:2), Mormon writes to the "remnant of the people that are spared" (vs. 1), "remnant of the house of Israel" (vs. 5), "remnant of the seed of Jacob" (vs. 10). He calls for them to repent, believe the gospel, be baptized, accept the record in which he writes and also the "record of the Jews, which shall come unto the gentiles unto you." A similar message is found in Morm. 5:12ff. that the house of Jacob should go to those Jews who do not yet believe, "for this intent..." that they shall believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God." Also, that they, the Lamanites, "may more fully believe the gospel."

According to the scripture and revelations that came through Joseph Smith, what happened to their ancestors in the Book of Mor-

mon would affect their faith and behavior when they learned that they—the Indian descendants of the Lamanites—were members of the “House of Israel.” The nineteenth century Native Americans would be restored to their covenant position because of the lessons learned about their ancestors. The Alma 26:9 passage refers to ancient Lamanites. The broader context is, as Novak stated: “Ammon’s reflections on his missionary efforts among the Lamanites.” Ammon, a Nephite, praises God for the Lamanites’ accepting Ammon’s preaching and renouncing their hatred and slaughter of the Nephites. The relations between the former enemies changed to love and harmony. By accepting that their ancestors, the Nephites and Lamanites, had found peace by following the word which had been recorded on the plates, the American Indians had hope for a similar outcome. So the passage has both the sense of Jacob 1:13-14, referring to those who rejected the words of the Nephites, and also to the modern Indians, who would read those words in the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine & Covenants do not use the terms “Indian” and “America,” and the terms “Lamanites” and “Nephites” were used in several ways.²³ I used the terms as in Jacob 1:13-14: “Now the people which were not Lamanites were Nephites; nevertheless, they were called Nephites, Jacobites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites. But I, Jacob, shall not hereafter distinguish them by these names, but I shall call them Lamanites that seek to destroy the people of Nephi, and those who are friendly to Nephi I shall call

Nephites, or the people of Nephi, according to the reigns of the kings.” This includes those of direct lineage as well as those of religious or political division.

However they are distinguished by clan or division, they all have Israelite ancestry, tracing their ancestry back to a descendant of Manasseh—Lehi, whose family fled northern Israel, avoided the deportation of the ten tribes, and lived in Jerusalem until 600 B.C.—or to Mulek, a son of Judah’s King Zedekiah, who fled Jerusalem in 588 B.C. Inter-marriage eventually mixed the population so that one could speak of either Nephites or Lamanites as Israelites, Ephraimites, Manassehites, Josephites, or Jews. When the Lamanites defeated the Nephites, that left dark-skinned Lamanites. On pp. 147-48 I discuss the predictions that the post-Columbian Lamanites would become “a white²⁴ and delightful people” (2 Ne. 30:6). When speaking of them, I use the term to refer back to any previous Lamanites as well.

There is a correlation of this usage with that of the way that “Indian” was used in the early 19th century, a usage that has been designated as “the white man’s Indian”; all native Americans were included in the term.²⁵ On June 4, 1834, Joseph Smith and the rescue squad called Zion’s Camp, on their way to Missouri, discovered a Lamanite skeleton on a mound in Illinois. They called it Zelph.²⁶ In a letter next day to his wife, Emma, Smith depicted his troops as “wandering over the plains of the Nephites, recounting occasionally the history of the Book

of Mormon, roving over the mounds of that once beloved people of the Lord, picking up their skulls and their bones, as proof of its divine authenticity.”²⁷ In his study of this incident, Kenneth Godfrey captured the kind of usage I brought to my use of “Lamanite”: “This term might refer to the ethnic and cultural category spoken of in the Book of Mormon as actors in the destruction of the Nephites, or it might refer more generally to a descendant of the earlier Lamanites and could have been considered in 1834 as the equivalent of ‘Indian.’”²⁸ Likewise, Richard L. Bushman acknowledges such usage: “The critics cannot be faulted for saying that the Book of Mormon was a history of the Indians. The book obviously was that, and early Mormons told the world that it was.”²⁹

