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## **Book of Mormon Minimalists and the NHM Inscriptions: A Response to Dan Vogel**

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# BOOK OF MORMON MINIMALISTS AND THE NHM INSCRIPTIONS: A RESPONSE TO DAN VOGEL

*Neal Rappleye and Stephen O. Smoot*

*Abstract: Biblical “minimalists” have sought to undermine or de-emphasize the significance of the Tel Dan inscription attesting to the existence of the “house of David.” Similarly, those who might be called Book of Mormon “minimalists” such as Dan Vogel have marshaled evidence to try to make the NHM inscriptions from south Arabia, corresponding to the Book of Mormon Nahom, seem as irrelevant as possible. We show why the NHM inscriptions still stand as impressive evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon.*

The debate over the historicity of the Hebrew Bible’s depiction of the Davidic monarchy reignited over an important archaeological discovery that surfaced in northern Israel in 1993–94. The so-called Tel Dan inscription, a basalt stele written in Aramaic and dating to the ninth century BCE, was highly significant in that it was the earliest non-biblical attestation of *bytdwd*, or the “house of David.” The significance of this discovery lies in the fact that it challenges the arguments of biblical “minimalists,” or scholars who assign minimal value to the historical reliability of the Hebrew Bible, who wish to relegate the biblical depiction of the Davidic kingdom to myth.<sup>1</sup>

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1 A translation of the Tel Dan inscription can be found in Alan Millard, “The Tel Dan Stele,” in *The Context of Scripture: Volume II, Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World*, ed. William W. Hallo (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 161–62. For commentary on the significance of the Tel Dan stele, see generally Carol Meyers, “Kinship and Kingship: The Early Monarchy,” in *The Oxford*

Yosef Garfinkel, writing in the *Biblical Archaeology Review*, has summarized how this discovery undermines the minimalist argument by noting that the inscription “is clear evidence that David was indeed a historical figure and the founding father of a dynasty... There was a David. He was a king. And he founded a dynasty.”<sup>2</sup> What’s more, Garfinkel observes that “the minimalists reacted in panic, leading to a number of suggestions that now seem ridiculous.”<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, says Garfinkel, “[minimalist] arguments... can be classified as displaying ‘paradigm-collapse trauma,’ that is, literary compilations of groundless arguments, masquerading as scientific writing through footnotes, references and publication in professional journals.”<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps Garfinkel is somewhat exaggerating the significance of the Tel Dan inscription and its evidentiary weight against minimalist arguments. While significant, the Tel Dan inscription cannot be seen as *proof*, per se, of the historicity of David’s dynasty, though it is compelling evidence for such. Significant scholarly debate still revolves around the importance of the Tel Dan inscription. Most scholars would concede that the discovery offers evidence for the historicity of

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*History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York, N. Y.: Oxford University Press, 1998), 175; Edward F. Campbell Jr., “A Land Divided: Judah and Israel from the Death of Solomon to the Fall of Samaria,” in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, 225; William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know & When Did They Know it? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 128–29, 166–67; Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 36–37; Siegfried H. Horn and P. Kyle McCarter Jr., “The Divided Monarchy: The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel,” in *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, 3rd ed., ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, D. C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2011), 152.

2 Yosef Garfinkel, “The Birth & Death of Biblical Minimalism,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 37/3 (May/June 2011): 47.

3 Garfinkel, “The Birth & Death of Biblical Minimalism,” 47.

4 Garfinkel, “The Birth & Death of Biblical Minimalism,” 47.

the Davidic kingdom, and that “attempts to avoid any possible reference to an historical David... stem... from a form of skepticism at odds with all known ancient practices.”<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of one’s conclusions about the Tel Dan inscription’s significance, Garfinkel’s comments about the minimalist reaction to the Tel Dan inscription calls to mind a similar attitude of those who might be called Book of Mormon minimalists—that is, scholars who assign little to no historical value to the Book of Mormon. One sees this attitude in the reaction of some scholars to the NHM altar discoveries, which have been hailed by others as the first archaeological attestation of a Book of Mormon toponym besides Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 16:34).<sup>6</sup> Dan Vogel, a biographer of Joseph Smith, exemplifies this minimalist reaction in his 2004 account of the Prophet’s life. Vogel, who has usually proven to be one of Joseph Smith’s more informed critics, dismisses the significance of the NHM

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5 Millard, “Tel Dan Stele,” 162 n. 11.

