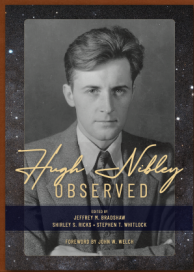


**What Was Hugh Nibley Thinking About When He Landed  
His Jeep on the Beach on D-Day?**

Book of Mormon Insight Final: April 8, 2021

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

# WHAT WAS HUGH NIBLEY THINKING ABOUT WHEN HE LANDED HIS JEEP ON THE BEACH ON D-DAY?



THINGS THAT  
MATTERED MOST  
TO HUGH NIBLEY

On the dawn of one of the most daring and dangerous events of World War II, the typical soldier would hardly be thinking deep thoughts about puzzling intellectual problems. But then again, Hugh Nibley was not the typical World War II soldier.



In the book *Hugh Nibley Observed*, Jack Welch recounts the story as follows:<sup>1</sup>

At first light on June 6, 1944, the first of many allied landing craft began hitting the beaches of Normandy. At Utah Beach, twelve men dangling from one of the emerging jeeps cheered their driver on as they surged up from beneath the surface of the chilly English Channel waters. That driver, an army intelligence officer with a PhD in ancient history from the University of California at Berkeley, was none other than Hugh W. Nibley, age 34.



While preparing for the invasion, Hugh had visited several antiquarian bookstores in London—walking out with armloads of Arabic and Greek literary treasures. He had also, on the sly, slipped a copy of the Book of Mormon into one of the fifty-five pockets in his regimental intelligence corps fatigues.

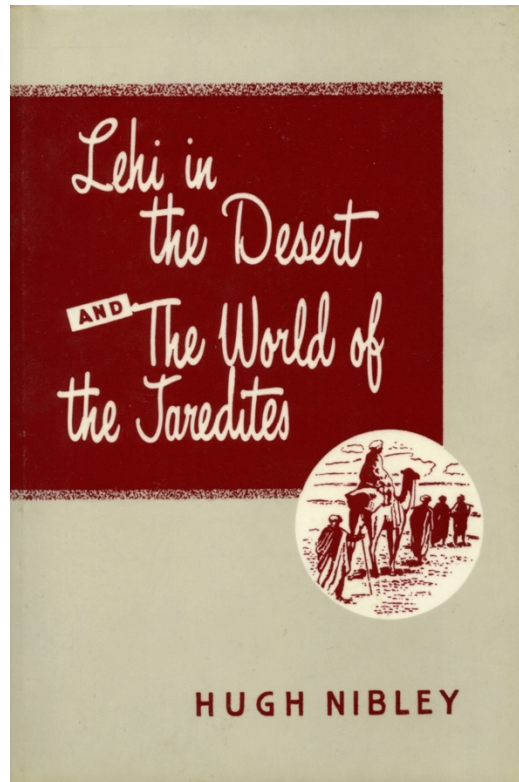


[“The jeep ahead of Nibley’s went over a sand knoll and disappeared from the face of the earth, never to be heard of or even seen again.”<sup>2</sup>]