In the case of the Book of Mormon, everything that identifies America or Indians by name comes from outside the book; with the Doctrine & Covenants, identification came only in the names of U.S. cities and towns. Still, there was never any question that America and Indians were meant; it all came through Joseph Smith. After what Lucy Mack Smith later identified as his 1823 vision, when he was in his late teens, Joseph recited “stories about Indians, their fortifications, customs, and life as if he had lived among them.”³⁰ On March 29, 1830, Free-will Baptist evangelist David Marks visited the David Whitmer home in Fayette, N.Y., where some of the Book of Mormon witnesses equated the civilized Nephites with the moundbuilders responsible for the mounds and fortifications of Ohio. The witnesses said that “the ‘*Book of Mormon*’ gave a

history of them, and of their authors.”³¹ On June 14, 1830, after his first day as a missionary, Samuel H. Smith asked his innkeeper “if he did not want to purchase a history of the origin of the Indians.”³³ Since these claims did not come in the Book of Mormon, that points to Joseph Smith as the source.

Joseph Smith’s revelations given in the autumn of 1830 established the Lamanite mission party, set the Indian territory beyond Missouri’s western border as the destination, with the goal of dedicating the site of the New Jerusalem, building the restored church among the Indians at the western edge of the United States, and building the temple at Independence.³⁴ Ohio newspapers reported on the missionary party’s journey and message: “the missionaries claimed the Indians to be ‘a part of the tribe of Manasseh...and from them descended all the Indians of America.’”³⁵

Richard L. Bushman notes that “Modern readers of the Book of Mormon assumed that the American Indians were descendants of the Lamanites.”³⁶ Novak cited the work of Bohn to look at my hypothesis; let’s look at Bushman’s comment through Bohn’s eyes. “The historical record does not interpret itself: it is the reader who explores the possible meanings of the texts, who interprets the text from within the language of his or her own time.”³⁷ Since the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants do not mention Indian or America by name, readers needed a preunderstanding that Lamanites were Indians and that the land choice

above all others was America. Joseph Smith and Mormon missionaries supplied it.

G. The Ethan Smith theory³⁸

Novak asserted that [Hullinger] “will not allow anything to count against the Ethan Smith story.”³⁸ That was after I had discussed and ruled out in Appendix 1 five different Mormon attempts to deal with Ethan Smith’s possible influence. The main arguments are: A.. The purposes and content are different from the Book of Mormon, at least on its major points. B. We might have expected much more material from *View of the Hebrews* if it were a source. C. In many places it contradicts the Book of Mormon.

A. *The purposes and content are different from the Book of Mormon.* To accept any influence from Ethan Smith’s book, John W. Welch would require Joseph Smith to have known “*View of the Hebrews* quite well and implicitly accepted it as accurate. If he did so, then he should have followed it—or at least not contradicted it—on its major points.”³⁹ Why does that follow? David J. Shepherd responded to Welch that “Joseph Smith might well have chosen not to follow it on ‘major’ points, whether out of a fear of incurring charges of plagiarism by agreeing too much with it or perhaps out of a genuine disagreement with Ethan Smith’s account on any number of different grounds, including theological, literary, or historical.”⁴⁰ B. H. Roberts: “What is sought in this study is not absolute identity of incidents, and absolute parallel of conditions and circumstances all down the line; but one thing here and another there, that may suggest another but

similar thing in such a way as to make a product of the other...”⁴¹ Perhaps Welch and Novak—to twist Novak’s words—“will not allow anything to count against [for] the Ethan Smith story.”

B. We might have expected much more material from *View of the Hebrews* if it were a source. B. H. Roberts wrote of one instance of material absent from the Book of Mormon: “the signs given among Book of Mormon peoples as to the birth, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of the Christ...It should be remembered, however, that while it may be claimed with much force that many of the Book of Mormon traits were supplied by *View of the Hebrews*, it does not follow that every one should be supplied from that source.”⁴²

C. *Ethan Smith’s book in many places contradicts the Book of Mormon.* Different ways of handling the same biblical themes, estimates of the different purposes of the two books,⁴³ and the two books finding different ways of accounting for the Israelite ancestry of the Indians are examples.⁴⁴ Roberts looks past those considerations: “The variation in the Book of Mormon, from ‘the ten lost tribes’ theory, to their being descendants of two of the lost tribes—Ephraim and Manasseh—with an infusion from the tribe of Judah through the people of Mulek, as before remarked, is not of sufficient importance to affect the main idea, namely, that the American Indians are of the family of Israel, and hence heirs to the promises of God to that peoples. And whatsoever would make for the proof of the American Indians being