6 See S. Kent Brown, “The Place that Was Called Nahom: New Light from Ancient Yemen,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 66–68; Warren P. Aston, “Newly Found Altars from Nahom,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/2 (2001): 56–61; Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York, N. Y.: Oxford University Press, 2002), 120–21; S. Kent Brown, “New Light from Arabia on Lehi’s Trail,” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 81–83; Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York, N. Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 93; S. Kent Brown and Peter Johnson, eds., *Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land* (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2006), 105; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 1:286–89; Stephen D. Ricks, “On Lehi’s Trail: Nahom, Ishmael’s Burial Place,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20/1 (2011): 66–68; Robert F. Smith, “Nahom,” in *The Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, online at <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/onoma/index.php/NAHOM> (accessed October 19, 2013); John A. Tvedtnes, “Names of People: Book of Mormon,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, 4 vols., ed. Geoffrey Khan (Leiden/Boston: E.J. Brill, 2013), 2:787.

inscription for the Book of Mormon's historicity on five grounds.

(1) What need was there for a compass if Lehi followed a well-known route? (2) The Book of Mormon does not mention contact with outsiders, but rather implies that contact was avoided. (3) It is unlikely that migrant Jews would be anxious to bury their dead in a heathen cemetery. (4) There is no evidence dating the Arabian NHM before A.D. 600, let alone 600 B.C. (5) The pronunciation of NHM is unknown and may not be related to Nahom at all.<sup>7</sup>

We will argue for the weakness of Vogel's five objections, which parallel the sort of reaction that biblical minimalists exhibited over the Tel Dan inscription discovery.

**(1) "What need was there for a compass if Lehi followed a well-known route?"**

Here Vogel seems to be referring not to the correlation of Nahom, per se, but rather the popular notion that Lehi was following the Frankincense Trail, which leads generally south-southeast, the direction Lehi's party traveled (see 1 Nephi 16:13–14, 33). It then turns eastward around the Nihm tribal territory, where the altars were found, which is also consistent with where Nephi reports they changed course and "did travel nearly eastward" (1 Nephi 17:1).<sup>8</sup>

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7 Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 2004), 609 n. 17. For a previously published brief rejoinder to Vogel, see Robert Boylan, "On Not Understanding the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review* 22/1 (2010): 183–85. Our response here will differ somewhat from Boylan's rejoinder. Also see Stephen D. Ricks, "Some Notes on Book of Mormon Names," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013): 157–58, which only responds to one (number 4) of Vogel's objections. To our knowledge, these are the only responses to Vogel's objections yet published.

8 This has been a widely held view among Latter-day Saint scholars and researchers for nearly 40 years. See Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A. Hilton, "In

Asking why a compass was necessary seems akin to asking why one needs a GPS when traveling in an unfamiliar city—after all, it has well-known, clearly marked roads (and even helpful road signs for direction). The mere presence of roads, however, does not eliminate the need for navigation. Lehi was in unfamiliar territory, and the Liahona lead him and his family to where the Lord wanted them to go. While Lehi may have known of the Frankincense Trail, there is no reason to assume he had previously traveled it before and thus would have *known* the route.

