

An Inheritance Reserved for Nephites?: Sorry, No Vacancy!

Apologists focus primarily on Middle Eastern and Biblical topics, rather than the archaeology of pre-Columbian North, Central and South America. Undoubtedly they have found the Americas to be unproductive turf for their objectives. Yet even the average Mormon has heard of problems, such as the consensus among archaeologists, paleontologists and other experts, that horses did not exist in the New World during the past several millennia, in agreement with the eye-witness reports of the first Europeans arriving in the New World, *to wit*, that they found no horses. Indeed, this is just the very tip of the iceberg. Its massive body includes such things as horses, cows, sheep, goats, wheat, barley, iron smelting, steel making, written materials in Nephite Hebrew and reformed Egyptian, and the list goes on.

For many, this is enough to conclude that the *Book of Mormon* is a nineteenth century historical fiction. But the faithful for their part base hopes on the view that the remains of Jaredite, Nephite and Lamanite cities lie in some remote valley, yet to be discovered, or have simply vanished.

And yet, it is what the *Book of Mormon* does not say that provides the ultimate test, and the most ineluctable conclusion.

The *Book of Mormon* makes it clear that upon the arrival of the families of Lehi and Ishmael, and the band of Mulek, all leaving Jerusalem during the reign of Zedekiah (c. 597-590 BCE), the new land of their inheritance was empty. It was theirs alone, to preserve a branch of Israel in its purity, to be gathered to Christ in the latter days. Note, in 2 Nephi 1:

8. And behold, it is wisdom that this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations: for behold, many nations would overrun the land, that there would be no place for an inheritance.
9. Wherefore, I, Lehi, have obtained a promise that inasmuch as they which the Lord God shall bring out of the land of Jerusalem shall keep his commandments, they shall prosper upon the face of this land; and they shall be kept from all other nations, that they may possess this land unto themselves.

The BoM had to go to atrocious lengths to make this happen, since the non-Israelite Jaredites and their civilization were there first, also led there by God, but from the tower of Babel. What to do? Note this statement in Ether 11:

20. many prophets... prophesied... and cried repentance unto the people, and except they should repent, the Lord God would execute judgment against them to their utter destruction;
21. and that the Lord God would send or bring forth another people to possess the land.

The Jaredites too had divided into two branches. Initially one was more righteous than the decidedly wicked other group, but eventually both became very iniquitous. Warfare between the two ultimately led both leaders to gather their forces to – where else? – Upstate New York. These were men of might, Coriantumr, leader of the formerly more righteous group, and Shiz, leader of the wicked group. They commanded great masses of people: “the people began to flock together in armies, throughout all the face of the land.” (Ether 14:19) In their initial battles, Coriantumr “saw that there had been slain by the sword already nearly two millions of his people ... there had been slain two millions of mighty men, and also their wives and their children.” (Ether 15:2 2) So these mighty men, plus wives and children, should total perhaps four million. Just on one side. One can assume that the casualties among the wicked group were no less. So the grand total would possibly reach eight million dead in the initial encounters. This makes every known historical battle a back-alley brawl. At this point, the two leaders realized that this was a fight to the extermination of one group or the other. So they took four years to gather every living human being from Jaredite territories, to have available to them the fighting potential of every man, woman and child. (Ether 15:12-14) While doing this, apparently others fabricated armor and weapons for every man, woman and child: “both men, women and children being armed with weapons of war, having shields, and breastplates, and head-plates, and being clothed after the manner of war.” (Ether 15:15) Then, the preparations made, they all fought to the end, to their mutual total extermination. We are left to imagine the horrific scene of child slaughtering child. Only the two leaders were left standing, the classic duel of the chiefs. Coriantumr killed Shiz, and eventually made contact with the successor Nephite-Mulekite group, spending the last nine months of his life in Zarahemla. Thus the promise was kept, and the Israelite group entered into the land of their inheritance, purged of prior inhabitants, and totally reserved just for them. Splendid isolation.

The *Book of Mormon* text reinforces this assertion in its historical narrative. There is no single mention of any people or group that is not descended from Lehi, Ishmael, Zoram or Mulek. Realistically, upon

their arrival they would have found the land full of occupants. Like the arriving European explorers and settlers (and even the Vikings), they would have found all the best lands taken. In addition to accounts of negotiation and cooperation, there would be accounts of conflict and warfare with these other peoples. The fierce Vikings could not hold out, and the lost colony of Roanoke is famous. Even the Jaredite account makes no mention of other peoples in the New World.