‘the ten lost tribes’ would also make for proof of their being descendants through the three fragments of tribes as represented in the Book of Mormon. ”

B.H. Roberts still provides many reasons why the Ethan Smith source story is not easily discounted. He wrote: “as to this particular book [*View of the Hebrews*]—if the Smiths never owned the book, never read it, or saw it, still its contents—the materials of which it was composed—would be, under all the circumstances, matter of ‘common knowledge’ throughout the whole region where the Smiths lived from the birth of Joseph Smith in 1805, to the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1829-30.”⁴⁵

In spite of my regard for Ethan Smith as a source theory, however, I did not pin my conclusions solely upon it. I discuss it and Mormon reaction to the theory.⁴⁶ The larger picture is that of the theological and historical puzzle that Indian origins presented to the European settlers. On that canvass, the Mound Builder, Indian-Israelite theory covers a large area.⁴⁷ It was the “pre-understanding” of the Book of Mormon witnesses when they told David Marks about the Gold Bible: “the ‘*Book of Mormon*’ gave a history of them [the moundbuilders responsible for the mounds and fortifications of Ohio], and of their authors,”⁴⁸ The Zelph incident is based upon that understanding. So, also, is an 1833 report from the first issue of *The Unitarian*: “The preachers of this faith, we understand, endeavour to prove the truth of the history by a reference to the face of the country. They suppose the mounds throughout the west-

ern states, which have heretofore excited so much curiosity, are the remains of the cities of the Nephites and Lamanites.”⁴⁹ “If you object to the historical accounts of their sacred books, they refer you to the mounds of the western country, as remains of ancient cities, and as proofs that this country was once inhabited by a race of people better acquainted with the arts of civilized life, than the present race of savages; and this, they contend, is satisfactory presumptive proof of the truth of the history.”⁵⁰

H. Ancient American Geography and Antiquities

Novak⁵¹ wrote that I “complain” that “the Book of Mormon is vague about details of ancient American geography and antiquities.” His use of “complain” puts a negative slant on my observation; rather, “observed” or “noted” expresses it. Then I continue: “M. Wells Jakeman and Ross Christensen, anthropologists at Brigham Young University in 1959 to 1960, denied that certainty was possible regarding the Book of Mormon’s statements about America.”⁵² That opinion is not theirs alone. Diane E. Wirth wrote in her 1992 review of Stephen Williams, *Fantastic Archaeology: The Wild Side of North American Prehistory*. “The Book of Mormon does not give specific details as to the location of sites, and even if it did, all but a few pre-Classic names in Meso-america are unknown to scholars today.”⁵³ Blake T. Ostler writes, “there is no such thing as Book of Mormon archaeology unless and until we find something that can be directly linked to the text somewhere.”⁵⁴

Novak suggests that I consult John L. Sorenson who, Novak wrote, “details every major Book of Mormon site and in most instances provides a known Mesoamerican location. Sorenson and others have continued research on the so-called limited geography of the Book of Mormon.”⁵⁵ However, many students of Mormon studies have disagreed with Sorenson’s identifications.⁵⁶ Current LDS authorities do not wish to be pinned down on exact locations and have warned against pursuing the limited geography theory.⁵⁷

Conclusion: Environmental Explanations Alive and Well

Although Novak dismisses the environmental approach to understanding the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith, the “common knowledge” of Smith’s time—the environ-

mental explanation— reveals how very much was known; it does not demand that Smith have read all that was available. Those who hold to the environmental approach may come to different conclusions about the book and the man. Nevertheless, the same is true for Mormons. Mormonism itself depends upon the nineteenth century environment for its initial understanding and acceptance of its goals and faith.

Mormonism asks potential converts to set aside historical judgments, pray with a sincere heart, and ask in faith if the Book of Mormon is true. Reading the Book of Mormon and taking into account the culture in which it was produced gives us a better understanding of the claims Joseph Smith was making. If that is the case, the environmental approach offers clearer answers to the questions raised by the book and the prophet.

ENDNOTES

¹ Gary F. Novak, “Examining the Environmental Explanation of the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, (1995) Vol. 7, #1, pp. 139-54.