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Search of Lehi's Trail—Part 1: The Preparation," *Ensign* (September 1976): 44; Eugene England, "Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land: Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?" in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982; reprint FARMS, 1996), 150; Paul R. Cheesmen, "Lehi's Journeys," in *First Nephi: The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Study Center, 1989; reprint Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 244; Warren P. Aston and Michaela J. Aston, Stephen D. Ricks, and John W. Welch "Lehi's Trail and Nahom Revisited," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 47–50; Warren P. Aston and Michaela Knoth Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence of Lehi's Journey across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1994), 4–6, 30; Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi's Arabian Journey Updated," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 381–82; Brown, "New Light from Arabia," 83–85; George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness: 81 New, Documented Evidences That the Book of Mormon is a True History* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2003), 53–72; S. Kent Brown, *Voices from the Dust: Book of Mormon Insights* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2004), 31–32; Warren P. Aston, "Across Arabia with Lehi and Sariah: 'Truth Shall Spring out of the Earth,'" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/2 (2006): 12–13; George Potter and Richard Wellington, "Lehi's Trail: From the Valley of Lemuel to Nephi's Harbor," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/2 (2006): 26–43; David A. LeFevre, "We Did Again Take Our Journey," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/2 (2006): 61; Daniel B. McKinley, "The Brightening Light on the Journey of Lehi and Sariah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/2 (2006): 78; Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:276. For the eastward turn in the route, see Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 22; Brown, "New Light From Arabia," 88–90; S. Kent Brown, "New Light: Nahom and the 'Eastward' Turn," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/ 1 (2003): 111–12.

Vogel's argument seems to assume that Lehi was a caravaner who would have therefore frequently traveled this way. This idea was made popular by Hugh Nibley,<sup>9</sup> but has more recently fallen out of favor.<sup>10</sup> In light of more recent evidence, it seems more likely that Lehi was a metalworker.<sup>11</sup> This has some interesting implications when it comes to travel routes and the use of the Liahona. When traveling from Jerusalem to the Red Sea, and then a short three-day stint to get to the Valley of Lemuel, Lehi and his family apparently didn't need the Liahona. Jeffrey R. Chadwick offers this explanation:

Why did Lehi and Nephi seem to have readily known the way from Jerusalem to the Red Sea (Gulf of Eilat) and back without the aid of the Liahona, which they later needed in Arabia? The fact that copper ore was mined in several locations near the Gulf of Eilat and in northern Sinai... could suggest that Lehi and Nephi had traveled to the region several times over the years to obtain copper supplies and knew the route well

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9 See Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 36; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 77.

10 Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 59–61 make a strong argument as to why Lehi was probably not a caravaner.

11 See John A. Tvedtnes, "Was Lehi a Caravaner?," in *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Springville, Utah: Horizon, 2003), 78–97; Jeffery 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: FARMS, 2004), 113–17. Also see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:78–80. In Vogel's defense, the Potter and Wellington critique was published in 2003, and Chadwick's argument for Lehi as a metalworker was published in 2004, making it difficult for Vogel to have taken notice in time to include it in his own volume published in 2004. But Tvedtnes's book was first published in 1999, and the relevant chapter has been available as a FARMS preliminary report since 1984.

prior to their permanent departure from Jerusalem in 1 Nephi 2.<sup>12</sup>

If Chadwick is correct, then Lehi and his family would have probably been in unfamiliar territory once they traveled past that point into the Arabian deserts—which explains the sudden appearance of the Liahona.

LDS researchers have frequently noted that the roads and trails are not clearly marked along the route. S. Kent Brown explains, “It is not really possible to speak of a single trail. At times this trail was only a few yards wide when it traversed mountain passes. At others, it was several miles across. In places the trail split into two or more branches that, at a point farther on, would reunite into one main road.”<sup>13</sup> After not only researching but also traveling along the trail, Lynn and Hope Hilton made this same point back in 1976.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Warren and Michaela Aston also both researched and traveled to the area, and made a similar observation in 1994.<sup>15</sup> Most recently, after both research and travel, George Potter and Richard Wellington made the same point in 2003, as a response to the very question of needing the Liahona:

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12 Chadwick, “Lehi’s House,” 117.

13 Brown, “New Light from Arabia,” 83. Cf. Brown, *Voices from the Dust*, 32: “One should not think of a narrow roadway or single trail, for at points the inland trade route grew to be several miles wide, running between wells through valleys or across wide stretches of desert.”

