The Family of Lehi about 600 Years before Christ by Kelly Hale. Courtesy BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies.

Dating the Departure of Lehi from Jerusalem

Jeffrey R. Chadwick

Most Latter-day Saints would agree that the prophet Lehi and his family left their home in Jerusalem and departed into the wilderness in the year 600 BC. This is largely due to the presence of an asterisk in 1 Nephi 2:4, present in every official edition of the Book of Mormon from 1920 to 2012, which alerts readers to a "600 BC" chronological notation at the bottom of the page. However, a number of studies over the last forty years have suggested that 600 BC cannot have been the correct date of Lehi's departure, preferring later dates anywhere from 597 to 587 BC. But these suggestions, as well as the 600 BC notation itself, are all chronologically too late to accommodate the complicated contextual factors present in the text of First Nephi. This study will propose an earlier date for the event, within a quite narrow window of time. In what may come as a surprise to many readers, I suggest that Lehi's departure from Jerusalem occurred sometime in November 605 BC. This dating, I argue, makes the best sense of two principal data points: (1) the birth of Jesus in late 5 BC and the death of King Herod in the early spring of 4 BC and (2) the prophecy that Jesus would be born six hundred years from the time of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem.

As I write and refine this study, I find myself in "the land of Jerusalem," at Brigham Young University's Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, with its valuable library of rigorous sources, in my thirty-fifth year of professional research and archaeological work here. Knowing this land and its history is vital in attempting a study such as this. And, as is the case in any study of ancient society and chronology, a great deal of data must be introduced from various sources and fields to address

all of the issues that arise from a text as complicated as that of 1 Nephi. The 605 BC proposal has previously been only briefly outlined in footnotes and endnotes of a few of my academic articles.[1] This is the first time this particular proposal has been thoroughly explained and supported with contextual references from Nephi's text as well as historical, archaeological, and geographical information from the Land of Israel and the ancient Near East. At the outset, it will be important to review a sampling of other approaches to dating Lehi's departure, both by professional scholars and other interested commentators, and to demonstrate why those approaches do not satisfy the contextual demands of the Book of Mormon. Although it may appear, at times, that I am hopping around between different and unrelated subjects, by the end of this study all of the evidence will combine to support the proposed dating of Lehi's departure in late 605 BC.

The 600 BC Notation—a Modern Addition

Beginning with the 2013 English edition of the Book of Mormon, all date notations were moved from the bottom of every right-hand page (except for the book of Ether) to the end of each chapter heading. A distinct, and I believe quite significant, change was made in 1 Nephi 2: the bottom-of-page note "600 BC" was moved to the chapter heading and revised to "About 600 BC." This slight equivocation—from exactly 600 BC to "about" 600 BC—invites us to inquire where the dating schema originated and why it merited change. A brief explanation of the origin of the "600 BC" notation seems warranted. That notation, and all the other chronological notations found at the bottoms of the pages in the pre-2013 authorized editions of the Book of Mormon, were the contribution of Elder James E. Talmage, who was charged in his day to prepare a new 1920 edition of the Book of Mormon, having "double column pages, with chapter headings, chronological data, revised footnote references, pronouncing vocabulary, and index."[2] Elder Talmage

1. See Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 117–18 n. 24; Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "An Archaeologist's View," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 123 n. 7; and Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Dating the Death of Jesus Christ," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2015): 147–48 n. 46.

2. "Authorized" editions here refers to those editions authorized and published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints since 1920, including the extensively reworked 1981 edition, copyrighted by successive Presidents of

settled upon the year 600 BC as the zero-date in his chronology of Book of Mormon events. This was due primarily to three factors: (1) his determination that Jesus had been born in April of the year 1 BC, published in his 1915 book, *Jesus the Christ*;[3] (2) the prophecy of Lehi that the Messiah would be raised up "600 years from the time that (Lehi) left Jerusalem" (1 Ne. 10:4), which was periodically repeated by Nephi (see 1 Ne. 19:8; 2 Ne. 25:19); and (3) the ultimate report of the sign of Jesus's birth six hundred years after Lehi's departure (see 3 Ne. 1:1, 9–19). The 600-year span and 1 BC date for Jesus's birth seem to have been the only factors Elder Talmage worked with—neither biblical Israelite-Judahite history nor the Babylonian chronology appear to have been considered.[4] Events that occurred prior to Lehi's departure, including a reference to "the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah" (1 Ne. 1:4), were simply notated at the bottom of the page as dating to "about 600 BC."

The Reign of Zedekiah and the 600-Year Prophecy/Count

For half a century following the appearance of the 1920 edition of the Book of Mormon, no one in the LDS academic world questioned Elder Talmage's 600 BC departure date. Indeed, Sidney B. Sperry, one of the most respected LDS scholars of that era, basically concurred with it in a published pamphlet titled *Book of Mormon Chronology,* although he refined the actual departure date to 601 BC, which he identified as

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the Church above the title Trustee-in-Trust, by the Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or by its successor designation, Intellectual Reserve. The quotation here is from the copyright page of the 1920 edition.

3. See James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ: A Study of the Messiah and His Mission according to Holy Scriptures Both Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1915), 102–4.

4. The reference by Mormon to the first year of the reign of Mosiah II "about four hundred and seventy-six years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem" (Mosiah 6:4) presents what has been regarded by some as a possible imprecision in the 600-year count. It does not seem to have been a factor in Elder Talmage's calculations. In the present study, I suggest that it is not an imprecision at all, but an indication that Mormon was placing responsibility for the dating on his source material from the large plates of Nephi and not stating that he certified the dating himself. He made a similar disclaimer in 3 Nephi 8:2. For the purposes of the present study, however, it is of note that Mormon made no equivocal remark in 3 Nephi 1:1, where he stated that "it was six hundred years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem."

Zedekiah's first regnal year.[5] But beginning in the 1980s, the 600 BC departure date began to be seriously challenged, primarily for historical reasons. The most prominent chronological marker in Nephi's record, which also appears in the contemporary Hebrew Bible text and can be cross-checked in the Babylonian Chronicle, is represented by the phrase "it came to pass in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah" (1 Ne. 1:4; see also 2 Kgs. 24:17–18). It is a historical certainty, now accepted by a complete consensus of biblical and historical scholarship, that Zedekiah was elevated to the throne of Judah by the Babylonian monarch Nebuchadnezzar in the spring of the year 597 BC.[6] Thus, Zedekiah's first regnal year is calculated by scholars from the month of *Aviv* in the spring of 597 BC to the spring of 596 BC. In the text of 1 Nephi, "the first year of the reign of Zedekiah" (1 Ne. 1:4) is mentioned prior to Lehi's departure from Jerusalem (1 Ne. 2:4), although the amount of time between the two markers is not elaborated. Taken at face value, this would indicate that Zedekiah's first regnal year was three years later than 600 BC and would mean that the absolute earliest Lehi could have left Jerusalem was 597 BC, if not somewhat later.

This complicates the traditional Book of Mormon chronology because of the 600-year prophecy and year count for the birth of Christ after Lehi's exodus. Six hundred years can simply not be squeezed into the period from 597 BC to 1 BC. Additionally, the modern consensus of New Testament scholarship agrees that Jesus could not have been born later than the early winter of 5/4 BC.[7] The reason for this is that Herod the Great is considered with historical certainty to have died in April of 4 BC, and the New Testament positively asserts that Herod was alive when Jesus was born and did not die until sometime thereafter

5. Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Chronology: The Dating of Book of Mormon People and Events* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 2.

6. See Yohanan Aharoni and others, *The Carta Bible Atlas* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2011), 128. See also Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 264; and John Bright, *A History of Israel,* 3d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 327.

7. For my discussion of this consensus, see Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ," in *BYU Studies* 49, no. 4 (2010): 11–13; see also Thomas A. Wayment, "The Birth and Death Dates of Jesus Christ," in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ: From Bethlehem through the Sermon on the Mount,* ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 385–86.

(see Matt. 2:1–20). It becomes necessary, then, to reconcile the 600-year prophecy/count with the period from 597/6 BC to 5/4 BC, a span of only 592 years. How is this to be done?

Part I

Modern Approaches to the 600-Year Prophecy/Count

Before I present the 605 BC model, I will survey existing approaches to this conundrum. Of several possibilities, three samples of modern studies attempting to deal with the above-noted historical considerations will suffice here to show the main ways in which this dating challenge has been approached since the 1980s. The first example is an approach taken by John L. Sorenson, a respected BYU professor of anthropology, in his 1985 book, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. Sorenson proposed that the Mayan 360-day count known as a *tun* should be considered as the "year" that accumulated in the 600-year prophecy/count. The 360-day *tun* was a component of a complex Mesoamerican chronological system known to archaeologists as the Long Count, which had developed among the Maya by the first century BC as a parallel to their older chronological system, known to archaeologists as the Calendar Round.[8] Both systems were quite complicated and did not accommodate the four annual seasons, the two equinox days, or the two solstice days of the 365¼-day tropical solar year that we now commonly utilize. The *tun* of the Long Count was not aligned to any of the twelve lunar months of the Hebrew Bible calendar in use for the law of Moses or with the biblical seven-day week, which was unknown in the Mayan system. These issues notwithstanding, Sorenson suggested the following: "'600 years' by the Maya *tun* method of calculating time would turn out 8.64 years shorter than '600 years' in today's conventional sense. If we mark off 600 *tun* years from Zedekiah's first year, 597–596 BC, 216,000 days brings us into the year overlapping 5–4 BC, an acceptable date for Christ's birth."[9] Sorenson's approach, and his

8. For a succinct description of the Mayan calendar and chronological system, see Robert J. Sharer and Loa P. Traxler, *The Ancient Maya,* 6th ed. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 102–15; see also Michael D. Coe and Stephen Houston, *The Maya,* 9th ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2015), 63–68, 259–62.

9. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1985), 273. See also Jay Huber's 1982 FARMS preliminary

597 BC departure date for Lehi, have become popular among contemporary Book of Mormon commentators who are convinced (as am I) that ancient Mesoamerica and the Late Preclassic Maya society were the venue of the Nephite narrative.

A quite different approach to the 600-year issue was suggested in a speculative essay by Randall P. Spackman that appeared in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* in 1998.[10] Spackman suggested that the Nephites had adopted a strictly lunar calendar of 354 days, divided into 12 lunar months of 29 to 30 days each, which did not adjust to the tropical 365¼-day year in the way that the biblical Judahite calendar did. He notes that the account written by Amaleki in Omni 1:21 mentions "the space of nine moons" and speculates from this that the Nephites did not intercalate lunar months to the solar year. His explanation for the 600-year prophecy/count was that it lasted 7,200 lunar months. And rather than place Lehi's departure close to the first year of Zedekiah's reign in 597/6 BC, Spackman theorized it was nine years later, in 588/7 BC, a year prior to the 586 BC destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. He chose this date because of two Book of Mormon passages: 2 Nephi 25:10, which he read to mean that Jerusalem was destroyed directly after Lehi departed; and 1 Nephi 7:14, which mentions that the prophet Jeremiah had been cast into prison. Spackman identified this imprisonment as the one reported in Jeremiah 37:15 (a connection also suggested in footnote *d* to 1 Nephi 7:14), which occurred during the 588/7 siege of Jerusalem. Finally, counting forward 7,200 lunar months from 588/7 BC, Spackman placed the birth of Jesus in the spring of 5 BC. In practical terms, the time span he advocated for the 600-year prophecy/count would equal about 583 regular tropical solar years.

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report "Lehi's 600-Year Prophecy and the Birth of Christ," https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/PreliminaryReports/Set%203/Prelim%20Rep/Huber,%20Lehis%20600%20Year%20Prophecy%20and%20the%20Birth%20of%20Christ,%201982.pdf.

10. Randall P. Spackman, "The Jewish/Nephite Lunar Calendar," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 48–59. This work is referred to herein as an essay because it is not a scholarly or academic article in any sense. It does not cite or utilize outside scholarly works or references to support the theories it presents. Its four endnotes refer only to Bible and Book of Mormon passages. See also his 1993 FARMS Preliminary Report offprint: Randall P. Spackman, "Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates," a longer compilation with a lengthy bibliography but very few internal reference citations.