² William Mulder, “Mormon Angles of Historical Vision: Some Maverick Reflections,” *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 3, 1976, pp. 13-22; p. 13.

³ Robert N. Hullinger, *Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon*. (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1980); 2nd ed. rev., *Joseph Smith’s Response to Skepticism*. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992). This is the issue

referred to unless indicated otherwise.

⁴ Novak, “Environmental Explanation,” p. 140.

⁵ Hullinger, p. xv, xvii, n. 17: “Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and Skepticism* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974). The 1980 edition, p. 2, and p. 3, n. 17, gives the same information.

⁶ Cannon Cook, *Far West Record*, 23. Cited in H. Michael Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism: 1816-1844*. (Longwood, Fla.: Xulon Press, 2005), p. 315.

⁷ Dan Vogel, *The Making of A Prophet*. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004) presents a non-Mormon perspective; Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), gives a Mormon viewpoint.

⁸ David E. Bohn, “Unfounded Claims and Impossible Expectations: A Critique of the New Mormon History” in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, George D. Smith ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 227–61, p. 237.

⁹ Bohn, *ibid.*, p. 239.

¹⁰ 2 Ne 25:1,3-4,7-8, 17-18, 20; 26:33; 32:7; 33:5; Jacob 4:13; Enos 1:23; Mos 2:4; Alma 13:23. A recent study on Smith’s purpose is that of Robert M. Price, “Joseph Smith, Inspired Author of the Book of Mormon,” pp. 321-66, *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*. (Signature Books, 2002). He sees Smith as a pseudepigraphist, “a liar in the same sense that a fiction writer is a liar and deceiver. . . . the writer tries to woo the reader into a state of ‘temporary willing suspension of disbelief,’” p. 327. Mark D. Thomas, “Moroni: The Final Voice,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, (2003) Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 90-99, analyzes Book of Mormon narrator, Moroni, finding two organizing principles showing intention in his three endings: “to apply the Nephite and Lamanite stories. . . to latter-day readers; and (2) to include a variety of doctrinal, logical, and scriptural arguments that are a subtle . . . yet thorough defense of the Book of Mormon and its doctrines,” pp. 97-98.

¹¹ (D&C 3; 20:8-12, 17, 26, 35; 14:10; 10:46-63)

¹² H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*. (Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 1994). Richard L. Bushman, “Just the Facts Please,” *FARMS Review of Books*, (1994) Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 122-33. In Bushman’s view, “Walters had a debater’s temperament.” He credits Marquardt for the book’s

less critical tone, p. 123, yet still says of the joint effort: “I have taken exception to the most critical conclusions, but I like the book. I admire the research, and I appreciate the generous, fair-minded tone of the writing,” p. 133. Larry C. Porter, “Reinventing Mormonism: To Remake or Redo,” disagrees with many of the conclusions of Walters’s book, co-authored with H. Michael Marquardt. Still, he wrote: “To their credit, Marquardt and Walters have made a definite contribution in a number of areas by supplying valuable documents and information on certain key events and personalities.” *FARMS Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, (1995) Vol. 7, #2, pp. 121-43. P. 125.

¹³ Novak, “Environmental Explanation,” p. 141, emphasis added.

¹⁴ Hullinger, 1980 edition, Foreword, p. xi.

¹⁵ Novak, “Environmental Explanation,” p. 141.

¹⁶ Hullinger, 1980 edition, Foreword, p. xi.

¹⁷ Novak, “Environmental Explanation,” p. 149.

¹⁸ Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason: Being An Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology*, Moncure Daniel Conway, ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1898).

¹⁹ Hullinger, pp. 22-23, quoting from Paine, pp. 77.

²⁰ Dan Vogel’s study has the most extensive research on the American Indians’ and their cultural impact when the Book of Mormon was in preparation. See *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon: Religious Solutions from Columbus to Joseph Smith*, (Salt Lake City, Signature Books, 1986).

²¹ Novak, “Environmental Explanation,” p. 145.

²² Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*. (Chicago: University of

Illinois Press, 1984), p. 133; *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

²³ Many studies grapple with Lamanite identity. The following present different views and extensive coverage of it: Brent Lee Metcalfe, "Reinventing Lamanite Identity," *Sunstone* March 2004, pp. 20-25; John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper, "Before DNA," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (2003), pp. 6-23, p. 11; Sandra Tanner, "Who Are the Lamanites?," *Salt Lake City Messenger*. (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry) Issue No. 103 (November 2004).