The test based on the omissions in the *Book of Mormon* is more final than that of the commissions, because in the case of the omissions, the data set is fixed. We will not wake up one morning and suddenly find in our BoM copy mentions of numerous other peoples, and wonder, "how did I not notice this before?" Improvements in the table below will only add more peoples that should have been mentioned. In stark contrast with the BoM, the Hebrew Bible is replete with mentions of many other peoples, both near and far.

The Archaeology Cultures List

The many important Pre-Columbian cultures and cities that existed during the timeframe of the BoM narrative cannot be fully represented here. Table 2 lists some of the salient ones, and details of interest to the present study.

Table 3. Pre-Columbian Cultures

A. Cultures before or during the BoM Jaredite Period	
Culture	Dates and Details
Clovis	C. 13,000 BCE to 10,000 BCE, a Paleo-Indian population, noted for its arrow heads. They are considered to be the ancestors of most of the indigenous cultures of the Americas. Clovis tips are found in most of North & Central America. A boy preserved in a Clovis culture grave, dubbed Anzick-1, yielded DNA related to the modern Amerindians and the DNA found in eastern Asia.
Folsom	Ca. 9000 BCE, perhaps the principal tradition that replaced the Clovis culture, and appears to have grown out of it. They are more common in the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains, but not as rare east of the Mississippi as once thought.
Las Vegas	8000-4600 BCE (Holocene), 31 sites, primarily hunting, gathering, fish/shell fish, & primitive agriculture, near the Ecuador coast.
Valdivia culture	3500-1800 BCE, impressive ceramic finds (earliest in the Americas), cotton textiles, maize & vegetable cultivation, near the west coast of Ecuador. Used rafts with sails along the coast.
Norte Chile (Caral)	3,500-1,800 BCE, Peru, largest city of the ancient Americas, with large pyramids (contemporary with ancient Egypt); temple complex.

Monagrillo	2500-1200 BCE, Panama, early ceramic site; hearths, post holes, pits, shell, bone, pottery, stone tools, early maize culture.
Chavin de Huantar	1,500 (up to 400) BCE, Peru, largely a pan-regional ritual center (possibly a religious cult), temples, agricultural economy, gold soldering in jewelry.
Ancon	10,000 BCE to end of Incan period, a principal center, vast necropolis with thousands of burials.
Montegrando	The civilization in the Peruvian Amazon built a massive earthen burial mound c. 1000 BCE, where a spiral temple was later built. At a second pyramid, the remains of 22 children were found, sick and malnourished victims of human sacrifice. In a lavish burial site the remains of a powerful shaman priest (covered with 180 snai shells) have been discovered, dated to 2,800 years before present.
Acre (Amazon)	In eastern Acre, the westernmost division of the state of Rondônia, and the southern part of the state of Amazonas, ca. 300 geometric earthwork structures have been registered. They represent a regional cultural institution related to ritual and/or sociopolitical institutions, in use from 1200 BCE to the 14 th century CE.
B. Cultures Overlapping BoM Jaredite & Nephite Periods	
✠ designates some of those with pagan items in the BoM Christian Period	
Olmecs	1600—400 BCE, produced a developed writing system, and invented the concept of zero. It is considered to be the first major civilization in Mesoamerica.
San Lorenzo	1200—900 BCE, center of early Olmec culture with temples, plazas and royal residences. There are ten colossal stone heads, apparently of rulers.
La Venta	c. 900—c. 400 BCE—followed San Lorenzo as the most important Olmec center. The Great Pyramid was the largest Mesoamerican structure of its time. Even today, after 2500 years of erosion, it rises 34 m (112 ft.) above the naturally flat landscape. Buried deep within La Venta, lay opulent, labor-intensive "offerings" – 1000 tons of smooth serpentine blocks, large mosaic pavements, and at least 48 separate deposits of polished jade celts, pottery, figurines, and hematite mirrors.
Tres Zapotes	Pre-1000 BCE, & flourishing c. 900-800 BCE, the third major Olmec site. It continued after 400 BCE, but gradually transformed into post-Olmec (Epi-Olmec) culture.
Maya	2000 BCE—1697 CE (fall of the last Mayan city). Hieroglyphic writing was in use by the 3 rd century BCE. By 500 BCE monumental architecture existed.
	400 BCE—250 CE, late preclassic period.
Calakmul	250—900 CE, classical period, with Mayan sites at their height Preclassic through late classic; a major site by the late preclassic period, and competitor of Tikal. Check out the Calakmul mask!
El Mirador	500 BCE—150 CE, a massive Mayan site and political center with a huge pyramid, other stone architecture, and preclassic glyphs.
Paso del Macho	600-500 BCE, situated in the Yucatan with a find of cocoa used as a condiment.
Tikal	250-400 CE, the largest Maya dam ever found, 260' long and 33'