A third study on the departure date of Lehi from Jerusalem, quite thoughtful and thorough in its approach, was published in 2001 by two respected BYU professors of ancient scripture, S. Kent Brown and David Rolph Seely. Titled "Jeremiah's Imprisonment and the Date of Lehi's Departure,"[11] Brown and Seely's academic article in *The Religious Educator* reviewed the model proposed by Spackman and discussed several of its weaknesses. In particular, Brown and Seely dealt with the confinement of Jeremiah alluded to in 1 Nephi 7:14 and Spackman's acceptance of the Jeremiah 37:15 event of 588 BC as the imprisonment to which Nephi referred. They point to two earlier confinements of Jeremiah, one in Jeremiah 36:5, dating to 605 BC, when the prophet was arrested and jailed; and one in Jeremiah 20:2, dating to 601 BC, when the prophet was put into stocks for a day and night. They suggest one of these events was more likely the confinement spoken of by Nephi. Brown and Seely discuss a number of issues in significant detail that serve to refute the departure-date model in the Spackman essay and conclude that Lehi's departure most likely occurred sometime shortly after 597 BC, which they accept as the beginning of Zedekiah's first regnal year. Ultimately, they do not offer a specific date or year for Lehi's departure. As for the 600-year prophecy/count, they note that the period between 597 BC and 5 or 4 BC allows for a passage of only 592 or 593 years and admit that this "remains an issue that has not been solved."[12]

The Law of Moses and the Lunar-Solar Year

In order to evaluate the models of Sorenson, Spackman, and Brown and Seely above, and as a necessary prelude to introducing the 605 BC model for Lehi's departure, it is important to understand the calendar requirements of the law of Moses. The law of Moses, as recorded in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), was strictly and legally observed in Judah prior to Lehi's departure. It was also observed by the Nephites and even some Lamanites (see for example 2 Ne. 5:10; 25:24; Jacob 4:5; Jarom 1:5; Mosiah 2:2; 16:14; Alma 25:15; 30:3; Hel. 13:1; 3 Ne. 1:24–25) for the 634 years between Lehi's departure (see 1 Ne. 2:4) and the visit of the risen Christ to Nephite Bountiful (see 3 Ne. 11–28). The ancient law of Moses calendar, derived from the early Hebrew Bible writings, which were upon the plates of brass possessed by Lehi (see 1 Ne. 5:10–13), consisted of twelve

11. S. Kent Brown and David Rolph Seely, "Jeremiah's Imprisonment and the Date of Lehi's Departure," *Religious Educator* 2, no. 1 (2001): 15–32.

12. Brown and Seely, "Jeremiah's Imprisonment," 16.

lunar months of 29 to 30 days each. The actual period of lunation is 29.53 days (or 29 days, 12 hours, and 44 minutes), so lunar months alternated between 29 and 30 days each and commenced with the observation of the new moon. Key ordinances of the law of Moses were connected to the monthly new-moon cycle. For example, with each new moon, on the first day of each month, the law of Moses required a sacrifice to be made by the priests at the Tabernacle (later the Temple) of two bullocks, one ram, and seven lambs (see Num. 28:11). This was part of an elaborate system of offerings that mandated sacrifices on a daily basis (Num. 28:3–4) and a weekly Sabbath basis (Num. 28:9–10). Sacrifices were also required on the yearly festival holidays, including Passover, in the first month of spring (Num. 28:16–25); the early summer day of first fruits, also known as the Feast of Weeks (Num. 28:26–27; Deut. 16:10); the day of trumpeting on the first day of the seventh month, at the onset of autumn (Num. 29:1–2); the tenth day of the seventh month, known also as Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement (Num. 29:7–8; Lev. 23:27); and on the fifteenth day of the seventh month at the autumn Feast of Tabernacles (Num. 29:12–13; Lev. 23:34–36). That this complex calendar of sacrifices on Sabbaths, festivals, and the monthly new moons was in place in Judah well before Lehi's day is manifest in a passage in Isaiah, dating to 700 BC, in which God condemns those Israelites whose oblations on the new moons, Sabbaths, and other occasions were deemed vain (Isa. 1:13).

However, this twelve-month lunar count notwithstanding, the law of Moses also specifically stipulated that the Passover festival must take place in the spring season, which marked the first month of the year. Indeed, the name of the first month, *Aviv* ("Abib" in the KJV), was also the Hebrew term for spring (see Ex. 12:2; 13:4; 23:15). Spring was understood as commencing with the vernal equinox, around March 20, whether in the hot tropical climate of Egypt or the more moderate Mediterranean climate of Canaan. The Israelite-Judahite year of the Hebrew Bible, during the time of the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon, was counted from spring to spring.[13] And Passover absolutely had to be

13. While the Israelite-Judahite calendar year ran from spring to spring in the time of Solomon's Temple (the First Temple Period), the situation became more complex after the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity. By the time of Christ (late in the Second Temple Period), the Jewish year was counted in two different but complementary ways—the old Israelite way, in which the first month of the year was considered the first spring month, and the adopted Syrian method, in which the first autumn month was the first month of the yearly count. Passover continued to be celebrated in the spring, of course, and

celebrated in the first vernal month, after the onset of spring (on the first full moon in the four weeks after the March equinox).

But as already noted, twelve strictly lunar months add up to a period only 354 days long, some eleven days shorter than the tropical solar year of 365¼ days. If adjustments had not been made by the Israelites of Judah, the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, which was to be Passover, would fall back in the seasonal cycle by eleven days each year, quickly putting Passover back into late winter, then midwinter, then early winter, then late autumn, and so on. A strictly lunar calendar year could not keep Passover in its commanded spring season. The Israelites of Judah realized this very early in their history and devised a way to keep Passover from falling back out of spring and into winter. They added an extra month—a thirteenth leap month—into their year every two to three years as needed, in order to keep the month of *Aviv* in the tropical spring season where it belonged. So, for example, if Passover, on the 15th of *Aviv,* were to fall one year on a day we would know as March 28, in order to prevent it from falling back to March 17 the following year, the priests in Judah would proclaim an extra month of *Adar* (their twelfth month) the following winter, which would then push *Aviv* back into spring and the 15th of *Aviv* that year to the date we know as April 17. This would allow a couple of more normal years to pass before the 15th of *Aviv* again fell far enough back to require another addition of a leap month. The thirteenth leap-month addition was apparently inserted by ad hoc observation every two to three years for centuries prior to Christ, and even during his era, but was ultimately fixed in a seventeen-year repeating cycle by Jewish sages in the fourth century AD.[14]

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the Feast of Tabernacles in the autumn, but the first day of the Israelite seventh month (the day of blowing trumpets) became known as *Rosh HaShanah* (the head of the year) due to the Syrian calendar's regard of the initial autumn month as the first month of the year. The Jewish year was counted from the first autumn month at the time of Jesus and the first century AD Jewish sages and has continued so from then until the present time. See Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Dating the Death of Jesus Christ," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2015): 137–38, 137 n. 8.

14. For a brief treatment of the Jewish calendar intercalation, see Chadwick, "Dating the Death of Jesus Christ," 144–45, and for a very detailed description, see Sacha Stern, *Calendar and Community: A History of the Jewish Calendar, Second Century BCE–Tenth Century CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 47–98, 175.

This method of adjusting the lunar-month year count of 354 days to the tropical solar year count of 365¼ days is called intercalation. The Israelite-Judahite intercalated calendar of lunar months in a solar-year system is also known as the lunar-solar year. The Judahite lunar-solar year kept Passover and the other law of Moses festivals in the seasons to which the scriptural commands had initially assigned them. Observance of the law of Moses absolutely required the lunar-solar year arrangement, in which the tropical solar year of 365¼ days was the year that accumulated over time and history. To put it simply, in the long run, when added up over time, law of Moses years were the same length as our normal years.

The point of this rather long but necessary explanation is that the Nephites, who were observing the law of Moses, would have had to utilize the Judahite lunar-solar calendar system that was systemic in the law of Moses. And we have it on good authority that the Nephites were very particular about observing the law of Moses, from its Sabbath days to its prescribed sacrifices (see 2 Ne. 5:10, 16; 25:24–25; Jacob 4:5; Jarom 1:5; Mosiah 2:3; Alma 25:15; 30:3; Hel. 13:1; 3 Ne. 1:24–25). That the Nephites were counting their months according to the new moons seems evident from Amaleki's reference to the passing of "nine moons" (Omni 1:21). But that they were keeping their lunar months intercalated to the tropical solar year is self-evident from Mormon's inclusion of the point that "they were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses, for they were taught to keep the law of Moses" (Alma 30:3). To strictly observe those ordinances required the festivals and their sacrifices to occur in their scripturally mandated months and seasons. And although Mormon, who lived centuries after the law of Moses was discontinued among his people, had no personal acquaintance with its ordinances or festivals, the records from which he drew also recalled times when "the Lamanites did observe strictly to keep the commandments of God, according to the law of Moses" (Hel. 13:1).

Mormon never named any of the Mosaic festivals in his record (he may not have known the names), but his limited description of the gathering in Mosiah 2 was very likely reporting a Passover festival, at which King Benjamin announced the ascent of his son Mosiah to the throne as the new Nephite king—an event logically performed at the beginning of the year, when biblical regnal years were considered to commence. Indications that the event was a Passover festival include that the population gathered at the central temple (Mosiah 2:1), per Deuteronomic standard (see Deut. 16:16); that the people gathered as families for the event (Mosiah 2:5); and particularly that they brought their own animals for

sacrifice (Mosiah 2:3), a feature specific only to the Passover festival (Ex. 12:3). The other Mosaic law festivals did not require individuals or families to perform individual sacrifices or to provide sacrificial animals.[15]

The only secure reference to the Nephite calendar month supplied in Mormon's entire narrative occurs in 3 Nephi 8:5.[16] The passage refers to the day on which the storms and signs marking the day of Jesus's death occurred and specifies that it was in the first Nephite month. In a previous study, I have given what I consider strong evidence that Jesus most likely died at Jerusalem at Passover during the first week of April in AD 30.[17] This indicates the Nephite "first month" was an early spring month, exactly as the law of Moses lunar-solar calendar requires.[18]

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15. Some have suggested that the Mosiah 2 event was a Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot festival), based on the description of families staying in tents and other parallels to Israelite festival activities in the fall holy season around the Day of Atonement. See John A. Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley,* vol. 2, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 197–237; and Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 147–223. While this may be correct, the Sukkot festival did not necessarily require individual or family animal sacrifices, nor did it even accommodate them in any numbers. The families staying in tents in Mosiah 2 is also consistent with a Passover festival, since on that occasion, too, Israelites were to gather from everywhere to stay at the site of the central temple and celebrate the festival in family units—in Judah that would have been at Jerusalem, but in Nephite King Benjamin's setting it would have been at Zarahemla.

16. It could be argued that there are actually two such references, if one includes the allusion to the "ending of the thirty and fourth year" in 3 Nephi 10:18, when Nephi gave his report of the ministry of the resurrected Jesus Christ, who appeared to the Nephites in Bountiful. It might be that almost an entire year had passed between the time of Jesus's death and his first appearance to the Nephites. The inference, then, would be that both the ending of the Nephite year and the beginning of the Nephite year occurred in early spring, again suggesting that the first Nephite month was an early spring month, since they had begun counting their years from the date of the sign of his birth (3 Ne. 2:4–8).

17. See Chadwick, "Dating the Death of Jesus Christ," 184–88.

18. With regard to the Nephite "first month," I have suggested, in another study, that Mormon's caveat about the possibility of mistake in the date reported in 3 Nephi 8:1–5 may represent an error of ten days and that the "fourth day of

Why the Lunar Year and the *Tun* as a Year Simply Don't Work

With the above in mind, it should be clear why the proposition that the Nephites were counting Mayan *tuns* as their years cannot be correct. And it should also be clear that the Nephites were not using a strictly lunar calendar year. The law of Moses, with its annual festival ordinances that demanded an intercalated lunar-solar year, simply could not have been observed with strictness or accuracy under a system of 360-day Mayan *tuns* or 354-day lunar years. The first annual month, when Passover was held, would fall from spring back into winter within just six years under a *tun* count and would not cycle back to spring again for another six decades. In the case of strictly lunar years, the first month would cycle back into winter in just three lunar years, not returning to spring for another thirty years. The Nephites, strict observers of the law of Moses, would not have conducted the sacred festivals outside their scripturally mandated seasons. Their Passover had to have been in their first month, and it had to have been in the spring, every single year. So they could not have been using *tuns* as their years, nor were they counting strictly lunar years.

Another important indicator that the Nephites were counting real tropical solar years in an intercalated lunar-solar calendar is found in the 3 Nephi narrative. There we learn that a full thirty-three years passed between the time of the signs of Jesus's birth and time of the signs of his death (see 3 Ne. 8:2–4). In the New Testament setting, the date for the birth of Jesus could not have been later than the early winter of 5/4 BC, and the best possible date for his death was in the early spring of AD 30.[19] This means that Jesus's life span was most likely a period of thirty-three full tropical solar years and three or four months. If the Nephites had been counting *tuns* as years in the 3 Nephi narrative, and that 360-day count were multiplied by thirty-three, the period between the signs of Jesus's birth and death would have been 165 days shorter than in the tropical solar year count, amounting to a little less than thirty-two real tropical solar years and seven months, some seven or eight months shy of what the New Testament context demands. And if

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the month" may really have been the fourteenth day of the first month—the biblically noted day of the eve of Passover, on which Jesus is known to have been crucified at Jerusalem. See Chadwick, "Dating the Death of Jesus Christ," 185–88.