14 Hilton and Hilton, “In Search of Lehi’s Trail,” 1:44: “We should note that the term trail is apt to be misleading. It does not refer to well-defined, relatively narrow paths or roadways, but to more general routes that follow through this valley, that canyon, etc. The width of the route varied with geography, ranging from a half mile to a dozen miles wide.”

15 Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 4: “In most places the ‘trail’ actually was a general area rather than a specific, defined track, and it varied according to local politics, taxes, and so on.” It is worth noting that Vogel cites this source as he describes the association of NHM with Nahom, and as such should be aware of the ill-defined nature of the trail. See Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 609 n. 17.

One might ask, “If they traveled along a trail why did they need the Liahona to show them the way? They could have just walked along the road.” One needs to understand that the Frankincense Trail was not a road in the sense that we are used to. There was no delineated trail along which to walk. It was simply a general course that would take one to the next caravan halt and water. . . . Lehi would have needed a guide, and for those times that the family was traveling alone, the Liahona was capable of taking a guide’s place.<sup>16</sup>

There are a number of reasons Lehi may have needed navigation despite following a “trail.” While interaction with some people would have been necessary and inevitable (see below), the Liahona may have helped the group avoid marauders and others who would have been hostile toward Lehi and his family. Besides simply getting them from water hole to water hole, the Liahona may have helped guide them to where there would have been the most available game for hunting (see 1 Nephi 16:30–32). Lastly, the group’s final destination (Bountiful) was not necessarily where the trail would ultimately lead; thus, they needed navigation to find it.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, questioning why the Liahona was necessary misses the point entirely. As noted, navigational aids are necessary with or without roads and trails, and for a number of reasons. The Frankincense Trail is significant not because it provided Lehi and his family with a means to navigate the region, but rather because its existence shows that travel through the arid desert in the direction claimed by the text is

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16 Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 59.

17 If Khor Kharfot is Bountiful, as proposed by Warren P. Aston, “Arabian Bountiful Discovered? Evidence for Nephi’s Bountiful,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 4–11, it would have been away from the main roads, and conceivably would have required some guidance from the Lord (via the Liahona) for Lehi and his family to find.

completely possible. It means that absolute necessities, such as water and food, were available. Although they have never been to Arabia, Ed J. Pinegar and Richard J. Allen capture the importance of this quite well:

Imagine struggling to survive in the midst of an immense and hostile desert environment reflecting an ominous sameness in all directions. We are heeding the directive of God to attain a promised land of safety—but how far away and in which direction? Our provisions are strictly limited. Where do we turn meanwhile for nourishment and water?<sup>18</sup>

Survival in the desert is not a given, and “Lehi could not have carved out a route for himself without water.”<sup>19</sup> The trail provided the necessary means for water and nourishment, as Potter and Wellington, who have traveled the course, explain, “The course of the Frankincense Trail can be explained in one word—*water*, the most precious commodity of all to the desert traveler.”<sup>20</sup>

In wondering why travelers along a trail would need navigation, Vogel has completely missed the significance of that trail. “Even in the most stable of times,” Brown reports, “trudging off into the bowels of the Arabian desert invited a swarm of troubles, what with... a lack of water, food, and fuel.”<sup>21</sup> The Frankincense Trail provided for those needs. If Joseph Smith did make this up, then he coincidentally sent his group packing off into the only direction where long-term travel was possible in what one party has called “the most hellish terrain

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18 Ed J. Pinegar and Richard J. Allen, *Commentaries and Insights on the Book of Mormon*, 2 vol. (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communication, 2007), 1:78.

19 Hilton and Hilton, “In Search of Lehi’s Trail,” 1:44.

20 Potter and Wellington, “Lehi’s Trail,” 28.

21 Brown, *Voices From the Dust*, 27.

and climate on earth.”<sup>22</sup> Vogel’s minimalist approach fails to interact with these realities of desert travel. He needs to explain how Joseph Smith knew where to have the group travel, and when to turn eastward toward the interior of the desert.