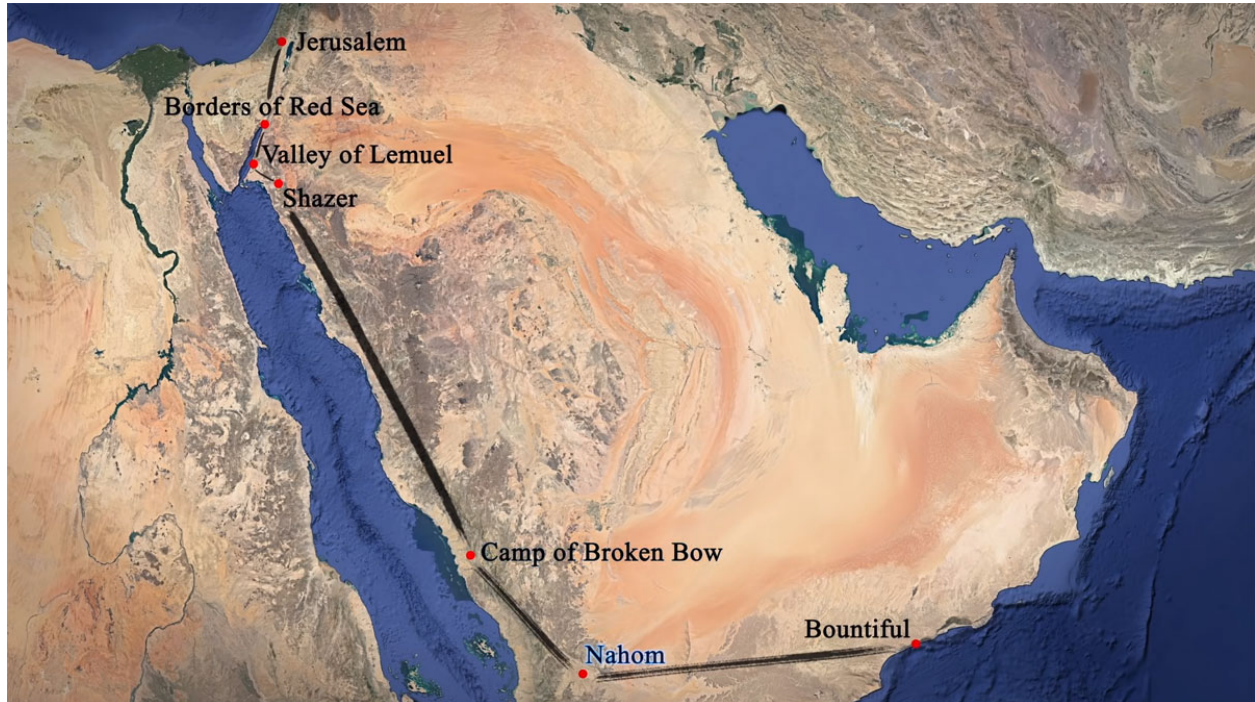
“It was right there at Utah Beach,” Hugh still vividly recalls, “as we were a couple of feet under water, that it really hit me—how astonishing the Book of Mormon truly is. It had never occurred to me before, but all I could think of all that day was how wonderful this Book of Mormon was.”

Judged by any standard, the Book of Mormon is nothing ordinary. So it seems only right that possibly the most illustrious scholar yet to have investigated the Book of Mormon should have become fascinated with it in no ordinary way. Since Utah Beach, Hugh Nibley was never again the same. Nor was Book of Mormon scholarship.



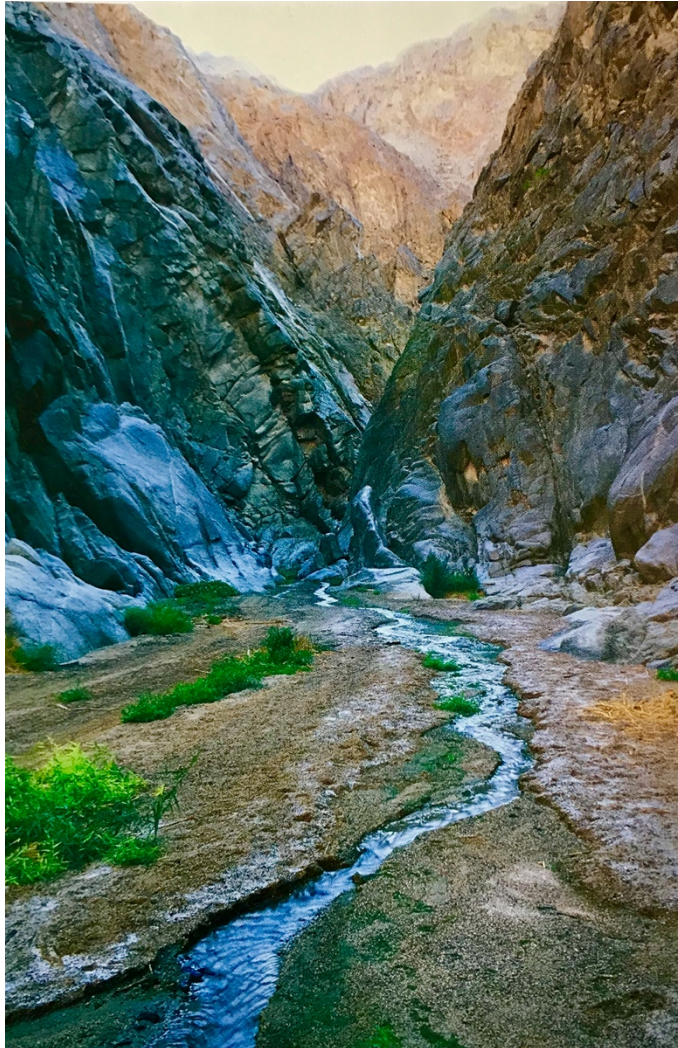


A few years later, Nibley published *Lehi in the Desert*, the first of many books he would write on the Book of Mormon. His next book, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, was written for the Church as the lesson manual for adult priesthood quorums.