19. For full details, see Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ" and "Dating the Death of Jesus Christ."

the span between those signs were counted in strictly lunar years, the period between the signs of birth and death would be 363 days shorter than a tropical solar count, amounting to only thirty-two tropical solar years—some fifteen months shy of what the New Testament context describes. It must also be clear from this data that the Nephites could not have been using *tuns* or a lunar-year calendar in counting the total of years described in 3 Nephi.

To support his lunar-year theory, Spackman suggested that the Nephites were not concerned about keeping Passover and the other Mosaic law festivals in their scripturally mandated seasons, theorizing that they would not have felt those seasons were applicable in the climate of Mesoamerica. He proposed that the Nephites abandoned any effort to retain Passover in the tropical solar year spring season, or the Feast of Tabernacles in the tropical solar year autumn.[20] But there is not a shred of evidence in the Book of Mormon to support this idea, and it cannot be squared with the report that the Nephites "were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses" (Alma 30:3). The lunar-year theory must be rejected.

All of the above is critical to understanding the length of time described by the Book of Mormon's 600-year count that originated with Lehi's prophecy in 1 Nephi 10:4. Those 600 years can only have reference to real, full years of 365¼ days each, accumulated in the lunar-solar year count, which, over time, exactly matches the count of tropical solar years. Neither the 592 real years suggested by Sorenson nor the 583 real years of Spackman's scheme will suffice as the 600 real years between Lehi's departure and the birth of Jesus, demanded by the prophecy/count references in the 1, 2, and 3 Nephi narratives.

A final fact to keep in mind is that Lehi's original 600-year prophecy was given in the valley of Lemuel, on the extreme north Arabian shore of the Red Sea, a decidedly ancient Near Eastern venue, not an ancient Mesoamerican one. Lehi could not possibly have known about the Mayan *tun* when he uttered that prophecy, nor could Nephi in his repetitions of the prophecy. Indeed, the Mayan Long Count, with its *tun* component, is not even known to have existed in 600 BC (its earliest attestation is to the late first century BC).[21] And there was simply never a time when the Israelites of the Hebrew Bible operated on a strictly lunar calendar. Neither the *tun* nor the strictly lunar count can be reconciled

20. Spackman, "Jewish/Nephite Lunar Calendar," 52–54.
21. See Coe and Houston, *Maya,* 67.

to the context of Lehi's original 600-year prophecy or Nephi's repetitions of it.

Counting back 600 real years from the most likely date for Jesus's birth, which was in early winter of 5/4 BC (essentially December of 5 BC), would mathematically place the departure of Lehi in the year 605 BC. And, to be even more precise, it would suggest Lehi departed in or just prior to early winter, between mid-November and December of 605 BC. This is the proposition of the present study. But, again, how can a departure in 605 BC be reconciled with Nephi's own reference to the "first year of the reign of Zedekiah" (1 Ne. 1:4) if Zedekiah did not begin his reign until 597 BC?

Part II

King Josiah's Death and His Sons as Successors

In order to answer this question, we must know something of the reign of Josiah, king of Judah, and have an understanding of events in the decade following his death. King Josiah was killed in battle with the Egyptians at Megiddo in 609 BC (2 Kgs. 23:29–30), a few years prior to Lehi's departure from Jerusalem.

Josiah had become king of Judah by consensus of "the people of the land" in 640 BC, at eight years of age, after the assassination of his father, Amon (2 Kgs. 21:23–22:1). At that time, the small kingdom had been a controlled vassal of the Assyrian empire for six decades, since the disastrous attack of Sennacherib on Judah in 701 BC (see 2 Kgs. 18–19). Judah was essentially run by Josiah's handlers until he was grown, but by age twenty he was in control of the royal agenda. About that time, in 628 BC, the death of the Assyrian emperor Ashurbanipal marked the beginning of the final disintegration of the once great empire.

As the Assyrians withdrew from the Mediterranean region, Josiah's army regained control over all of Judah's former territory, expelling the occupying Philistines. His forces then moved north to annex the province of Samaria by 625 BC. Moving farther north, his armies annexed to Judah the Megiddo region, including the Jezreel Valley and the Galilee, all part of the former Assyrian province of *Magiddu*.[22] The territories Josiah appropriated had been portions of the former northern

22. Aharoni and others, *Carta Bible Atlas,* 126, map 175.

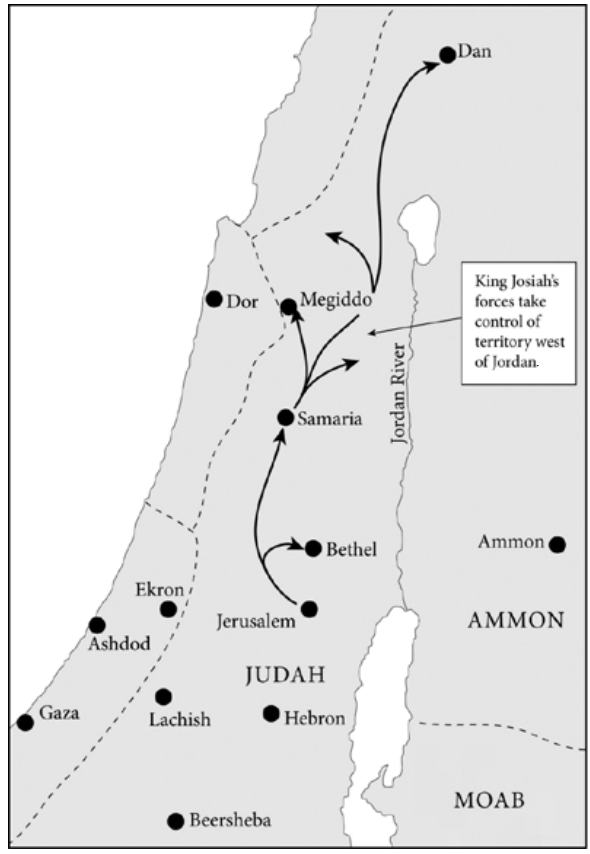

FIGURE 1. Josiah's expansion of Judah northward into former Assyrian provinces of Samaria and Megiddo, c. 625 BC. Map by the author.

kingdom of Israel until the Assyrians had conquered it and deported away its Israelite population between 732 and 721 BC. Josiah's annexations after 628 BC extended his kingdom's borders to the ancient boundaries controlled by Solomon—from Dan to Beersheba (1 Kgs. 4:25). This expanded Judah became the most prominent polity in the region for the next two decades.

In 622 BC, Josiah had the temple of Solomon repaired (2 Kgs. 22:3–6). This resulted in the discovery of a scriptural record in the temple (2 Kgs. 22:8), which led to the subsequent composition of the biblical books of the law of Moses (Genesis–Deuteronomy) and of six centuries of Israelite and Judahite history (Joshua 1–2 Kings 23), known to biblical

scholars as the Deuteronomic History.[23] As a result, Judah had its first functional scripture compilation, still the major component of our current Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). Josiah also reinstituted the Passover festival (2 Kgs. 23:21–23), which had not been performed for decades, since King Hezekiah's time (see 2 Chr. 30). All of these events and the expansion of Judah's territory, economy, and prominence were the context of Lehi's life in Jerusalem. When Josiah was killed in 609 BC, Lehi was perhaps around forty years old.[24]

Josiah and his kingdom were implicit allies of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom of the Chaldeans, ruled by king Nabopolassar. This relationship was a renewal of the ties that had existed between Judah and Babylon in the days of Josiah's great-grandfather Hezekiah (see 2 Kgs. 20:12–13). When the Babylonian armies, led by Nabopolassar's son Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed the Assyrian capital at Nineveh in 612 BC, Chaldean Babylon began to emerge as a new and expanding empire in the ancient Near East. The Egyptian king Necho II, wishing to forestall Babylonian expansion, marched to Carchemish in Syria to attempt the recapture of Haran.[25] Proceeding north through Philistia, Necho needed to pass by Megiddo and through the Galilee to confront the Babylonians in Syria. Josiah was unwilling to allow the Egyptians to pass through his territory to fight his own ally, leading to the battle between the Egyptians and Judah at Megiddo in which Josiah was killed by an archer (2 Chr. 35:23–24). His death was a national catastrophe for Judah.

The account in 2 Kings, paralleled in 2 Chronicles, reports that "the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's stead" (2 Kgs. 23:30; 2 Chr. 36:1). It seems clear from these passages that Jehoahaz, though at twenty-three years of age not Josiah's oldest son at the time, was the royally designated and publicly acknowledged heir to the throne. Josiah's popularity had

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23. The Deuteronomic History (beginning with Deuteronomy, followed by the history in Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings), was composed around 620 BC from a variety of earlier-written sources, including royal chronicles, but was an essentially new work. For a complete description of the process, see Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989), 101–35.

24. For background on Lehi's life in Jerusalem, see Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Lehi's House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem,* ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004), 81–130.

25. Aharoni and others, *Carta Bible Atlas,* 127, map 176.

been such that "the people of the land" would likely not have supported a successor who was not his explicit choice. Jehoahaz's mother, Josiah's wife Hamutal, seems to have been the queen mother and was the daughter of the priestly scion Jeremiah of Libnah (2 Kgs. 23:31), all important facts to keep in mind.[26] However, Necho's Egyptian forces, having defeated the Judahite army, occupied Judah and removed Jehoahaz from the throne after only three months. Late in 609 BC, Necho installed another, older son of Josiah, Eliakim, as king of Judah, who used his other Israelite-Judahite name, Jehoiakim, as his throne name. Jehoahaz was taken prisoner to Egypt, where he perished (2 Kgs. 23:34–35).

Jehoiakim, twenty-five years old when he began to reign, was the son of another of Josiah's wives, Zebudah (2 Kgs. 23:36), who was not the publicly recognized queen mother in the context of 2 Kings 23. Jehoiakim would likely never have become king if the Egyptians had not taken control of Judah in 609 BC. He operated as a loyal vassal of Egypt for the five years that Judah was under Egyptian domination, from 609 to mid-604 BC.[27] He was condemned (routinely) by the Deuteronomic historian (2 Kgs. 23:36–24:5) and also fiercely denounced by Jeremiah the prophet. Jeremiah mourned that Jehoahaz was taken away (see Jer. 22:10–11, where Jehoahaz's alternative name, Shallum, is used) and ranted against Jehoiakim, accusing him of many religious and public wrongdoings and predicting his ignoble death and burial (see Jer. 22:12–19).

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26. It is difficult to imagine what Jehoahaz might have done in just three months to merit the formulaic condemnation "he did . . . evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Kgs. 23:32)—there is no parallel condemnation in the Chronicles account (2 Chr. 36:1–3). He was clearly the designate successor of his father, Josiah, whom the people supported and of whom the Deuteronomic historian spoke positively. The Deuteronomic History up to the point of 2 Kings 23:25 (Deuteronomy–2 Kings) is theoretically attributed to a writer or writers around 620 BC in Jerusalem known as Dtr1. The text from the account of the death of Josiah, 2 Kings 23:26 through 2 Kings 25, is attributed to a writer or writers known as Dtr2 (which may have been the same person or persons as Dtr1) writing outside Judah sometime after the 586 BC destruction of Jerusalem. With this in mind, it may be that all four kings of Judah after Josiah's death were described differently, and routinely condemned, from the distant perspective of Dtr2, and that Jehoahaz was not really guilty of any serious religious transgression in the three months he was on the throne. See the discussion on Dtr1 and Dtr2 by Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible,* 111–49.

27. On this period as one of Egyptian domination of Judah as a vassal state, see Rainey and Notley, *Sacred Bridge,* 260. They round out the period as simply 609–605 BC.

It is likely that those who regarded Jeremiah's prophetic calling felt the same way about Jehoiakim—that his kingship was essentially illegitimate. There is no indication in the reports of either 2 Kings or its later parallel, 2 Chronicles, that Jehoiakim was supported or recognized as king by "the people of the land" in the way that Josiah and Jehoahaz had been. In his first five years, he was, by any standard, an Egyptian puppet.