**(2) “The Book of Mormon does not mention contact with outsiders, but rather implies that contact was avoided.”**

Without any actual references to the Book of Mormon, it is hard to know what Vogel means by saying it “implies that contact was avoided.” We assume that Vogel has in mind the statement in 1 Nephi 17:12 that “the Lord had not hitherto suffered that we should make much fire, as we journeyed in the wilderness.”

It is certainly true that more than a few LDS scholars and researchers have read into this passage the implication that they were trying to avoid contact.<sup>23</sup> Notice, however, that this is not mentioned until *after* they have passed through Nahom, and several scholars have suggested that the conditions of the area east of the Nihm territory explain why they would want to avoid contact. For instance, Aston suggests that only after Nahom are they traveling in less populated areas, and hence as a small group would be more vulnerable to desert marauders.<sup>24</sup> Brown, meanwhile, reasons that it is because they are now traveling in hostile territory, where contact might be dangerous

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22 Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 53.

23 See Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 63–64; Brown, “New Light from Arabia,” 92; Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 118; Aston, “Across Arabia with Lehi and Sariah,” 12; S. Kent Brown, “Refining the Spotlight on Lehi and Sariah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/2 (2006): 55.

24 Aston, “Across Arabia with Lehi and Sariah,” 12: “The Lord’s instruction not to ‘make much fire’ (1 Nephi 17:12) is highly significant. In well-traveled areas the making of fire would not have presented a problem, and perhaps the group needed to conserve fuel resources. They now ate their meat raw (see 17:2), probably spiced as many Arabs still do; camel’s milk would have helped them cope with reduced availability of water. All this paints a clear picture of survival in a region away from other people.”

or detrimental.<sup>25</sup> In either case, the actual implication is that they had greater contact with others during earlier parts of the journey.

What's more, although it is certainly common, that is not the *only* interpretation of 1 Nephi 17:12. It can also simply be read as meaning that burning fires simply had not been necessary. Jeffrey R. Chadwick responds to both Aston and Brown on this matter:

Nor do I think that the avoidance of fire was at the Lord's command. Though Aston suggests it was "the Lord's *instruction* not to 'make much fire'" and Brown mentions "the *commandment* that Nephi's party not make fire," this language is not in the text of 1 Nephi itself. What Nephi specifically wrote is that "the Lord had not hitherto *suffered* that we should make much fire, as we journeyed in the wilderness" (1 Nephi 17:12). While the term *suffered* could be understood as *allowed* or *permitted*, in the context of the passage it could also be understood as Nephi attributing to the Lord the fact that, for practical reasons, they had simply not made much fire on their journey.

There are three quite practical reasons why Lehi's group would not have made much fire. (1) The availability of firewood or other fuel was not consistent, and in some areas where few trees and shrubs grew, kindling would have been largely absent. (2) The party would often

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25 Brown, "Refining the Spotlight on Lehi and Sariah," 55: "The commandment that Nephi's party not make fire also implies that the family was traveling through areas at least lightly peopled by others who were hostile (see 1 Nephi 17:12)." For a full discussion of the hostile tribal territories Lehi's family would have traveled through on this leg of the journey, see S. Kent Brown, "A Case for Lehi's Bondage in Arabia," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2 (1997): 205–217.

have traveled at night, particularly in the hot months, which means that their resting hours were during the daylight, when no fire would be needed for visibility. (3) They cooked very little of their food, animal meat or otherwise, which seems obvious from the Lord's promise: "I will make thy food become sweet, that ye cook it not" (1 Nephi 17:12).<sup>26</sup>

So 1 Nephi 17:12 need not necessarily imply anything about avoiding contact with others. Of course, none of this may matter since there is no telling whether Vogel has 1 Nephi 17:12 in mind or not. However, we are unaware of any other passage that potentially "implies" any kind of effort to avoid contact with others, and Vogel needs to do more than just make an assertion here.

On the other hand, almost everyone who has commented on Nahom has pointed out that the use of the passive voice in 1 Nephi 16:34—in contrast with all other place names in 1 Nephi, which are actively given by Lehi and company—implies that it was a pre-existent place name, which naturally implies there were people there.<sup>27</sup> S. Kent Brown makes note of this, and other facts which suggest Lehi was traveling among others.