*Approximate Route of Lehi's Trail from Jerusalem to Bountiful.<sup>3</sup>*

The trajectory described by Hugh Nibley in *Lehi in the Desert* takes us from Jerusalem southward through the Arabian Peninsula, then eastward through the desert to Bountiful, where Lehi's family would launch a ship for the promised land in the Americas.<sup>4</sup> Nibley's pioneering research provided the foundation for additional discoveries by other researchers generally confirming and enriching his early hunches.



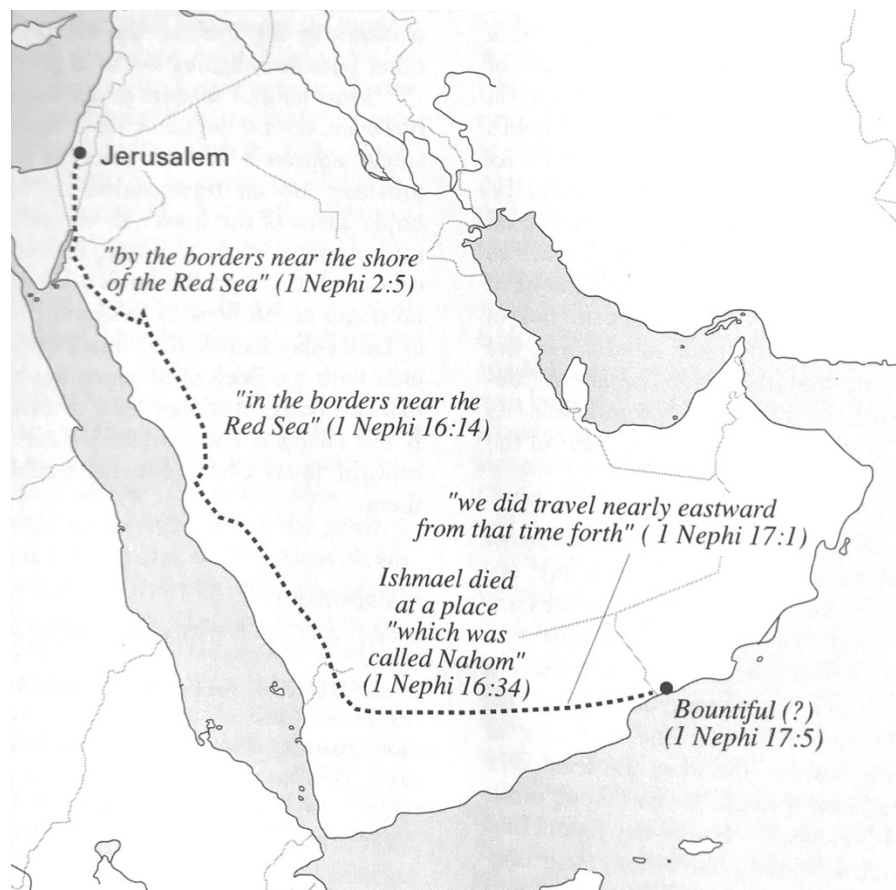
*Plausible Location of the Valley of Lemuel.<sup>5</sup>*

After leaving Jerusalem, the first major stop of Lehi's party was at the Valley of Lemuel. Nibley noted not only the ancient custom Lehi followed in giving a name to the valley's features (1 Nephi 2:6,9-10). He also discovered that the form of Lehi's expressions followed the conventions of Arabic *qaṣḥidah*, "the oldest actual poetry of the desert."<sup>6</sup>

It was not until 1999 that George Potter made the first plausible proposal for a specific Arabian location for the Valley of Lemuel.<sup>7</sup> Consistent with scripture, the river runs "continually." A claim for such an improbably flowing stream in arid Arabia could not have been checked until well after 1830. Many other features of the site also seem to correspond to elements of Lehi's dream of the Tree of Life (1 Nephi 8) which he had while the family was camped here.