The First Year of the Reign of Zedekiah

It is here, in the overall discussion, that I may now introduce the first chronological marker in the proposal for Lehi's departure from Jerusalem in late 605 BC. This marker is that "the first year of the reign of Zedekiah" spoken of by Nephi (1 Ne. 1:4), when many prophets spoke out, must actually have been the first year of Jehoiakim's reign, which started in late 609 BC, after Josiah's death and the Egyptian deposing of Jehoahaz. In the way regnal years of Jehoiakim are expressed in the book of Jeremiah, this first year would have been 608/7 (counted from the new-year mark in spring of 608 to spring of 607).[28] Zedekiah, whose other name is given as Mattaniah (only in 2 Kings 24:17), was the younger brother of Jehoahaz and the son of the queen mother, Hamutal (2 Kgs. 24:18), and thus theoretically next in line to Josiah's throne after Jehoahaz's demise. Why the Egyptians did not install him as their puppet, but instead chose his much older half-brother Jehoiakim, is not clear. It may have been because Zedekiah was only eight years old in

28. A brief explanation of how the calendar references in Jeremiah work is in order. Jeremiah's calendar references are keyed to the lunar-solar year beginning in spring, with the month of *Aviv* (also known as *Nisan*) as the first month. This is clear from references such as Jeremiah 36:22, where the ninth month is said to be in winter. With regard to the years of Jehoiakim's reign, which did not begin until late 609 BC, his first full regnal year was counted in Jeremiah from spring of 608 to spring of 607 BC. The full table proceeds as follows: first year = 608/7, second year = 607/6, third year = 606/5, fourth year = 605/4, fifth year = 604/3, and so on. Some scholars hold that chronological references in the 1 and 2 Kings accounts should be understood as the year beginning in autumn, as contrasted to the references in Jeremiah, which would count Jehoiakim's first year as beginning in autumn of 609. See E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1983), cited in Rainey and Notley, *Sacred Bridge,* 260. This is not a settled issue. But since 2 Kings makes no specific references to individual years in Jehoiakim's reign, Jeremiah is the primary source for understanding chronologically tagged events during Jehoiakim's administration.

609 BC, or it may have been because they reasoned that Jehoiakim, who otherwise had no claim to the throne, would be a more reliable collaborator than the child Zedekiah, who would have to be mentored by the same court officials and priests who had supported Necho's foes Josiah and Jehoahaz. Whatever the reason, Zedekiah's young age would not have been a deterrent to "the people of the land" of Judah in recognizing him as the rightful king, since his own father, Josiah, had also taken the throne at only age eight (2 Kgs. 22:1). The proposal here is that men in Judah like Lehi and Nephi, who were allies of Jeremiah the prophet and who would have deeply resented the Egyptians for killing King Josiah, would also have regarded the Egyptian puppet Jehoiakim as illegitimate or, at best, an undesired co-regent,[29] and would have actually recognized young Zedekiah as the rightful monarch from the point in late 609 BC when it was clear that Jehoahaz would never return. I suggest that from 609 to mid-604 BC, the entire duration of Egyptian domination of Judah, people like Lehi would have regarded Zedekiah as the legitimate and legal royal heir. Thus, Nephi's reference to "the first year of the reign of Zedekiah" could very well have been regarded by them as beginning in the same year as the death of Josiah—609 BC.

Of course, normative historical understanding recognizes that Jehoiakim reigned eleven years, from 609 to 598 BC. For five years of that reign, he was a puppet of the Egyptians (late 609 to mid-604 BC), and something over six years of his reign were under Babylonian dominion (mid-604 to late 598 BC). It would have been during Jehoiakim's administration that Lehi and his family departed for the wilderness in late 605 BC. A brief description of Jehoiakim's time on the throne must be considered before further making the case for the date of Lehi's departure.

The Egyptians had failed in their 609 BC attempt to move east from Carchemish and the Euphrates to recapture Harran from the Babylonians. This made their hostile occupation of Judah all the more important—it was planned to be a buffer zone between Egypt and any further Babylonian advance in Egypt's direction. But this worked for only five years. In September of 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar succeeded his father,

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29. It seems clear from the harsh comments in Jeremiah 22:1–19 that the prophet regarded Jehoiakim's position as king to be conditional, and only tenable if Jehoiakim and those of his court would abide by the prophet's call to righteousness, otherwise warning that Jehoiakim's "house shall become a desolation" (Jer. 22:5).

FIGURE 2. A BYU Jerusalem Center student, Sally Patterson, excavating an ancient altar at Ekron (Tel Miqne) in debris from the 604 BC Babylonian destruction of the Philistine city. Photo by the author.

Nabopolassar, as king of the Chaldean-Babylonian realm and immediately set out to expand his empire to the Mediterranean, successfully conquering Carchemish from the combined Egyptian and Syrian forces there and triumphantly entering Syria by the beginning of autumn (see the allusion in Jeremiah 46:1–2).[30] In the following year, 604 BC, Nebuchadnezzar's armies marched farther south, through Syria into Philistia, Judah's neighbor on the coastal plain.[31] That summer, Ekron was attacked and destroyed, and by December of that year, Ashkelon was totally destroyed. The last Philistine inhabitants of these cities were deported and became lost to history. Archaeological excavations at both ancient sites, Ashkelon and Ekron,[32] uncovered vast evidence of the total destruction of the two cities by the Babylonians.[33] The conquest

30. For a detailed account of the events of 605 BC, see Rainey and Notley, *Sacred Bridge,* 262.

31. See the Babylonian Chronicle (5:15–20) and commentary on Ashkelon in Rainey and Notley, *Sacred Bridge,* 262–63. See also Aharoni and others, *Carta Bible Atlas,* 127, map 177.

32. The Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon, directed by Lawrence Stager and Daniel Master, excavated at Ashkelon between 1984 and 2016. See "The Leon Levy Expedition," The Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon, The Leon Levy Foundation, digashkelon.com/expedition. The Tel Miqne–Ekron Archaeological Expedition, directed by Seymour Gitin and Trude Dothan, excavated at the site of ancient Ekron from 1981 to 1996. See "Tel Miqne-Ekron Excavation and Publication Project," W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research, www.aiar.org/miqne-ekron/. Both sites are in Israel.

33. It is of note that 160 students from the Brigham Young University Jerusalem Center excavated the Babylonian destruction level at Ekron (Field II) in the spring of 1994, led by the author of this article and Jerusalem Center director S. Kent Brown, under the supervision of Seymour Gitin, director of the Tel

of the Philistine coastal plain, and particularly the absolute devastation of nearby Ekron, must have shocked and stunned Jehoiakim and the people of the kingdom of Judah that summer. Ekron was located twenty-five miles directly west of Jerusalem, on the ancient border of Judah and Philistia.[34] The siege of Ashkelon in December brought such fear to Judah and Jerusalem that a fast was proclaimed that month (Jer. 36:9).

With the destruction of Ashkelon and the subsequent capture of Gaza, the Babylonians had pushed the Egyptians entirely away from Judah and out of Philistia, south to the traditional Egyptian border at the "river of Egypt" (el-Arish) in the northern Sinai Peninsula. Egyptian forces would not expand north out of Sinai into the area of Judah with any success for another three hundred years. By the end of 604 BC, Judah and Jerusalem were under the control of Babylon.

King Jehoiakim was compelled to declare loyalty and allegiance to Babylon even as the autumn of 604 BC began. This appears in the 2 Kings report where "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him" (2 Kgs. 24:1). The account does not detail Jehoiakim's administration under Babylonian control but skips immediately to his rebellion against that control in 601 BC. In that year, the Babylonians sought to overwhelm the Egyptians in a battle in northern Sinai. The battle ended in a draw, with major losses on both sides.[35] Nebuchadnezzar withdrew from Sinai and returned home to Babylon to regroup his military. The Egyptians did not venture beyond their own borders again (see 2 Kgs. 24:7), but Jehoiakim apparently thought it was a good time to break from his forced commitment to Babylon and throw his loyalty back to Egypt. It was a disastrous move. Nebuchadnezzar did not bring his entire army to the region the next year but did send some Chaldean forces that joined with his vassal allies from Ammon, Moab,

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Miqne–Ekron expedition. The students became eyewitnesses to the totality of the Babylonian destruction of Ekron. The author was a member of the supervisory staff at the Ekron expedition for three years, conducting excavations in two different areas there.

34. On the Babylonian conquest of Philistia, and specifically on Ekron being "completely destroyed" in 604 BC, see Seymour Gitin, "Philistines in the Books of Kings," in *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography, and Reception,* ed. Andre Lemaire, Baruch Halpern; assoc. ed. Matthew J. Adams (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 345–46.

35. On the 601 BC battle, see the Babylonian Chronicle passage (5:5–7) and commentary in Rainey and Notley, *Sacred Bridge,* 263.

and probably Edom[36] to launch destructive attacks against Judah (2 Kgs. 24:2).[37] These operations would have affected outlying regions, with the Chaldeans likely striking in Judah's west, from the coastal plain, Ammon raiding into northern areas such as Benjamin and the Jericho plain, and Moab and Edom besieging and terrorizing the Negev and shutting off the south and the *Arava* route to the Red Sea. By 600 BC, Judah was under siege from a series of sustained attacks that shut off its borders in all directions. No one was coming to or going from Jerusalem to the Red Sea or anywhere else in 600 BC.

Nebuchadnezzar took his revitalized army west again in 599 BC but did not enter Judah that year. Instead, the Babylonians battled and neutralized the Arabs of the Kedar region, south and east of Edom, cutting off caravan and trade access to Egypt from Arabia.[38] Having secured that flank, Nebuchadnezzar's formidable forces entered Judah for battle in late 598 BC. They moved straight to Jerusalem, encircling and laying siege to the city. It is at this point that the 2 Kings account records Jehoiakim's death (2 Kgs. 24:5–6), without comment as to cause—some authorities suggest he was assassinated.[39] His eighteen-year-old son, Jehoiachin, took the throne for three months (2 Kgs. 24:8). As had been the case for his father, the record again does not say that "the people of the land" chose

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36. Particularly if *Aram* (ארם), which the KJV renders "Syrians," is an error and *Edom* (אדם) was intended—if *Edom* were spelled defectively (not incorrectly), the two terms could appear very similar in the paleo-Hebrew script of the period, since the letters *d* and *r* were so similar. That Edom was involved here is suggested by Aharoni and others, *Carta Bible Atlas,* 128.

37. On the 600 BC military actions against Judah, see Rainey and Notley, *Sacred Bridge,* 263.

38. See the Babylonian Chronicle (5:9–10) and discussion in Rainey and Notley, *Sacred Bridge,* 263. Compare also the prophecy against Kedar (understood as north Arabia) in Jeremiah 49:28–33; note that the Hazor of this oracle was likely a location in north Arabia and not the Israelite Hazor north of the Sea of Galilee.

39. On the assassination of Jehoiakim see, for example, Bright, *History of Israel,* 327; and Rainey and Notley, *Sacred Bridge,* 264. The report in 2 Chronicles 36:6 that he was taken prisoner to Babylon is regarded as a manuscript error. *Genesis Rabbah* 94:9, admittedly a very late source, offers another possibility—that Nebuchadnezzar demanded that the council of Jerusalem surrender Jehoiakim or the entire nation would be destroyed. Citing the case of Sheba, the son of Bichri, as precedent, the council turned Jehoiakim over, and he was taken to Babylon. *Midrash Rabbah,* ed. and trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: Soncino, 1939), 2:879.

him as they had Josiah and Jehoahaz (compare 2 Kgs. 21:24) . In March of 597 BC, young Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar's forces, and Jerusalem was captured (2 Kgs. 24:10–12). The city was not destroyed, as the cities of the neighboring Philistines had been, perhaps because Judah had been a Babylonian ally until Josiah's death or perhaps because it surrendered so quickly. But for the first time in four hundred years, since the reign of King David himself, Jerusalem had fallen![40]

As the spring of 597 BC began, the Babylonians marched into the city, putting it under martial law. They entered the temple of Solomon, looting it of precious items, cutting apart its golden vessels, and taking them as payment (Jehoiakim had not sent tribute in over three years). They also looted the larger royal palace complex, King Solomon's palace, that lay just south of the temple, along with the royal treasury (2 Kgs. 24:13). The total value of the booty surely reached the equivalent of many millions of dollars by today's standards. But an even more traumatic punishment was meted out by the occupying forces—thousands of the elite people of Jerusalem and Judah were rounded up and deported, marched away to Babylon under guard of the Chaldean forces. These thousands of deportees included the teenage king Jehoiachin himself, his mother (Jehoiakim's wife), the other royal wives (of both Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin), and many other princes and women of the extended royal family (2 Kgs. 24:14–15), including young Daniel and his friends (see Dan. 1:1–7).[41]

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40. Jerusalem had been threatened and had capitulated in earlier episodes but had never been forcefully conquered or occupied and looted by an enemy. Those occasions included the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sam. 15–16), the invasion of Shishak (1 Kgs. 14:25–27), the invasion of Hazael the Syrian (2 Kgs. 12:17–18), the conspiracy of Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel (2 Kgs. 16:5), and the attack of Sennacherib and the Assyrians on Judah and their short siege of Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 18:13–19:36).