²⁴ The Book of Mormon, 1830 ed., (Herald Heritage House: Independence, Mo.) 1970 reprint, p. 117. The 1984 edition has "pure and delightful."

²⁵ Robert J. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indians from Columbus to the Present*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978). He briefly states his theme: "the Indian was a White invention," collapsing multiple cultures, societies, customs, and languages into "a single unity for the purpose of description and analysis" p. 3.

²⁶ Kenneth W. Godfrey, "What is the Significance of Zeph In The Study Of Book of Mormon Geography?," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, (1999) Vol. 8, #2, pp. 70-79; Dan Vogel, *The Making of A Prophet*. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), pp. 646-47, n. 32, disputes many of the arguments that Godfrey uses to strengthen the "Limited Tejuantepec Theory of Book of Mormon geography."

²⁷ Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 4 June 1834, in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co.; Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 345-46; cited in Dan Vogel, *Making of A Prophet*. p. 333.

²⁸ Godfrey, "Significance of Zeph." He cites

D&C 3:18, 20; 10:48; 28:8; 32:2).

²⁹ Bushman, *The Beginnings of Mormonism*, p. 133.

³⁰ Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations*. (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), pp. 84, 90.

³¹ David Marks, *The Life of David Marks to the 26th Year of His Age* (Limerick, ME: Office of the Morning Star, 1831), p. 341.

³² Bushman, *The Beginnings of Mormonism*, p. 133.

³³ Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*, Ch. 11, "New Jerusalem in America," pp. 253-72. Marquardt documents the Mormons' having to curtail work in the Indian territory and regroup to Jackson Co., Mo. Cf. also Larry Porter's 1971 Ph.D. thesis, "A Study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816-31," pp. 277-84; Bushman, *The Beginnings of Mormonism*, pp. 168-73; Vogel, *Making of a Prophet*. pp. 530, 536.

³⁴ "The Golden Bible, or, Campbellism Improved," Hudson, Ohio, *Observer and Telegraph* 1 (Nov. 18, 1830):3, cited in Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*, p. 302. n. 1. The missionaries' leader, Oliver Cowdery, was "bound for the regions beyond the Mississippi, where he contemplates founding a City of Refuge' for his followers, and converting the Indians under his prophetic authority," "The Golden Bible," Painesville *Telegraph* 2 (Nov. 16, 1830):3; cited in Marquardt, *ibid.*, p. 305, n. 2. The *Telegraph* reported that they asked the "brethren of the reformation...to receive their mission and book as from Heaven, which they said chiefly concerned the western Indians, as being an account of their origin, and a prophecy of their final conversion to [C]hristianity, and made them a white and delightful people, and be reinstated in the possessing of

their lands of which they have been despoiled by the whites,” “Mormonism,” *Telegraph* 2 (Feb. 15, 1831), Painesville, Ohio, cited in Marquardt, *ibid.*, p. 302, n. 1. On April 8, 1831, Cowdery wrote of “a government contact who claimed that the Delaware ‘have now the name of Nephy who is the son of Nephi &c handed down to this very generation,’” cited in Metcalf. “Reinventing Lamanite Destiny,” n. 29.

³⁵ Bushman, *The Beginnings of Mormonism*, p. 116.

³⁶ Bohn, “Unfounded Claims,” p. 239.

³⁷ See Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews; or the Tribes of Israel in America* (Poultney, Vt., 1825). There are many studies of this theory, chief of which is that of B. H. Roberts, “A Book of Mormon Study,” Part I, pp. 151-250; “A Parallel,” 344-54. *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, 2nd edition, Brigham D. Madsen, ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992). Preceding the bibliography in Roberts’s *Studies*, pp. 345-57, Madsen gives an overview of the works of Mormons and others in their assessment of the Ethan Smith theory. Other significant works among many: Bushman, *The Beginnings of Mormonism*, p. 134-38; Stan Larson, *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson’s Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon*, (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press and Smith Research Associates, 1996), pp. 144-49, 169-70, 226-27; John W. Welch, “View of the Hebrews: An Unparallel” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, (Deseret Book, Salt Lake City, UT, 1992), pp. 83-87; Wesley P. Walters, “The Origin of the Book of Mormon,” *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, Vol. III, No. 3, which summarizes Roberts’s evidences that tie *View of the Hebrews* to the origin of the Book of Mormon. Reprinted as *An Examination of B. H. Roberts’ Secret Manuscript*, Utah Lighthouse Ministry, Salt Lake City, 1979,

³⁸ Novak, “Environmental Explanation,” p. 149.