While ty



*Annotated Map of Lehi's Journey.<sup>8</sup>*

Although some had suggested that Lehi's party traveled along the "western shore of the Red Sea" during their southward journey (1 Nephi 16:13, 33), Nibley correctly concluded that Lehi's party followed the Gaza branch of the Frankincense trail on the eastern side.<sup>9</sup>

In Semitic languages, the words for "mountains" and "borders" are synonyms. Thus, when the Book of Mormon says that Lehi's family traveled "by the borders" or "in the borders" it is the same as saying "by the mountains" or "in the mountains" (1 Nephi 2:5). Remarkably consistent with the description of Lehi's journey in the Book of Mormon, the split of the Hejaz mountain range defines a trail consisting of two segments, one that is "near the Red Sea" and the other that is "nearer the Red Sea" (1 Nephi 2:5).

At a place called Nahom, the family stopped their southward journey, buried Ishmael, and then turned eastward toward Bountiful.





*Altar Inscribed With a Reference to the Tribe of Nihm.<sup>10</sup>*

Nibley carefully observed that unlike other desert locations that Lehi encountered and named for himself, the Book of Mormon statement that Ishmael's burial place "was *called* Nahom" (1 Nephi 16:34) indicates that this place already had a name before the traveling party arrived.<sup>11</sup>

In perhaps one of the most astonishing archaeological discoveries relating to the Book of Mormon, Kent Brown learned about this altar. It dates back to Lehi's era and stands near his most likely trail. The altar is inscribed with a reference to the tribe of Nihm.<sup>12</sup>





*A Rock Burial Tomb in the Desert Northeast of Marib, Similar in Style and Age to the Nehem Tombs.<sup>13</sup>*

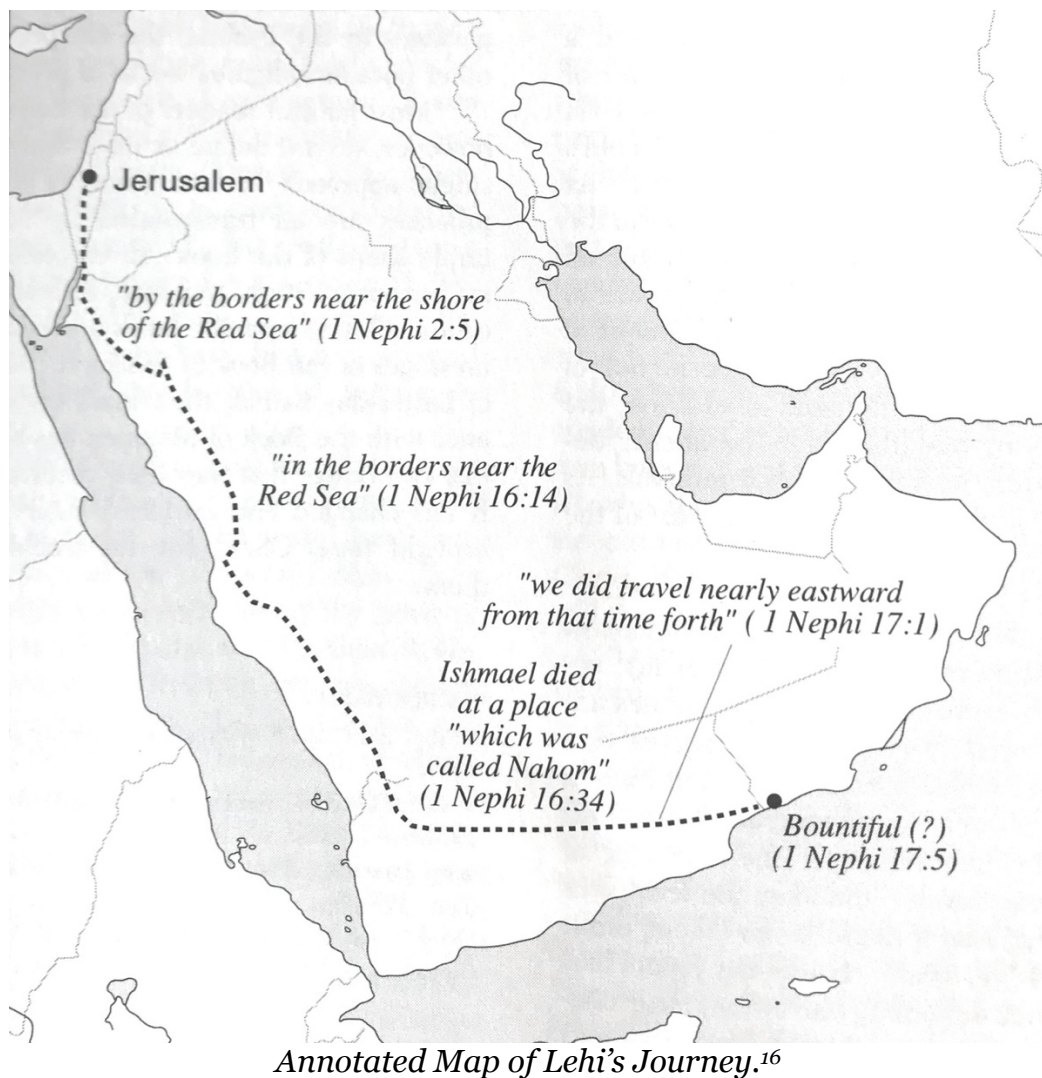
Consistent with this location as an appropriate burial place for Ishmael, hundreds of burial mounds going back beyond Lehi's time have been found. Significantly, the roots of the Semitic term NHM (transliterated in English with various combinations of vowels) indicate mourning, consoling, and complaining with hunger (consistent with 1 Nephi 16:35).