41. The reference to "the third year of Jehoiakim" in Daniel 1:1 cannot have reference to 606 BC, as popularly suggested in outdated Bible dictionaries, since Nebuchadnezzar had not entered the region so early. It refers, instead, to the same chronology as employed in 2 Kings 24:1, pointing to 601 BC, the third year of Jehoiakim's reign under Babylonian rule, the same year that Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. The account in 2 Kings 24 compresses into one short description all the events from Jehoiakim's third year under Babylonian rule down to the 597 BC siege and surrender of Jerusalem. The compressed summary in 2 Kings 24 is the source of the impression in Daniel 1:1 that Nebuchadnezzar's siege was in Jehoiakim's third year, when actually another three years passed before the Babylonians commenced the siege. The looting and deportation mentioned in Daniel 1:2–3 are the same events as those in

Along with the royal family, palace officers and staff and the military officers of Judah were also deported. Ten thousand captives were reportedly taken away; all of the builders, manufacturers, and metalworkers of Judah were taken away: "all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land" (2 Kgs. 24:14). The number of craftsmen and smiths taken was reported as a thousand (2 Kgs. 24:16; see also Jer. 24:1; 29:2). This is a particularly important fact when considered together with the likelihood that Lehi was a metalsmith. Several indicators in the text of 1 Nephi suggest that both Lehi and Nephi were expert metal craftsmen, working in gold, silver, bronze, and iron.[42] Had Lehi and his family been in Jerusalem in 598 BC, they would very likely have been deported away to Babylon in the aftermath of the 597 surrender of the city. But they had departed seven years earlier.

It was only after the fall and looting of Jerusalem and the deportation of ten thousand people that Zedekiah, by then twenty-one years of age, was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar as king of Judah in March of 597 BC. Why he was chosen instead of a nonroyal governor to be the Babylonian puppet on Judah's throne is unclear. Eleven years later, when the Babylonians would again capture Jerusalem in 586 BC (and then destroy it), a nonroyal governor named Gedaliah would be appointed (2 Kgs. 25:2–22). But in 597 Nebuchadnezzar may have been attempting to restore the Babylonian alliance with Judah's throne that had existed when Josiah was king a dozen years earlier. Zedekiah was the son of Josiah and of

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2 Kings 24:13–15. The notion that young Daniel grew up with and was friends with Nephi, suggested in certain popular LDS novels and commentaries, is picturesque but untenable. Nephi was as much as fifteen years older than Daniel. Nephi was in his mid-to-late teens when he departed Jerusalem in 605 BC and could not logically have socialized with Daniel, who was still a young boy at the time of his deportation in 597 BC. Further, there was no Babylonian deportation of Judahites in 606 BC, and Daniel was not "carried captive 606 BC," contrary to the notation in the Bible Chronology section of the LDS Bible Dictionary. A short encyclopedia entry on Daniel, which was prepared in 1990 by the author of the present article, erroneously states that Daniel was deported in 606 BC. See Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Daniel, Prophecies of," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism,* ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 355. The author has long since disavowed that incorrect statement and model of events. Daniel was deported in 597 BC.

42. See the extensive treatment of indicators that Lehi and Nephi were metalsmiths in Chadwick, "Lehi's House at Jerusalem," 113–17. See also John A. Tvedtnes, "Was Lehi a Caravaneer?" in *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 94–97.

the legitimate queen-mother, Hamutal, and was thus the heir of Josiah recognized by "the people of the land." Nebuchadnezzar may have been attempting to establish a new beginning with the throne of Judah, having purged Jerusalem of all the court and officers of the corrupt king Jehoiakim. Zedekiah's given name, Mattaniah, is reported in the 2 Kings narrative (2 Kgs. 24:17), but it was the young prince's royal name that Nebuchadnezzar used to establish him as king.[43]

Zedekiah ruled in Jerusalem for eleven years as a puppet ally of Babylon (2 Kgs. 24:18). But other than his eventual rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar and the siege and destruction of Jerusalem that occurred at the end of his administration (2 Kgs. 25:1–10), the contemporary history of the Deuteronomist reports no accomplishments of Judah's final, failed monarch.

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43. Why Mattaniah/Zedekiah had two names in the 2 Kings narrative is not entirely clear. The same is true for Eliakim/Jehoiakim (2 Kgs. 23:34). This was not a practice seen in the installation of previous kings of Judah or Israel. In the case of Eliakim/Jehoiakim, the dual name was assigned by Pharaoh Necho. It may be that Necho employed the Egyptian custom of royals having two names, a personal name and a royal name (also known as the *nomen* and the *prenomen*), in order to "Egyptianize" Judah's palace. If this is the case, it is likely that both of Josiah's surviving sons, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, were given the dual names. And if so, the royal name Zedekiah would already have been well known in Jerusalem by the time the Babylonians took over, and in appointing Mattaniah with the name Zedekiah, the Babylonians would have signaled that the replacement was to be regarded as a legitimate king. Indeed, the names Jehoiakim and Zedekiah are unlikely to have been the inventions of either Necho or Nebuchadnezzar. The name Jehoiakim, used for Eliakim by Pharaoh Necho, was a *Yahu*-theophoric name. The text only says Necho "turned his name to Jehoiakim." The name Jehoiakim may have been a second name already given to him prior to Josiah's death. Other previous Judahite kings were known by two different Israelite/Judahite names (notably Uzziah/Azariah in Amos 1:1; Isa. 6:1; 2 Kings 15:1–3, 13, where the two names are not derivative but have different meanings). So also was Mattaniah/Zedekiah. Both Jehoiakim and Zedekiah were Israelite theophoric names, that is, names with a god-element in them—both the "jeho" and the "iah" particles were *Yahu* elements from the divine name *Yahuweh* (Jehovah), the God of Israel. The Babylonian practice, on the other hand, was usually to give new names with Babylonian theophoric elements (such as Daniel's new name, Belteshazzar; see Dan. 1:7). Like the name Jehoiakim, the royal name Zedekiah is more likely to have actually originated in Judah, even as early as Josiah's reign itself, rather than to have been devised by Nebuchadnezzar after the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem. This makes the appearance of the name in 1 Nephi 1:4 entirely plausible in a 609–605 BC setting.

The Prophetic and Political Conversation in First Nephi

Clues to discerning the date of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem are found in the prophetic and political conversation within the 1 Nephi narrative. Lehi and his prophet contemporaries were bold in their message that Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Babylonians and that "many should be carried away captive into Babylon" (1 Ne. 1:13). Yet when confronted with these warnings, Lehi was mocked by the populace (see 1 Ne. 1:19). Indeed, Laman and Lemuel, like the rest of the population of Judah, did *not* believe "that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed" (1 Ne. 2:13) and regarded Lehi's warnings as "foolish imaginations" (1 Ne. 2:11). Such attitudes would hardly have been possible in 597 BC, or in any subsequent year, after Jerusalem had been successfully besieged by the Babylonians, had surrendered, and had begun to see the deportation of ten thousand Judahites. And even though the capital had not been destroyed that year, the Babylonian capacity to both conquer and decimate large cities had been well understood in Judah since 604 BC, when their close neighbor Ekron, a large and prosperous fortified city with a temple comparable to Solomon's, had been utterly demolished by Nebuchadnezzar's forces. The attitudes depicted in the political conversation of Laman and Lemuel, and indeed in the reactions of Judahites in general, toward the warnings of Lehi and the other prophets, make better sense in the period prior to the summer of 604 BC—prior to the time that Babylon belligerently entered the area and wreaked havoc on Philistia. No citizen of Judah in 597 BC or any time later would have mocked the notion that Jerusalem could be destroyed and its inhabitants deported. The city, successfully besieged, would certainly have been razed had Jehoiachin not surrendered. And the warning that "many should be carried away captive into Babylon" (1 Ne. 1:13) would have seemed odd and redundant in 597 BC after ten thousand of Judah had already been deported—like an exhortation to close the barn door after the horses were already gone. Such oracles, and the reactions to them recorded by Nephi, seem at home only in the period 609 to 605 BC, prior to the arrival of the Babylonians in the region and prior to their domination of Judah that began in 604 BC. The political conversation of Laman and Lemuel, which was "like unto the Jews who were at Jerusalem" (1 Ne. 2:13), in response to the prophetic conversation of Lehi and his many fellow prophets (1 Ne. 1:4), points to a departure date for Lehi no later than 605 BC.

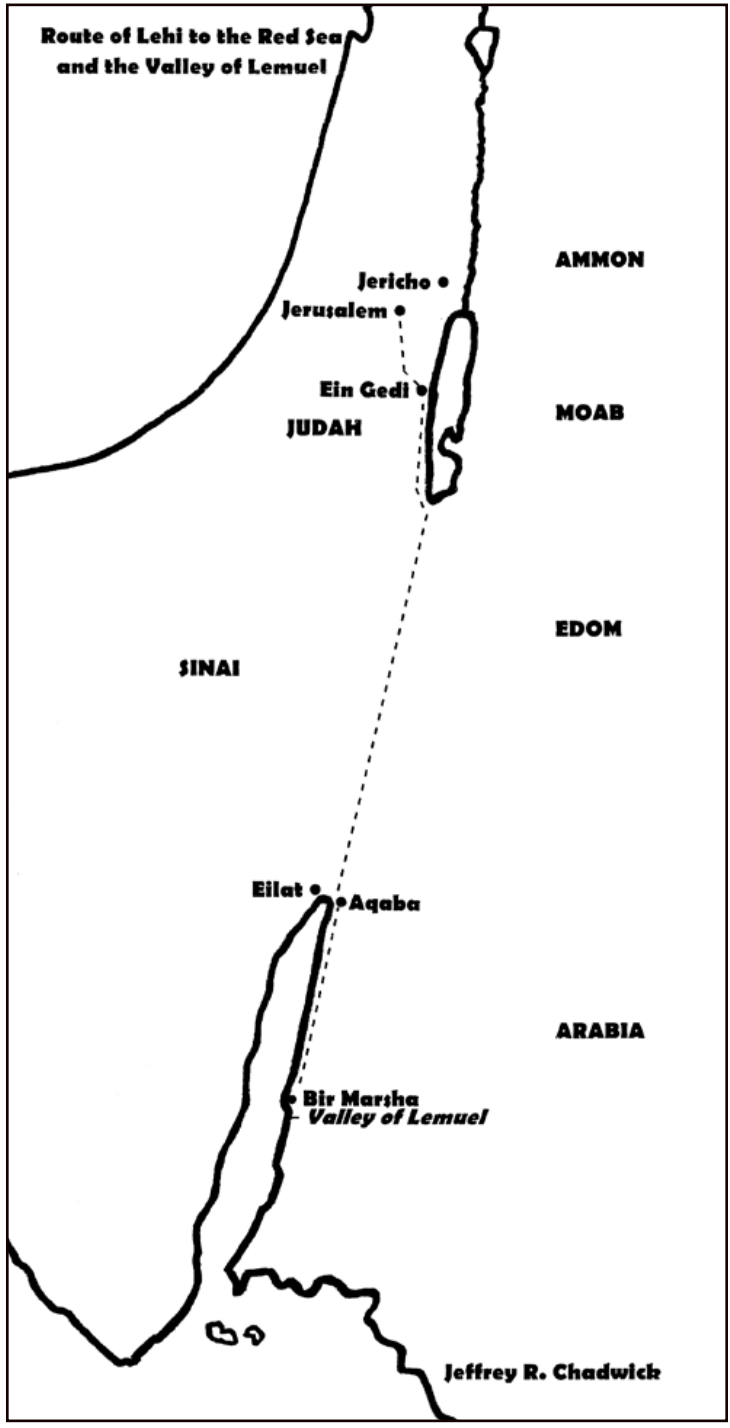

FIGURE 3. Route of Lehi to the Red Sea and the valley of Lemuel. Map by the author.

Down by the Borders of the Red Sea

Another factor that points to Lehi's departure prior to the arrival of the Babylonians in 604 BC is his travel route to the Red Sea. It has been demonstrated with near certainty that Lehi's trail from Jerusalem passed along the western shore of the Dead Sea and thence southward through the *Arava* desert valley to the Gulf of Aqaba (see fig. 3).[44] The distance from Jerusalem to that Red Sea gulf is some two hundred miles and would have taken ten days to traverse. In the text of 1 Nephi, this leg of the trip is sparingly described with the sentence "And he came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea" (1 Ne. 2:5).