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<sup>26</sup> Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "An Archaeologist's View," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/2 (2006): 74.

<sup>27</sup> This view has so frequently been articulated that it seems impossible that Vogel was unaware of it when he published his biography. See the following examples, most of which pre-date 2004: Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 79; Matthew Roper, *Review of Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* By Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4/1 (1992): 215 n.169; Aston, "Arabian Bountiful Discovered?," 7; Brown, "The Place that Was Called Nahom," 67; Aston, "Newly Found Altars from Nahom," 60; Brown, "New Light from Arabia," 81; Daniel C. Peterson, "Editor's Introduction: Not So Easily Dismissed—Some Facts for Which Counterexplanations of the Book of Mormon Will Need to Account," *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): xxvi; Aston, "Across Arabia with Lehi and Sariah," 14; Boylan, "On Not Understanding the Book of Mormon," 184. This list is far from comprehensive.

The expression “the place which was called Nahom” indicates that the family learned the name Nahom from others (1 Nephi 16:34). In addition, when family members were some fourteen hundred miles from home at Nahom, some knew that it was possible to return (1 Nephi 16:36), even though they had run out of food twice (16:17–19, 39). Evidently, family members had met people making the journey from south Arabia to the Mediterranean area. Further, the Lord’s commandment to Lehi about not taking more than one wife, if Lehi received it in Arabia, may point to unsavory interaction there (see Jacob 2:23–24). Moreover, Doctrine and Covenants 33:8 hints that Nephi may have preached to people in Arabia, although the reference may be to preaching to members of his own traveling party.<sup>28</sup>

Vogel ignores these and other reasons given by LDS scholars for implying interaction with others and provides a truly minimalist reading: what is not explicitly mentioned in the text is simply not there at all.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, Aston, Brown,

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28 S. Kent Brown, “Jerusalem Connections to Arabia in 600 BC,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, 641–42, n. 6; cf. Brown, “New Light from Arabia,” 99 n. 6. D&C 33:8 reads, “Open your mouths and they shall be filled, and you shall become even as Nephi of old, who journeyed from Jerusalem in the wilderness.”

29 While it is true that there is no explicit mention of interaction with others in the text of 1 Nephi, this shouldn’t come as too much of a surprise, as ordinary, unremarkable, and day-to-day occurrences are usually not mentioned when retelling a story unless they are crucial to the plot. If we were to tell you that we went on a road trip to California, would you assume that there was never anyone else on the road simply because we never talked about the other vehicles, or mentioned talking to anybody when we stopped for gas or food? Something so natural and inconsequential like this is so unimportant to the story that it is not at all inappropriate to simply assume that it would likely go unstated. If making a fire or interaction with other people was typical, then Nephi would have had no need to mention it. On the other hand, the command to make less fire and avoid contact (assuming that is the correct interpretation) would have marked a change in “typical” practice, and thus would have merited being mentioned (cf. 1 Nephi 17:12). Our thanks to Craig Foster for bringing this point to our attention.

and Chadwick each provide readings that realistically situate the text in real time and space. Vogel needs to engage these arguments if he wishes to assert that the record implies that Nephi and his family avoided contact with others.

**(3) “It is unlikely that migrant Jews would be anxious to bury their dead in a heathen cemetery.”**

Our first objection to this claim is that the Book of Mormon says nothing about Ishmael being buried in a “heathen cemetery.” It simply reports that Ishmael died and was “buried in the place which was called Nahom” (1 Nephi 16:34). It is likely that Vogel is referring to the burial grounds at Nihm, which Aston has suggested may be where the families of Lehi and Ishmael buried the latter.<sup>30</sup> Aston does note that the local people “were pagans, in the true sense of the word,”<sup>31</sup> but would that in any way be problematic?