Carsten Niebuhr's 1763 Map Showing "Nehm."<sup>14</sup>

In addition to confirming archaeological finds, scholar Ross T. Christensen located a place named "Nehm" on this German map from 1763. Warren and Michaela Aston have since located other maps and pre-Islamic documents describing a name and a place corresponding to the Book of Mormon Nahom.<sup>15</sup> To our knowledge, no other known place with the same or similar name in the Middle East has yet been found.



Remarkably, the spot indicated on maps and documents seems to be just where Book of Mormon requires it to be, at the juncture where Lehi's trail would have turned eastward. Though Latter-day Saint scholars were not aware of the existence of an ancient place called NHM until long after Nibley first traced the trail of Lehi, Nibley correctly deduced both the approximate location of the place where the party would have turned eastward and the existence of an unlikely paradise corresponding to Bountiful on the seashore where their desert journey would have ended:<sup>17</sup>

The party struck off ... through the worst desert of all, where they "did wade through much affliction" [1 Nephi 17:1], to emerge in a state of almost complete exhaustion into a totally unexpected paradise by the sea. There is such a paradise in the Qara Mountains on the southern coast of Arabia. To reach it by moving "nearly eastward" (1 Nephi 17:1) from the Red Sea, one would have to turn east on the nineteenth parallel.<sup>18</sup>





*Satellite Picture of the Relatively Lush Dhofar Region Where Lehi's Family Reached the Coast.<sup>19</sup>*

Here is the Dhofar region of Oman, where Lehi's party would have come to the coast after following the path from Nahom "nearly eastward" from that place on the nineteenth parallel. Nibley observed that the discovery of this rare green thumbprint on the ancient location of Bountiful where the humid winds from Indian Ocean brought moisture to the Arabian coast came "as a great surprise" when it was first discovered in 1838, eight years after the Book of Mormon was published.



*Wadi Sayq, a possible location for Nephi's "Bountiful" along Omani coast, 1989.<sup>1</sup>*