After arriving at the Red Sea and passing by the Edomite shoreline settlement at Elath (*Tell el-Kheleifeh,* near modern Eilat), Lehi's party traveled another three days[45] down the Arabian shoreline, "in the borders which are *nearer* the Red Sea," that is, another fifty to sixty miles along the beach, finally arriving at the desert *wadi* that Lehi called the "valley of Lemuel" (1 Ne. 2:5–6, italics added).[46]

Ammon and Moab were hostile neighbors to Judah even during Josiah's reign and remained so after his death. At no time after 609 BC was passage through their territory safe for travelers from Judah. There

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44. For a detailed discussion of possibilities offered by various researchers for Lehi's route to the Red Sea and valley of Lemuel, see Chadwick, "Archaeologist's View," 70–73.

45. The heading to the book of 1 Nephi contains an error in understanding the events and context of Lehi's departure into the wilderness. The heading simply states, "He taketh three days' journey into the wilderness with his family." This is an incorrect description of Lehi's travel in 1 Nephi 2:4–6, which notes (1) his departure into the wilderness, (2) his arrival at the Red Sea, and (3) his continued journey of three more days until arrival at the valley of Lemuel, a 250-mile journey that would have taken thirteen days—two weeks minus one Sabbath spent resting. Nephi would surely not have made such a mistake as the "three days' journey" error if he had written that heading. The heading was almost certainly the work of Mormon, as seen from the third-person voice, which he only changed to first person in the last line, prior to the first sentence of Nephi's account. Mormon composed the heading to 1 Nephi as a bridge from his own account when including the small plates of Nephi with his own collection of plates—the plates of Mormon (see W of M 1:6). But Mormon's "three days' journey" error is quite forgivable, inasmuch as he was personally unfamiliar with the physical context and details of Lehi's travel.

46. For a thorough discussion of proposals for the location of the valley of Lemuel, see Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "The Wrong Place for Lehi's Trail and the Valley of Lemuel," *The FARMS Review* 17, no. 2 (2005): 197–215.

is no indication, however, that Edom was hostile toward Judah until the arrival of the Babylonians into the region. There are no biblical or other historical references that mention a hostile attitude of Edom vis-à-vis Judah prior to 604 BC. That silence is probably to be understood as an absence of hostility, since hostile acts were wont to be reported. During Josiah's rather strong reign, but also during the early years of Jehoiakim's rule from 609 to 605, when Egypt exercised hegemony in the region, Edom likely tolerated Judahite access to and activity in the northeast Sinai and *Arava* areas as far south as the Gulf of Aqaba. For Lehi and his party, traveling in this area prior to 604 BC does not seem to have been a great risk. But with the arrival of Nebuchadnezzar's forces and the retreat of Pharaoh Necho's army to west of el-Arish (the "river of Egypt") in northern Sinai, Edom's relationship to Judah became dictated by the Babylonians. Probably as early as 600 BC, they were involved in military attacks against Judah, as mentioned above, and certainly by late 598 they were actively attacking Judah from the south.[47] The Edomites continued to attack Judah periodically under Babylonian direction and were remembered in the Bible as traitorous collaborators of the Babylonians in the destruction of Judah from 588 to 586 BC (compare Lam. 4:21–22; Ps. 137:7–9).

The travel of Lehi and his party through the *Arava,* essentially controlled by Edom, seems unlikely after 604 BC and is essentially unthinkable from 600 BC onward. The 1 Nephi narrative mentions Lehi's original journey to the Red Sea, but also two subsequent round-trips from the valley of Lemuel back to Jerusalem (1 Ne. 3–4, 7). In none of these episodes is any hint of danger from hostile parties along the route. This leads to the conclusion that the travel must have been prior to Edomite collaboration with Babylon, probably occurring prior to 600 BC, and most likely prior to 604 BC.

The Land of His Inheritance

Indicators in the Book of Mormon text, including Lehi's heritage in the tribe of Manasseh (see Alma 10:3), most likely indicate that the "land of his inheritance" (1 Ne. 2:4; 3:16) was located in the former northern kingdom of Israel, which had become known as Samaria and was inhabited by non-Israelite peoples brought to the area from Mesopotamia and Arabia around 720 BC. As mentioned above, Judah had controlled

47. See Aharoni and others, *Carta Bible Atlas,* 128.

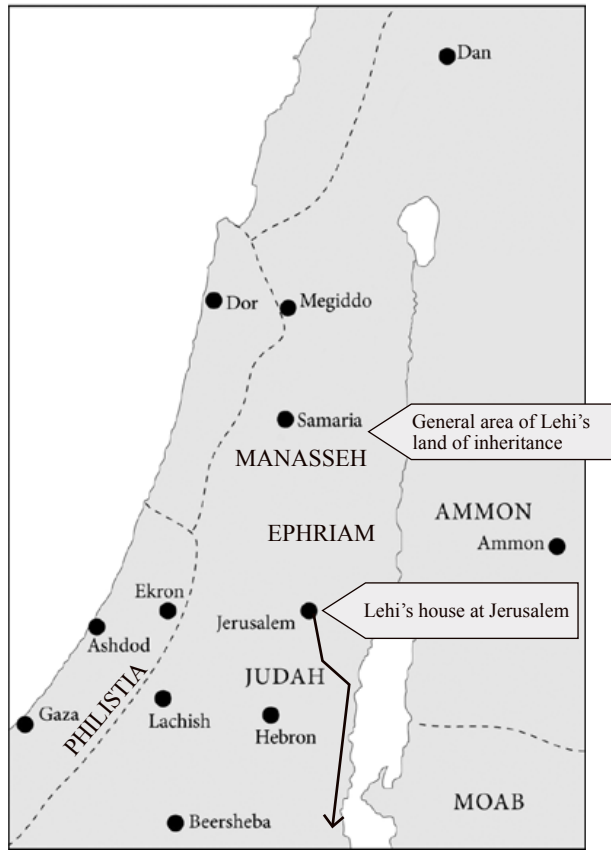

FIGURE 4. Lehi's properties in Judah-controlled territory. Map by the author.

Samaria since around 625 BC, when Josiah imposed his control over the territory and annexed it, thus giving people like Lehi and others of northern heritage access to ancestral lands in Ephraim and western Manasseh.[48] Though Lehi had lived in the city of Jerusalem his entire life (see 1 Ne. 1:4), it was only after Josiah's annexation of Samaria to Judah that Lehi could have had free access to lands he had inherited from his northern kingdom Manassehite forebears.[49]

48. For a detailed study of this issue, see Chadwick, "Lehi's House at Jerusalem," 81–113.

49. With regard to Lehi's residence at Jerusalem and the location of his land of inheritance, it must be noted that the archaeological site known as *Khirbet Beit Lei* (or *Beyt Loya*) in the modern state of Israel could not have been in any

For a twenty-year period, from 625 to 605 BC, Lehi would have had access to his inherited land in Manasseh, although he did not reside there—he probably leased it to Samaritans who had lived there since the Assyrian period. Egypt seems to have accommodated Judah's control of Samaria after 609 BC, continuing it under their own hegemony, since that territory was vital in using Judah as an expanded buffer zone against Babylonian advancement southward, toward Egypt. Hints that Samaria was still open to Judahite travel early in Jehoiakim's reign are found in Jeremiah.[50] Lehi hid his supplies of gold and silver at his land of inheritance prior to leaving Jerusalem for the Red Sea, as a precaution against Jerusalem being destroyed (see 1 Ne. 3:16–17), and Nephi and his brothers went to the area to retrieve the treasures (1 Ne. 3:22). In this travel lies another clue as to the dating of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem. Judahite access to Samaria was curtailed and restricted after the Babylonian occupation of the region in the summer of 604 BC. Babylon viewed Judah suspiciously and reduced Jehoiakim's influence to only the traditional borders of Judah. At what point this took place is not clear, but it was probably as early as autumn of 604 BC. Samaria was certainly cut off from Judahite access by 598 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and besieged Jerusalem—the invasion route from the coast to Mizpah on Judah's northern border effectively severed any Judahite route northward.[51] This means that probably from 604 BC onward, and certainly from 598 BC onward, no access to Lehi's land of inheritance in the western Manasseh area of Samaria would have been possible from Jerusalem, either for Lehi to leave his gold and silver there or for his sons to retrieve it. In other words, after twenty-one-year-old

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way associated with the narrative in 1 Nephi. The so-called "Lehi Cave" and propositions about a "City of Lehi" or "Beit Lehi" in the fertile *Shfelah* area southwest of Jerusalem are entirely spurious. See Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Khirbet Beit Lei and the Book of Mormon: An Archaeologist's Evaluation," *Religious Educator* 10, no. 3 (2009), 17–48.

50. These hints are found in Jeremiah 26:1–9, where the prophet predicts that the Jerusalem temple would become like Shiloh, which had been destroyed centuries earlier. Shiloh was located in Samaria, and the inference is that Judahites could still pass by and behold its ruins. A passage in Judges 21:19, whose composition is dated to the Deuteronomist writing around 620 BC, during Josiah's reign, precisely locates Shiloh (for the late seventh-century BC audience who would not know its exact location but could pass by and view it) north of Bethel and south of Lebonah on the road to Shechem in central Samaria.

51. See the mapped invasion route, severing Samaria from Judah, in Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 143.

Zedekiah's ascent to the throne in 597 BC, travel to the land of inheritance could not have occurred. Only in the period before the summer of 604 BC would those travels have been entirely possible, supporting the conclusion that an earlier "first year of the reign of Zedekiah" (609/8 BC) was being referred to by Nephi, with Lehi's departure from Jerusalem in late 605 BC.

There Came Many Prophets, Prophesying unto the People

A noted trend in 1 Nephi 1:4 is that in Zedekiah's first regnal year, "there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed." As the chapter proceeds, Lehi becomes one of those prophets. If the proposal is correct that 609 (or 608/7) BC was "the first year of the reign of Zedekiah" to which Nephi referred, is there evidence of such prophetic activity during that period? The answer is a definite affirmative. Jeremiah 25, reporting the prophet's declarations from "the fourth year of Jehoiakim," relates that Jeremiah himself had been prophesying for twenty-three years, since "the thirteenth year of Josiah" (628/7 BC) to the day of his speech in 605/4,[52] but that the people had "not hearkened" (Jer. 25:1–3). He then noted that "the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened" (Jer. 25:4). In other words, in addition to Jeremiah's mission, which seems to have been a lonely one for many years while Josiah was alive, God had recently sent more prophets to carry the same repentance message as Jeremiah. A similar reference is found in Jeremiah 35:15, also set in Jehoiakim's reign, where the prophet quotes God as saying, "I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending *them,* saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way." These two

52. The KJV reading of Jeremiah 25:3 mistakenly gives the impression that Jeremiah had prophesied from the thirteenth to the twenty-third year of Josiah, but it is an erroneous and confusing rendition of the Hebrew original. Bright's modern English version of the passage more correctly reads, "From the thirteenth year of Josiah ben Amon, king of Judah, until today—now all of twenty-three years—the word of the Lord has come to me." See John Bright, *Jeremiah,* The Anchor Bible, vol. 21, 2d ed., ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 156. See also E. W. Nicholson, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah: Chapters 1–25,* The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible, ed. P. R. Ackroyd, A. R. C. Leaney, and J. W. Packer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 208–10.

passages substantiate that during Jehoiakim's years, from the beginning of his administration in 609 BC, a significant number of prophets had been active in Jerusalem, just as 1 Nephi 1:4 indicates.

That Lehi was one of these seems certain. He likely prophesied from the suggested "first year of the reign of Zedekiah" (608/7 BC) until he left Jerusalem late in 605 BC, a ministry of some four years, during which time he was opposed and his life was endangered (1 Ne. 1:19–20). The dangers Lehi faced may have been similar to the opposition Jeremiah encountered when he prophesied early in Jehoiakim's reign (c. 608 BC), predicting that Jerusalem would be destroyed and become as desolate as Shiloh (Jer. 26:1–6). Jeremiah was taken by an angry mob to the "princes" (Hebrew *sarim,* or royal court officials) with the demand that he be executed (Jer. 26:7–11). Jeremiah made his defense to the royal officials, after which the officials explained to the crowd that he had not committed an offense worthy of arrest or execution (Jer. 26:12–19). Jeremiah was ultimately protected from mortal harm (Jer. 26:24), although he suffered significant hardship for his prophesying. But another instance of a prophet who predicted doom for Jerusalem did not end as well. King Jehoiakim sought to have a prophet named Urijah arrested for warnings similar to Jeremiah's. Urijah fled to Egypt but was hunted down by Jehoiakim's agents and returned to Judah for execution (Jer. 26:20–23). Fortunately for Lehi, his lot seems to have been more like that of Jeremiah, escaping harm because of "the tender mercies of the Lord" (1 Ne. 1:20). But Nephi specifically notes that certain of Jerusalem's population became so angry with Lehi because of his prophecies that "they also sought his life" (1 Ne. 1:20). Lehi ultimately escaped the fate of Urijah by departing Jerusalem near the end of 605 BC, never to return.