³⁹ John W. Welch, “View of the Hebrews: An

Unparallel,” *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), pp. 83-87. P. 83. gives many examples.

⁴⁰ “Rendering Fiction: Translation, Pseudo-translation, and the Book of Mormon,” *The New Mormon Challenge, Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*, Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, Paul Owen, eds., (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002), pp. 367-98. Pp. 503-04, n. 71

⁴¹ Roberts, “A Book of Mormon Study,” *Studies*, p. 186.

⁴² Roberts, *ibid.*, p. 236.

⁴³ Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, pp. 138-39. However, Roberts disagrees with Bushman in “A Book of Mormon Study,” 174-77, which reprints E. Smith’s “An Address of the Prophet Isaiah Relative to the Restoration of His People.” Then Roberts adds: “Thus ends his appeal and all this is important, *because this is the very mission assigned by the Book of Mormon prophets to the Christian people of the United States: Namely, in the language of Ethan Smith’s book, “that we are the people [meaning the people of the U.S.] especially addressed [i.e., in Isaiah 18] and called upon to restore them [the American Indians—the lost tribes of Israel], or bring them to the knowledge of the Gospel,”* and to do with them whatever the God of Abraham designs shall be done”; or, in the language of the Book of Mormon, when proclaiming the purpose for which the Book of Mormon was written, and which is “to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile... *to show with the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, and they are not cast off forever—and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself to all nations.*” This is from the title page of the Book of Mormon, but it is a transcript from the plates of the Book of Mormon, being Moroni’s preface, to the Book of plates he delivered to Joseph Smith, and hence part of the

Book of Mormon itself. In the body of the book the same purpose is stated," pp. 177-78 (emphasis in the text).

44 Roberts, *ibid.*, p. 170.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 155.

46 Hullinger, 1992 edition, pp. 49-55, 59-64, and Appendix I, pp. 183-89.

47 Cf. Vogel, *Indian Origins*.

48 Marks, *The Life of David Marks*, p. 341.

49 Jason Whitman, "The Book of Mormon," *The Unitarian*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Jan. 1, 1834, pp. 40-50 (Boston: James Munroe & Co., 1834) p. 43.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

51 Novak, "Environmental Explanation," p. 150.

52 Hullinger, p. 185. That refers to Jakeman's and Christensen's conclusions in their articles in the Brigham Young University Archaeological Society Newsletter, 57 (25 March 1959): 4; 64 (30 Jan. 1960): 3.

53 Diane E. Wirth, Review of Stephen Williams, *Fantastic Archaeology: The Wild Side of North Ameri-*

can Prehistory. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991). *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992), pp. 251-53, p. 252.

54 Blake T. Ostler, "DNA Strands in the Book of Mormon," *Sunstone*, May 2005, 63-71, pp. 69-70, n. 6.

55 Novak, "Environmental Explanation," p. 150.

56 Dee F. Green, Deanne G. Matheny, Raymond T. Matheny, were some with training in the archaeology, geography, and anthropology of Mesoamerica who disagreed with Sorenson.

57 Stan Larson, *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Search for The Book of Mormo*. (Freethinker Press, c. 2004), lists twelve different current suggested locations for the "narrow neck of land," p. 8. Ch. 1, "Early Book of Mormon Studies," pp. 1-40 (includes 10 pages of endnotes) traces the development of the limited geographical theory as debated among Mormon scholars—with emphasis upon the archaeological findings in Mesoamerica—up to its present development, Ch. 5, "Book of Mormon Archaeological Tests," pp. 175-234. LaMar Petersen, *The Creation of the Book of Mormon: a Historical Inquiry*. (Salt Lake City, Freethinker Press, c. 2000), prints Larson's updated fifth chapter with the same title in his Appendix D, pp. 169-230.

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