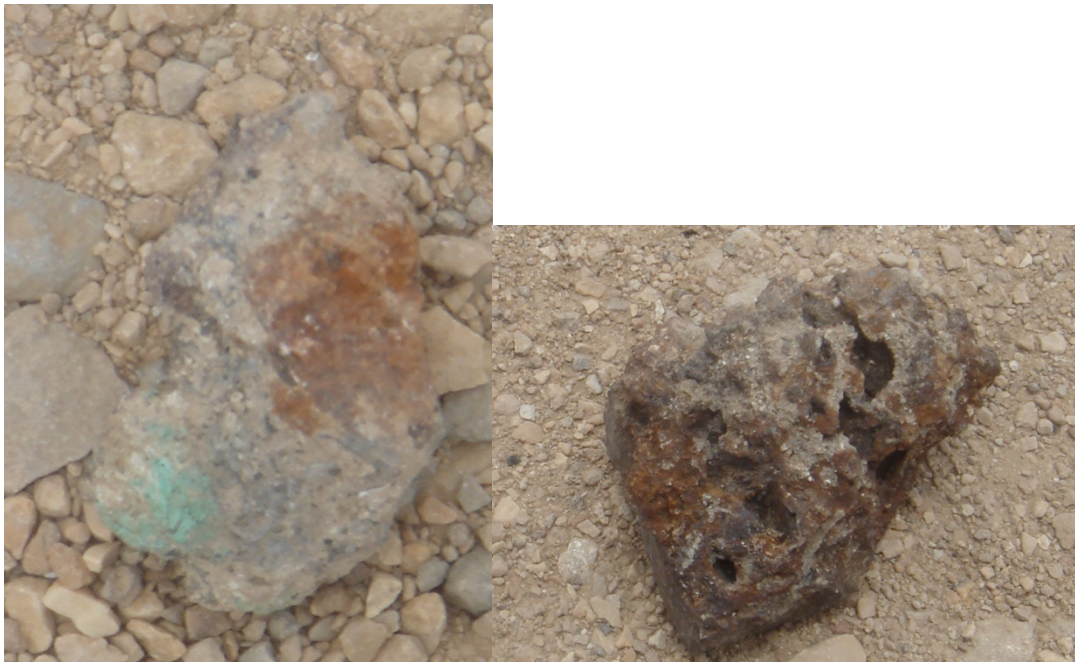
Supporting Nibley's conclusion that the discovery of such a place was at complete odds with the learned wisdom of Joseph Smith's day, he notes that when von Wrede "gave a glowing description" of these mountains in 1843, "the whole learned world simply refused to believe him."<sup>20</sup>





*Nearly Two Thousand Year-Old Honey Jar.*<sup>21</sup>

Nephi speaks of “wild honey” in the land of Bountiful, and this is one of the few places he would have found it. This honey jar in the museum of Salalah is nearly two-thousand years old.



*Evidence of Copper and Iron Smelting.<sup>22</sup>*

Nephi would have required a convenient source of ore to create tools and materials for his boat. BYU researchers discovered iron deposits on surface features of the area some years ago. More recently actual slag from copper and iron smelting has been found, confirming that this readily available ore was exploited in ancient times.<sup>23</sup>

Who would expect a fertile coastal site with available timber and iron ore to build and launch a ship on the southern coast of the Arabian desert? All these discoveries, built on the pioneering clues provided by Hugh Nibley, not only increase evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, but also help us make sense of details that its prophetic editors purposely included in the text for our benefit, but that we had little hope of understanding until Hugh Nibley came along.



May 18, 1984

J. Neusner  
Judaic Studies  
Brown University  
Providence, Rhode Island 02912

Dear Professor Neusner,

As a regular reader of the Theologische Literaturzeitung I was delighted to get your xerox sparing me the trouble of more note taking. What intrigues me at present about the Book of Mormon, independent of all other conditions, is the immense scope and detail of the story under the deceptively, even naively simple first appearance. The book we call the Pearl of Great Price is even more alarming in that sense but that is another story. Thanking you again for your kindness I remain yours truly,

Hugh Nibley

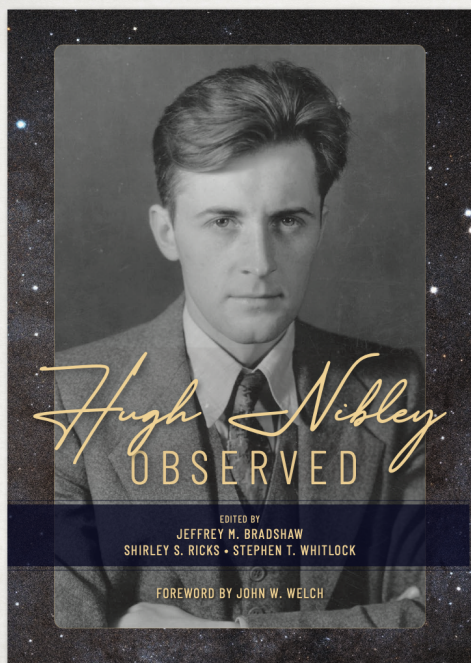
HN:og

*Letter to Jacob Neusner Discussing the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price.*<sup>24</sup>

In conversations with prominent academics, Nibley did not shy away from discussing his views on the remarkable nature of the Book of Mormon, as demonstrated in this letter by Nibley published for the first time in *Hugh Nibley Observed*. After Nibley thanked an eminent scholar of Judaism, Jacob Neusner, for sending a copy of one of his recent articles, Nibley abruptly launched into an impromptu testimony of the Book of Mormon:<sup>25</sup>

What intrigues me at present about the Book of Mormon, independent of all other conditions, is the immense scope and detail of the story under the deceptively, even naively simple first appearance. ... Thanking you again for your kindness I remain yours truly,

Hugh Nibley



<https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/>

High Nibley's deep interest in the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ led him to many discoveries of importance to Latter-day Saints. The book "Hugh Nibley Observed" tells the story of the man and his work. For more information, visit [interpreterfoundation.org/books/](https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/).