Jeremiah's Imprisonment in 605 BC

Understanding that travel both to the Red Sea and to Samaria would have been restricted for Judahites after mid-604 BC, and having considered both the political and prophetic conversation in 1 Nephi, which reflects the security situation after the spring of 604 BC, it seems clear that any departure date later than winter of 605/4 BC would not fit the situations described in the 1 Nephi narrative. We will now turn our attention to the chronological marker that was considered in the earlier studies of Spackman and also Brown and Seely. During the return from their second journey back to Jerusalem, Nephi exclaimed to his brothers, "and Jeremiah have they cast into prison" (1 Ne. 7:14). When was this imprisonment?

Repeating my earlier summary, the three times Jeremiah is known to have been confined are 588 BC (Jer. 37:15), during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem; 601 BC (Jer. 20:2), when he was put into stocks for a day and a night; and late 605 BC (Jer. 36:5), after the first composition of his prophecies. Of these three, clearly 587 BC and 601 BC must be ruled out, since both occur well after Babylon had dominated and occupied Judah, after which the account of Lehi's departure does not make sense. Only the late-605 BC confinement falls prior to the Babylonian entry into the region.

Jeremiah 36 begins with the account of the first writing of Jeremiah's prophecies, accomplished "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim" (605/4 BC), apparently prior to the prophet's arrest and confinement (Jer. 36:1–4). We may conveniently refer to this book (or "roll"—actually a scroll) as *Proto-Jeremiah,* since it did not include all of the material in our present book of Jeremiah, but rather only those early oracles that he had spoken down to 605 BC. For the writing task, Jeremiah employed the faithful service of his scribe, Baruch, the son of Neriah. Just when in Jehoiakim's fourth year the prophecies of Proto-Jeremiah were written down is unclear, but subsequent events later that year suggest the writing occurred in the first half of the year, between spring and autumn of 605 BC. (This is a key issue to which we shall return later in this study.)

Sometime after the writing of the Proto-Jeremiah scroll, the prophet was arrested. The conversation beginning in Jeremiah 36:5 is a separate event from the account of the writing of the scroll in verses 1–4, but it is still to be placed in Jehoiakim's fourth year, later in 605 BC.[53] Jeremiah directed Baruch to take the scroll and read it to the public in the temple of Solomon upon a fasting day (Jer. 36:6).[54] Jeremiah's reason for not

53. See footnote 28 herein for the brief explanation of how calendar references in Jeremiah work.

54. Which fasting day Jeremiah intended is not clear from the context of the passage. The Hebrew text reads *byom tzom* (ביום צום), which, without vowel points, could either mean "a fasting day" or "the fasting day," depending on the pronunciation. The KJV renders it "the fasting day" (Jer. 36:6), which would be vocalized *ba-yom tzom*; however, the received Hebrew text has vowel points under the *b* that vocalize it as *bĕ-yom tzom*, or "a fasting day." It is tempting to think that Jeremiah was directing Baruch to read the scroll on *the* fasting day of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (see Lev. 23:27–28)—fasting may already have been a practice on this day in Josiah's time. But it is also possible that Jeremiah was directing Baruch to read the scroll on any set fast day in the future, as practical, which would seem to be what he did in waiting until the proclaimed fast of the ninth month of Jehoiakim's fourth year (Jer. 36:9–10).

reading the scroll publicly himself was "I *am* shut up; I cannot go into the house of the LORD" (Jer. 36:5). The term "shut up" is given a translation from the Hebrew in footnote 5a of the LDS edition of the KJV—"HEB under arrest, or in confinement." This is a quite accurate rendition of the actual Hebrew term, which is *atzur* (עצור). Some commentaries interpret the term, in this passage alone, to mean that Jeremiah was merely restricted from entering the temple of Solomon.[55] But in two other passages where the Hebrew term *atzur* occurs (Jer. 33:1 and 39:15), it clearly indicates arrested confinement in prison, so the use of the term in Jeremiah 36 must be assumed to also mean arrested confinement. The passage seems clearly to be telling us that Jeremiah was imprisoned sometime in the second half of Jehoiakim's fourth year—in other words, between autumn of 605 BC and spring of 604 BC—the median point for this is late 605 BC.

Baruch eventually read the scroll in the temple (see Jer. 36:9–10), but for reasons that are not clear, it seems that an entire year passed before he carried out the task, reading the scroll publicly on a special fast day proclaimed "in the fifth year of Jehoiakim . . . in the ninth month" (Jer. 36:9). That was in the year 604 BC, in the Hebrew month we now call *Kislev,* which occurs late in November to late December in our own calendar. And by that time, Jeremiah was apparently no longer confined. This is evident in the account of Jehoiakim's destruction of Jeremiah's scroll, set "in the ninth month" (Jer. 36:22), when "the king sat in the winter house" with "a fire on the hearth burning before him" (Jer. 36:22). Having burned Jeremiah's scroll, the king commanded his officers "to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet: but the LORD hid them" (Jer. 36:26). Some of the royal advisors, secretly supportive of Jeremiah, had warned Baruch, "Go, hide thee, thou and Jeremiah; and let no man know where ye be" (Jer. 36:19). This episode indicates that the prophet was no longer in prison by late 604 BC. Just when Jeremiah was released from his late 605 BC imprisonment of Jeremiah 36:5 is not clear, but that he was free already by late 604 BC is an important indicator. It means that Nephi's exclamation about Jeremiah being in prison must have occurred before late 604 BC, and surely earlier than the Babylonian arrival in the summer of that year. I suggest Nephi uttered the sentence around early March of 604 BC and will now explain why.

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55. See, for example, Bright, *Jeremiah,* 179.

In a Valley by the Side of a River of Water

While Lehi's departure from Jerusalem must then have occurred before the mid-604 BC Babylonian takeover of Judah, and indeed some months before that arrival, the specific date of late 605 BC (November or December), which I propose for Lehi's departure, rests on two issues. The first, as reported above, is that Jeremiah was not imprisoned prior to mid-605 BC or thereabouts, and he must have been imprisoned either prior to or during Lehi's time in the valley of Lemuel in order for Nephi's declaration about the imprisonment to fit historical context.

The other issue is simple—it is weather. And seasonal weather at that—namely, the winter rains. Lehi must have left just at the beginning of the rainy season in Israel and in the Red Sea coastal region south of Eilat and Aqaba. The reason is that water was running in the river that Lehi called Laman, in the valley he called Lemuel (see 1 Ne. 2:6–10; and fig. 3). Of that river, Lehi exclaimed to his son, "O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness" (1 Ne. 2:9). Commentaries on this passage often suggest that the river by which Lehi camped in the desert valley of Lemuel was a perennial stream, flowing all year long, based on Lehi's words "continually running." But this is hardly likely, for two reasons: (1) there are very few perennial streams that run into the Red Sea's Gulf of Aqaba from the desert *wadis* on its eastern coast, and (2) due to the scarcity of fresh water in that region, any stream that was perennial would have been well settled, long prior to Lehi's arrival, with a population that would surely have challenged Lehi's attempt to reside there, however temporarily. Water is life in the desert, and constant water supplies have always been jealously possessed. Armed conflict has generally been the only way one party has ever moved into or displaced someone from a consistently fresh water source. To suppose that Lehi and his family simply arrived at a perennial stream and made camp there, without anyone else around to be mentioned or to oppose the newcomers, is to fundamentally misunderstand the deserts of the ancient Near East.

But for Lehi to locate himself in a desert valley (a *wadi*) that was running a winter *seasonal* flow of water, which would last just a few months, is a quite plausible scenario. The rainy season, from November to March, and particularly the winter months of December to February, bring much-needed water not only to the land of Israel but also to the northernmost Red Sea region, on both sides of the Gulf of Aqaba. (Though I do not travel on the Arabian side of the gulf, south of the Jordanian border, I regularly travel in its twin region on the Egyptian/

Sinai Peninsula side and am personally acquainted with the hydrological situation there in winter.) Life in the valley of Lemuel would have been impossible from May through October, when there is no water running in the *wadis,* and even in November and April the situation would be tenuous. But December through March is when water does run, consistently, in some of those otherwise dry riverbeds, and flash floods are common when the rains fall heavily. In any case, Lehi and family would have had water in their river only from about late November through early April.

Here a quote from an earlier study is in order, proposing the possible timing of Lehi's stay in the valley of Lemuel:

> When Lehi likened the valley's river to his son Laman, he used the words "continually running" (1 Ne. 2:9) rather than "continually flowing." A wadi's streambed may run all the way to the sea whether water happens to be flowing in it or not. And while I have no doubt that water was flowing in the streambed when Lehi made his exclamation (which was probably in late November, at the outset of the rainy season), that does not mean water had to be flowing in that same streambed six months later. The streambed itself would have been a continually running course to the ocean for the wadi's water, whether seasonal or perennial.
>
> Winter rains begin in the Sinai and Gulf of Aqaba region as early as November and continue as late as April. In any given year some seasonal streams in the region's wadis could flow as long as five months. All of the travel and events narrated while Lehi's family was at the Valley of Lemuel, from the arrival in 1 Nephi 2 to the departure in 1 Nephi 16, can be easily accommodated in a 19-week period—just over four months. This would include two weeks of initial camp setup; two weeks to travel back to Jerusalem to visit Laban; one week to go to the land of inheritance to obtain gold and silver and then return to Jerusalem in the attempt to buy the plates of brass; one week to be robbed by Laban, to be chased into the wilderness, and to return to Jerusalem to finally take the plates; two weeks for the return trip to the Valley of Lemuel; two weeks for Lehi to study the plates of brass; two weeks for a second return to Jerusalem to visit Ishmael; one week to convince and prepare his family to depart Jerusalem; two weeks again to return to the Valley of Lemuel; one week in which Lehi experienced his vision and related it to his family; one week in which Nephi experienced the same vision and taught his brothers; one week to prepare for and perform marriages of Lehi's sons to Ishmael's daughters; and one week to break camp and depart the Valley of Lemuel for good. If Lehi's initial departure from Jerusalem had been sometime in November, they could have departed

> the Valley of Lemuel in late March or early April. Winter rains would have provided a small but steady flow of water in the stream ("river Laman") during that entire time.[56]

In this scenario, the second return trip from Jerusalem would have occurred in late February or early March, when Nephi would have made his statement about Jeremiah's imprisonment (1 Ne. 7:14).

It would also seem that there was at least one flash flood in the valley of Lemuel that winter and that graphic images from the frightful event found their way into Lehi's dream of the "river of water." Nephi spoke of the "filthiness of the water" and the river as an "awful gulf" (1 Ne. 15:26–28) strong enough that "many were drowned in the depths of the fountain" (1 Ne. 8:32).

The time span needed for all events recorded in the valley of Lemuel, together with the timing of the rainy season necessary for Lehi's family to have lived in the desert valley, all point to mid-November for their initial departure from Jerusalem, with an arrival at the valley two weeks later. That departure could not have been in November of 604 BC, after the Babylonian arrival in Judah, nor could it have been in November of 606 BC, well prior to Jeremiah's arrest. It could have been only in November of 605 BC, when all factors are considered.

The Plates of Brass

A final issue related to the dating of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem is the content of the plates of brass that Nephi obtained from Laban. This content, as described by Nephi, can be argued to have existed in Jerusalem by the late 605 BC date proposed here for Lehi's departure.