	<p>high. It experienced a cultural florescence in the first century CE. Sometime in the 3rd century CE dynastic kingship was established.</p> <p>☛ Its Mundo Perdido ceremonial complex, with a pyramid and three temples, was active in the late preclassic and on. Rich burials have been dated to the first century CE.</p>
Kaminaljuyu	<p>1500 BCE-1200 CE, a major site with a large population by 700 BCE.</p> <p>☛A complex pantheon of deities by the middle preclassic period.</p> <p>☛400 BCE—250 CE, the late preclassic period, with a Principal Bird Deity, the maize god and a jaguar deity that was merged with the ruler.</p>
Piedras Negras	<p>7th c. BCE-850 CE, the first population peak being about 200 BCE, and the dynasty list beginning c. 297 CE.</p>
Early Mayan writing	<p>Slowly, a significant corpus of texts is emerging dating within the period from c. 100 BCE to c. 150 CE, i.e., the late preclassic period. See Ch. 6 by J. Kathryn Josserand, and Ch. 7 by Martha J. Macri, in Michael Love & Jonathan Kaplan, eds., <i>The Southern Maya in the Late Preclassic</i> (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2011).</p>
Lamanai	<p>4th c. BCE thru the classic period, a major site from the 4th century BCE through the 1st century CE, declining but persisting thereafter. It was a major copper center.</p> <p>☛<i>Lamanai</i> is Yucatec Maya meaning “Submerged Crocodile” and a temple features individuals wearing crocodile headdresses.</p>
El Baúl	<p>A center known for obsidian production, with a stele bearing a long count date: 36 CE. Volcanic ash was deposited from nearby volcano.</p>
El Zotz	<p>350-400 CE, Temple of the Night Sun, with ornate painted stucco inside and out. It has <i>wahob</i> figures (harmful spirits in animal form).</p>
Xno’ha	<p>400 BCE—600 CE, elite residential complex, with pottery dated to this period, and an early classic tomb.</p>
Tak’alik Ab’aj	<p>700-400 BCE, tomb of a ruler wearing a vulture-headed human figure.</p> <p>☛ Stele 5 bears two long count dates, the latest being 126 CE. It commemorates a transition of power, and exhibits the serpent.</p>
Chan Chich	<p>770 BCE-850 CE, a midden and neighboring sites being excavated in this much looted Maya site, Belize.</p>
Plan de Ayutla	<p>250-550 CE, a theater, in the palace on top of the acropolis.</p>
Izapa	<p>600 BCE—100 CE, the period within which the site reached its apogee. The site is not clearly Mayan nor Olmec, having elements of both, and purely local elements.</p> <p>☛ It leads other sites in the number of sculptures, featuring <i>vucub caquix</i> (a powerful bird deity), a long-lipped deity (of lightning and rain?), a club-wielding deity with serpents as legs, and a scene of violence among deities with a decapitated god.</p> <p>☛ A monolithic jaguar was found in 2012 dated to c. 100 CE, the 84th monolith found at the site.</p>
El Tajin	<p>1st century-1200 CE, part of the Classic Veracruz culture.</p> <p>☛ It was a center of the worship of the god Quetzalcoatl. Monumental architecture began in the 1st century CE. The ball court depicts human sacrifice.</p>