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## Endnotes

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- 1 J. W. Welch, *Hugh Nibley and the Book of Mormon*, pp. 433–434.
  - 2 John W. Welch, Introduction to *H. W. Nibley, Lehi 1988*, p. xi.
  - 3 Image by Matt Cutler, published in J. Gimenez, *Archaeological Evidence*.
  - 4 For a brief, easy-to-read summary of this journey, accompanies by videos, see *ibid.*.
  - 5 G. Potter *et al.*, *Lehi*, p. 10.
  - 6 H. W. Nibley, *Approach*, p. 273.
  - 7 G. Potter, *New Candidate*. See also G. Potter *et al.*, *Lehi*, pp. 6–13, 31–51. Though objections have been raised to Potter's proposal, notably by BYU professor Jeffrey R. Chadwick (J. R. Chadwick, *Wrong Place*), these objections have been ably answered by Kent Brown (S. K. Brown, *Hunt*). See also <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/have-the-valley-of-lemuel-and-the-river-laman-been-found> for an easy-to-read summary of the controversy concluding favorably for Potter's proposal.
  - 8 R. D. Eames, *First Book of Nephi*, 144.
  - 9 H. W. Nibley, *Approach*, p. 234.
  - 10 J. W. Welch, *Hugh Nibley and the Book of Mormon*, p. 436.
  - 11 H. W. Nibley, *Lehi 1988*.
  - 12 S. K. Brown, *Place That Was Called "Nahom"*.
  - 13 W. P. Aston *et al.*, *In the Footsteps*, p. 70.
  - 14 Published in *ibid.*, p. 15.
  - 15 See *ibid.*, pp. 14–21.
  - 16 R. D. Eames, *First Book of Nephi*, p. 144.



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17 H. W. Nibley, *Lehi* 1988, pp. 109–110.

18 After already having reached this conclusion Nibley came across a purported revelation to Joseph Smith in the handwriting of Frederick G. Williams (N. C. Williams, *After 100 Years*, p. 53):

The course that Lehi traveled from the city of Jerusalem to the place where he and his family took ship: They traveled nearly south, southeast direction until they came to the nineteenth degree of north latitude. Then nearly east to the Sea of Arabia; then south, southeast direction and landed on the continent of South America in Chili, thirty degrees south latitude.

The claim that this was a revelation from Joseph Smith is questionable (F. G. Williams, III, *Did Lehi Land in Chile?*. See also F. G. Williams, *Life*, pp. 427, 435) and, so far as the second part of the statement goes and the general consensus among trained Book of Mormon scholars is that Lehi landed on the coast of Guatemala (e.g., J. L. Sorenson, *Ancient*, p. 138; B. A. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:322–323). As to the first part of the statement, however, which indicated a change in direction for the traveling party at the nineteenth latitude, Nibley commented that “this correlation of data from two totally different sources is a strong indication that both are correct: (H. W. Nibley, *Lehi* 1988, p. 110).

19 From Google Earth app (March 18, 2021).

\ Photograph by Warren P. Aston, published in R. D. Eames, *First Book of Nephi*, p. 145 and J. W. Welch, *Hugh Nibley and the Book of Mormon*, p. 438.

20 H. W. Nibley, *Lehi* 1988, p. 111.

21 Photo by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, 2006. Photo ID: DSC00541.jpg.

22 Photo by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, 2006. Photo IDs: DSC00569.jpg and DSC00571.jpg.

23 See G. D. Potter *et al.*, *Lehi’s Trail: From the Valley of Lemuel to Nephi’s Harbor*, p. 115 n. 68 for Bradshaw’s report of the discovery of evidence of smelting at Khor Rori, one of the two leading candidates for the harbor used by Lehi’s family.

24 Published in J. W. Welch, *Hugh Nibley and the Book of Mormon*, p. 444.

25 Published in J. W. Welch, *Hugh Nibley and the Book of Mormon*, p. 444.