Nephi describes the plates of brass as containing the following writings: "the five books of Moses, . . . and also a record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah; And also the prophecies of the holy prophets, from the beginning even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah; and also many prophecies . . . spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah" (1 Ne. 5:11–13). Consider briefly each of the categories Nephi described:

A. "The five books of Moses" are universally understood to refer to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Commonly called the Torah in Jewish conversation, or simply the Law, the compilation begins precisely as described by Nephi, with "an account of the creation

56. Chadwick, "Archaeologist's View," 72–73.

of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents" (1 Ne. 5:11). Most orthodox and conservative scholarship agrees that these works existed, more or less in the form we still have, by the end of the reign of Josiah (609 BC). Some scholars suggest, however, that the books did not take their current form until after the Babylonian captivity had commenced (post-586 BC) or even until the return to Zion and the early Second Temple Period (post-537 BC). However, even this scholarship notes five general literary sources for the Torah, which existed with certainty by the time of Josiah's death, and which all contained the Moses narrative—four of the sources existed one to three centuries prior to Lehi's time.[57]

B. "A record of the Jews from the beginning . . . [to] the reign of Zedekiah" is easily recognizable by biblical scholars as referring to the Deuteronomic History, which actually begins with the Torah book of Deuteronomy itself (a "second telling" of the Moses and Exodus story) but essentially includes the historic/prophetic books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. These six books (plus Deuteronomy) indeed describe the Judahite nation from its Israelite beginnings with the prophet Moses, through the Israelites' entry into Canaan with Joshua, and through the nation's history as led initially by the judges and afterward by the kings of Israel and Judah. The seven books are academically recognized as the unified product of either (a) a small school of biblical writers living in the late seventh century BC, or (b) a single individual living in that same period.[58] These

57. The Torah is posited by some modern scholarship to be an editorial abridgment and combination of five probable sources, some dating back as far, perhaps, as the ninth to twelfth centuries BC. For an extensive description of these, see Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible,* 50–116. Briefly, four of these sources are referred to as J, E, P, and D, and a fifth I personally call M. (A redactor-editor often posited by scholars is also sometimes referred to as R.) J is an early Judahite version of the creation, the patriarchal narratives, and the Exodus account, utilizing the divine name *Jehovah*; E is an early Israelite, or northern kingdom, account of the same narrative components as found in J but frequently employing the divine term *Elohim*; P is a collection of narratives and ritual instructions compiled by Aaronic priests over Judah's history and set down by a writer or writers simply labeled P (for priests); D is the Deuteronomic account found in the book of the same name; and the fifth category consists of remarkable writings (such as Genesis 1) which some attribute to P, but others consider ancient and unique—the category has no letter tag, but for ease in explanation I refer to it as M (for Moses).

58. Friedman proposes that this individual was Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch, the son of Neriah, but that the main impetus and inspiration for the Deuteronomic History was Jeremiah himself—see Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible,*

books were in existence prior to Josiah's death in 609 BC. In the case of 2 Kings, the account ran to 2 Kings 23:25, summarizing Josiah's reign up to his death—that is, "down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah" (proposed here as the year 609 BC).

C. "The prophecies of the holy prophets" would include prophetic books known and in circulation prior to 609 BC, the chief of which was the book of Isaiah—the eighth century BC prophet of Judah who is most quoted in the Book of Mormon.[59] Also generally regarded to have been in circulation since the eighth century BC were the writings of Amos and Micah, and it is supposed that Hosea and Nahum were also in circulation around Josiah's time. Many of the prophetic books found in our Bible today had not been written by 609 BC and would not have been on the plates of brass.[60] Thus the plates of brass were a compilation much smaller than the Old Testament we use today.

D. "Many prophecies . . . of Jeremiah" can refer only to the scroll of Proto-Jeremiah that was written down in 605 BC, as described above. It would have contained only the oracles of Jeremiah up to that year, so it was not the complete book of Jeremiah we now have in our Old Testament, but it would nonetheless have contained Jeremiah's many earlier prophecies.

These four categories of biblical writings (three of which are widely presumed by modern scholarship to have existed by 609 BC, and the fourth was composed in mid-605 BC) precisely match the description Nephi gave of the content of the plates of brass. That all of this material, much of it only recently written when Lehi began his ministry, was in place and available for engraving on the plates of brass before the proposed departure date of Lehi in November of 605 BC, is a significant

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147–49. For this, and a detailed explanation of the authorship and composition of Joshua to 2 Kings, see Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible,* 117–49.

59. For a succinct treatment on the authorship of Isaiah—models of multiple authorship versus the model of single authorship, see Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "The Great Jerusalem Temple Prophecy," in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord,* ed. David R. Seely, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, and Matthew J. Grey (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 369–71.

60. Old Testament books that could not have been on the plates of brass were composed after 600 BC and include Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Obadiah, Habakkuk, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Lamentations, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, many of the Psalms and Proverbs, and probably books like Job, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.

factor to consider. There remain just four things to be said about this subject, two about the biblical writings themselves and two specifically about the plates of brass.

1. Traditional students of the Bible, Latter-day Saints and others, are sometimes unenthusiastic about the notion the Deuteronomic History (which I'll call DH hereafter). Traditionally, many have thought Moses authored Deuteronomy (and the other Torah books), Joshua authored Joshua, a judge authored Judges, Samuel wrote the books of Samuel, and so forth. That one small scribal school, or even just one or two men, would have authored the whole six-book (actually seven-book) history, late in the seventh century BC, during the reign of Josiah, is hard for some lay persons to swallow. It is important, though, in this regard, to remember that the proposition of a DH presupposes that the scribal school or authors were working with several ancient sources—histories or prophetic collections that were already centuries old by Josiah's time. Two of these are specifically named in several places within the DH—these are the chronicles of the kings of Israel and the chronicles of the kings of Judah, which were the official court records of the northern and southern kingdoms (not to be confused with our present books of 1 and 2 Chronicles). Other works, such as the book of Jashar and various other prophetic books not now found in our Old Testament, were also among the older sources used by the writer(s) of the DH. To put this into terms a Latter-day Saint will appreciate, the DH writer (like Friedman, I think it was one person, not a school) was a lot like Mormon. Mormon took centuries-old royal records (the large plates of Nephi) and abridged them into a single narrative, interweaving material from other sources, such as the teachings of the Nephite prophets. The DH writer (who, I think, like Friedman, was Jeremiah, assisted by his scribe Baruch, the son of Neriah) was a prophetic individual who created the DH in much the same way Mormon and Moroni wrote the Book of Mormon.

2. Traditional Bible students are likewise often bothered by the notion that Moses did not write the five books of Moses as we now have them and that they were instead the edited fusion of four or five earlier sources. But again, this is not unlike the Book of Mormon, in the specific case of the book of Ether. The account on the plates of Ether predated Mormon and Moroni by centuries. And Ether did not write the book of Ether as we have it in our present Book of Mormon—Moroni wrote the lion's share of it, heavily editing and abridging what Ether had originally written on his plates. So, really, the book of Ether was

written largely by a much later author, not by Ether himself, although his much earlier plates were the source material. And, by the same token, the books of Moses were written largely by later editors, not by Moses, although some very early sources were used in the composition, some of which were quite likely original to Moses himself. Again, the oldest books of the Bible were composed in much the same way parts of the Book of Mormon were composed.

3. The plates of brass—with the books of Moses, the DH, several prophetic books, and Jeremiah's early prophecies engraved upon them—were different in two ways from other compilations of the same writings that would have existed in Jerusalem in 605 BC. One, obviously, was that they were inscribed upon metal plates, rather than on leather or papyrus. But the other was that they were written in Egyptian—both Egyptian language and hieroglyphs. (It is specified in Mosiah 1:4 that Lehi could read the plates of brass only because he knew the language of the Egyptians.) Since the originals of the biblical books had been composed in Hebrew, the natural question is Why were the books translated into Egyptian and written onto the plates of brass in Egyptian script? The probable answer to this lies in the fact that Egypt had occupied and controlled Judah beginning in 609 BC and still controlled Judah as late as 605 BC, when Proto-Jeremiah was written down, the last material added to the plates of brass. That the Egyptian leadership would desire, and even demand, that Judah's law, history, and scriptures be translated into Egyptian and written down, so Pharaoh Necho's government could read and know all about the society they controlled, seems quite a natural conclusion.[61] In this regard, the commonly held idea that the plates of brass were a very old record that had been in Laban's family's possession for generations would not be accurate.[62] The plates of brass seem to have been created, and the scriptures on them inscribed in Egyptian, in just the four years prior to Lehi's departure from Jerusalem.

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61. A historical parallel to this would be the directive of Hellenistic pharaoh Ptolemy II (Philadelphus Soter) to have the Jewish scriptures translated from Hebrew into Greek during the third century BC, a version now known as the Septuagint (LXX).

62. That the plates of brass included "a genealogy of [Lehi's] forefathers" in addition to "the record of the Jews" does not actually indicate that the record was a very old one. The text of 1 Nephi 5:16 does not demand this. Rather, the genealogy of Lehi's and Laban's forefathers would simply refer to family information on the tribe of Manasseh found in both Numbers 1–2 and 26.

4. Finally, it seems that Lehi knew of the existence of the plates of brass independent of the dream he had in which he was commanded to send his sons to retrieve them (see 1 Ne. 3:2–3). In fact, it is possible that he had been involved in the actual production of those plates. This is not to say he was involved in engraving them, although that too is possible. He knew of their general content (see 1 Ne. 3:3) but also had to study them to learn and digest that content (see 1 Ne. 5:10–11). But Lehi was certainly expert in metalsmithing, and specifically in the making of metal plates upon which histories could be engraved. This is clear because Nephi had the same technical skills—making plates of metal and engraving upon them (see 1 Ne. 9:2–5; 17:9–16; 2 Ne. 5:12–15, 29–33).[63] Smithing metal tools and plates is not a hobby someone just picks up; it is a technical profession, and in Lehi's day it was the ultimate "high tech." Not many people in Jerusalem could have made metal plates. That a set of brass plates was created and engraved with scripture and historical records in the years just prior to Lehi's departure suggests that he would possibly have had a hand in their production.

Conclusion

It is at last time to bring all of the diverse and complicated data together to support this study's proposition for the date of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem. The following summary statements, drawn from the several different discussions offered earlier in this study, will combine to suggest, in my best professional opinion, that Lehi departed from Jerusalem in late 605 BC, specifically around mid-November of that year:

1. Lehi's departure could not have occurred as late as 588 BC, as proposed in the essay by Spackman, since the geographical-political and security situations in that period do not match the clues given in the text of 1 Nephi, and there is no real way of counting 600 years between that date and Jesus's birth late in 5 BC.

2. Lehi's departure could not have occurred in 600 BC, as proposed by Elder Talmage, nor in the years immediately following 597 BC, as proposed by several modern commentators, for the very same geographical-political and security reasons as stated in item 1 above.

3. A quite plausible case can be made that the Judahite populace of Jerusalem ("the people of the land") regarded eight-year-old Zedekiah as the legitimate heir to the throne of Judah after his brother Jehoahaz was

63. See note 42 herein.

deposed in 609 BC and that 608/7 BC (utilizing Jeremiah's method) was considered the first year of Zedekiah's reign by such people at the time.

4. After Babylon invaded the coastal plain of Philisita in the summer of 604 BC, destroying Ekron and Ashkelon, it dominated Judah and absorbed it into its empire. Judah was a Babylonian vassal from autumn 604 BC onward.

5. The political and prophetic conversation in the 1 Nephi account, in which Laman and Lemuel insist Jerusalem is not threatened, does not fit the period after 597 BC at all and fits only the period prior to the summer of 604 BC.

6. The route through Edom to the Red Sea (Gulf of Eilat/Aqaba) was open to safe Judahite travel during the reign of Josiah and also during the Egyptian-dominated reign of Jehoiakim, until 604 BC, but became unsafe for Judahite travel thereafter due to Edomite collaboration with the Babylonian empire after Nebuchadnezzar's 604 BC conquest of the region.

7. Judahite travel into Samaria and even Judahite claims to ancestral northern kingdom properties were a safe reality during the reign of Josiah and remained so under the Egyptian-dominated reign of Jehoiakim, but they became untenable after the 604 BC Babylonian conquest of the region.

8. In light of item 5 above, the only arrest and confinement date for Jeremiah the prophet that fits the narrative clues in 1 Nephi, and especially the declaration in 1 Nephi 7:14, was the prophet's arrest in 605 BC.

9. Camping in a desert valley on the Gulf of Aqaba shore, next to a "river of water" that actually flowed a water stream, would be possible only during the period from November to March or early April.

10. The scriptural and historical content on the plates of brass obtained from Laban matches what is known of Judahite scripture content by the year 605 BC.

Two or three of these items alone would not seem to be enough to propose an exact date for Lehi's departure with any certainty. But all ten together, as thoroughly discussed above in this study, combine to support with fair confidence the dating of the departure of Lehi to late 605 BC. And this, of course, puts that departure a full and exact 600 regular tropical solar years prior to the birth of Jesus Christ in late 5 BC. Some uncertainties may still exist, given the incomplete nature of the surviving records and archaeological findings to date. Future work may yield new findings that will allow improvements or require adjustments in this chronological reconstruction of these events that occurred more than 2,600 years ago. But for the present, the composite of all available

data supports this historical sequence better than any other proposed alternative.

So, Lehi departed Jerusalem in late 605 BC, most likely in November. More important than this conclusion, however, is the further confidence I am happy to share, as a Latter-day Saint of faith, as a professional archaeologist and researcher in the history and culture of the ancient Near East, and as a veteran of some thirty-five years of research and study "on the ground" there, that the 1 Nephi narrative is both spiritually true and factually and contextually reliable. I sincerely hope the data presented in this study will serve to enhance the reader's understanding of that narrative, as well as his or her appreciation of all that the Book of Mormon attempts to teach us.

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