Monte Alban	c. 500 BCE-1000 CE—A major site, considered Zapotec, that reached a population of over 5,000 by 300 BCE and over 17,000 by 100 BCE. During 200-500CE it was a regional capital with colonies. † Over 300 tortured sacrificed war victims are depicted. The Zapotec language was one of the first written (with a syllabic script). † The rain god Cocijo was important.
Teotihuacan	100 BCE thru 7th century CE, a major site in the Basin of Mexico, with major constructions from 100 BCE to 250 CE, but growing to its apogee at c. 450 CE. Its largest pyramid, Pyramid of the Sun, was largely completed by 100 CE and finished by 200 CE. † Its deities include the Storm God, Great Goddess, Feathered Serpent, Old God, War Serpent, Netted Jaguar, Pulque God and Fat God. Many of these are modern names given to them. † Hundreds of human sacrifice remains have been found beneath and around the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent (Quetzalcoatl), which was built from 150 to 200 CE.
La Mosquitia	A non-Maya culture in Honduras, not yet adequately dated, but notable for a stone head that appears to be a jaguar, or even a were-jaguar (possibly emblematic of a shaman).
Copán	An early Honduran site (across the border from Guatemala), with stone architecture by around 9 th century BCE, that grew to importance, but was refounded by a Maya people in the 6 th century CE. It is the principal Maya site in a largely non-Maya region.
Los Naranjos	An archaeological region in western Honduras, settled more or less continually from c. 800 BCE and notable for its ceramics, and in particular the highly decorated Yde vessel. The region has two earthen ditches of the BCE period, of unclear use.
Playa de los Muertos	An archaeological zone on the north Honduran coast known from its burials and ceramics, being as ancient as any Mesoamerican region. It has an extensive excavation history.
Talgua Caves	A cave ossuary in northeastern Honduras with numerous burials dated to c. 1000 BCE, possibly indicative of a notable degree of social development.
Yarumela	A major trade center c. 60 kilometers south of Los Naranjos, dating between 1000 BCE to 200 CE, with important mounds. (Honduras)
Sitio Barriles	4600-2300 BCE, the Tropical Forest Archaic period, rock shelter sites in Panama. 300 BCE—400 CE, Conception stage, first pottery 400-900 CE, Aguas Buenas period, featuring large villages & small farmsteads
Sitio Conte	450-900 CE, Panama, primarily a necropolis with ceramic remains. The iconography depicts animals, humans and animal-human beings.
Sitio Sierra	c. 250 CE to the conquest, a significant site in Panama, with periods poorly defined. Sites in the region span 350 BCE to 750 CE.
Chorrera (Ecuador)	1300-300 BCE, noted for its advanced ceramic tradition, particularly hollow figurines.
Moche	100-800 CE, particularly noted for their elaborately painted ceramics, metallurgy, monumental constructions (huacas) and irrigation systems
	C. 500 BCE-present, an agrarian culture in the Andean highlands of

	the Columbian Eastern Range. Antecedent cultures go back to 5000 BCE. The Muisca were organized in an extensive confederation. They had large quantities of gold. The chief upon accession covered his body with gold dust. They are famous for the gold Muisca raft, dating between 600-800 CE, & other gold creations.
San Agustín culture	The archeological park (Huila Department in Colombia) contains the largest collection of religious monuments and megalithic sculptures in Latin America and is considered the world's largest necropolis. The statues are believed to have been carved between 5–400 CE. The Mompos Depression is known for its raised fields that work as agricultural drainage systems. High-ranking individuals were buried in earth mounds with pottery and goldwork.
Nazca	100 BCE-800 CE, located in the southern coastal region of Peru, the Nazca were noted for textiles and ceramics. ✦ Their religion focused on powerful nature deities. The shaman cult used hallucinatory drugs. Their so-called trophy heads were either trophies from war, or ritual objects. The Nazca are known for their partial burials, of just parts of a body, or of decapitated bodies with a jar painted as a head. The little-understood Nazca lines include zoomorphic and phytomorphic figures, possibly to propitiate some corresponding celestial beings or forces.
Paracas	800-200 BCE, also in the southern coastal region of Peru, the Paracas culture is noted for its knowledge of irrigation and contributions to the textile arts. Their distinctive ceramics use incised polychrome and negative resist decoration. It appears that in some cases the heads of their deceased were used in rituals.
Recuay	200 BCE-600 CE, a Peruvian highland culture with highly elaborate pottery and impressive fabrics. Their iconography featured the so-called 'moon animal,' a fox-like or feline animal.
Tiwanaku	300 BCE-1000 CE, a precursor to the Incan culture, the ritual and administrative capital of a major state power for approximately five-hundred years. The ruins of the ancient city state are near the south-eastern shore of Lake Titicaca in Bolivia.
Pachacamac	A mostly post-420 CE site c. 25 miles SW of Lima, Peru. Named after its creator god Pacha Camaq, its old temple dates to c. 250 CE. They later built a temple of the sun, possibly associated with Inti, the sun god.
Chachapoyas	600 CE, in the Amazonas region of northern Peru. It is possible that they built a settlement called Gran Pajáten where some ceramics have been dated to 200 BC.
Tulor	380 BCE—1200 CE, a village complex in Chile (most surviving structures are post 800 CE). Boreholes were dug for groundwater.
Lagoa Santa	The center of Brazilian paleontology, a cave with 15 human skeletons and mega fauna. The oldest human fossil in Brazil, 11,000+ years old.
Pedra Furada	Circa 11,000 BCE Lithic art, possibly prior to the Clovis culture.
Acre	0-700 CE, Brazil Amazonian site, with many massive earthworks, apparently geoglyphs.
Basket Weaver	1500 BCE-500 CE, a people in the U.S. Southwest, with well-preserved mummies. Antecedent to the Pueblo culture.

Phoenix/Tuscan	From 1,500 BCE on developed irrigation systems were in use in the Phoenix and Tuscan basins. Ancient footprints, c. 1,500 BCE, of what appears to be two adults, two children and a dog, appear to be a family at work opening & closing channel head gates.
Mound Builders	c. 3,400 BCE to the 16th century, a collection of cultures. The Hopewell culture spanned c. 100 to 700 CE. Burial mounds of the Middle Woodland period range from 100 BCE to 400 CE. Kohukia was the first large city in North America, about 1,000 CE. † There are many theories about their religion, but most believe that sun worship was a central element. Evidence of human sacrifice has been found at Kohukia.
Woodlands Culture	c. 1,000 BCE—1,000 CE, in the eastern North America. c. 1,000 BCE—1 BCE, early woodlands period 1 CE—500 CE, middle woodland period, including the Hopewell culture sites, with burial mounds, evidence of hunting and gathering, pottery and some horticulture. Extensive trade system involving exotic items and materials. Sites with Hopewell traits are found in both New York and Ontario (cf. the Saugeen complex). Post-500 CE, introduction of the cultivation of maize, beans and squash. The Adena culture (c. 1000-200 BCE) built many mounds, including Criel mound, a burial site where many skeletons and grave goods (weapons and jewelry). The effigy mounds (350-1300 CE) were shaped like stylized animals, each having one, two or three people buried but almost totally without grave goods.

Conclusions

The claim of the *Book of Mormon* narrative to be a translation of an ancient record of the history and religious affairs of the pre-Columbian peoples of the Americas has been compared with the empirical findings of the archaeological records overlapping the relevant period.

1. The Archaeological BoM Item List was drawn up from the text of the BoM narrative to enable a focused comparison with the archaeological findings. The overwhelming majority of these items have been found to be unevicenced. For all but the most faith-bound, the conclusion is totally disconfirmatory to the BoM authenticity claim.
2. The Archaeological Cultures List was drawn up from a survey of pre-Columbian archaeology to provide an empirical test of the claim that the lands of the proposed Nephite/Lamanite territories had been kept away from the knowledge of all other peoples of the earth, a claim that the BoM narrative states explicitly and examples clearly by its total lack of any reference to any people other than those descended from the Jaredites, the party of Lehi and the party of Mulek. In fact, we have found that the Americas have been fully populated by numerous cultures.

A major civilization, with forty named cities and many unnamed others, covering a period of 1,000 years, must have had important and recurrent contact with the historical cultures of pre-Columbian America.

Highly committed, well-educated and intelligent LDS scholars laboring at this Gordian knot have produced creative research based on analyses of the BoM text and/or Middle Eastern cultural materials. The unstated premise that all such research is based on is that the *Book of Mormon* is the unquestionably best source for knowledge of pre-Columbian America, and therefore the pre-Columbian archaeological record cannot be totally disconfirmatory. The results from the analysis in this chapter make it clear that this premise is totally untenable, and that no amount of BoM textual or Middle-East cultural or literary analysis can overcome the clear facts on the ground in the New World.

This is the archaeological verdict.