Vogel’s argument rests on an assumption that is left unsupported by any evidence. Is there any biblical stipulation against the burying of Israelite dead in a “heathen cemetery”? The Law of Moses, as far as we can tell, offers no such proscription, and announces only ritual impurity for those who come in contact with a corpse (see Numbers 19:16; Deuteronomy 21:22–23). Is there any evidence that ancient Israelites were opposed to the idea of burying their dead in foreign cemeteries?

In truth, expatriated Jews like Lehi and his family had no choice but to bury their dead in the cemeteries of foreign lands. Joseph Modrzejewski has called attention to the presence of cemeteries in Ptolemaic Alexandria and Leontopolis

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30 See Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 19–20; Aston, “Across Arabia,” 15. Aston could, of course, be wrong, but that would not be an indictment on the Book of Mormon itself, nor would it invalidate the otherwise harmonious data that suggests a correlation between Nahom and the Nihm tribal territory

31 Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 19.

that served as the final resting place of Jews and pagans alike,<sup>32</sup> and Leonard Victor Rutgers shows the widespread presence of communal Jewish-Christian-Pagan cemeteries during the Roman Era.<sup>33</sup> What's more, besides evidently not being averse to burying their dead in foreign cemeteries, pious Jews were also not averse to syncretizing some of the "heathen" burial practices and beliefs of their neighbors.<sup>34</sup> The evidence discussed above is, admittedly, from a later period, but this is only natural, as "most of our knowledge of Israelite and early Jewish burial practices derives from the Second Temple period and later."<sup>35</sup>

We must therefore reject Vogel's assumption, as archaeological evidence contradicts it. If Lehi and his family were as pious as Nephi depicts them as being, to not have buried Ishmael, in a "heathen cemetery" or otherwise, would have been a grave theological and cultural offense, as the ancient Israelites considered it "a horrifying indignity" to leave "a corpse unburied."<sup>36</sup> What would be suspicious is if the Book of Mormon did not report on Ishmael's burial at this pivotal point in Nephi's narrative.

**(4) "There is no evidence dating the Arabian NHM before A.D. 600, let alone 600 B.C."**

Here Vogel is simply wrong. The non-Mormon archaeologist Burkhard Vogt of the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institute*, who is

32 Joseph Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: From Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian*, trans. Robert Cornman (Philadelphia, Penn.: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 77–78, 91, 129–33.

33 Leonard Victor Rutgers, *The Hidden Heritage of Diaspora Judaism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 82–91, esp. 88–89.

34 Pieter W. van der Horst, "Jewish Funerary Inscriptions—Most Are in Greek," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 18/5 (September/October 1992): 46–57; Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 369.

35 "Burial," in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, ed. Jacob Neusner (New York, N. Y.: Macmillan, 1996), 103.

36 "Burial," in *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*, ed. Geoffrey Widoger (New York, N. Y.: New York University Press, 1989), 143.

likely totally unaware of the significance of the NHM altars for the historicity of the Book of Mormon, wrote in 1997 that the altars are an “archaic type dating from the 7th to 6th centuries before Christ.”<sup>37</sup> Vogel was either unaware of this source or unable to read the French when he asserted in 2004 that there is no evidence for “dating the Arabian NHM before A.D. 600.” We can perhaps forgive Vogel for overlooking Vogt, who published his findings with a foreign press and in a foreign language, but we cannot easily pardon him for overlooking the English sources published before his book, including one that he cites himself (!),<sup>38</sup> that also discuss the NHM altars as pre-dating 600 BCE.<sup>39</sup>

But the situation has only become worse for Vogel since his 2004 assertion, as Aston has recently documented additional inscriptional evidence placing the NHM toponym before 600 BCE.<sup>40</sup> Although more work on the dating of this inscriptional

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37 Burkhard Vogt, “Les temples de Ma’rib,” in *Yémen: au pays de la reine de Saba* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), 144. Our thanks to Stephen D. Ricks for alerting us to this source and to Gregory L. Smith for the translation from the French.

38 Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 609 n. 17, cites Brown’s 1999 article published in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, which discusses “an inscribed altar that [Vogt and his team] date to the seventh or sixth centuries B.C., generally the time of Lehi and his family.” (Brown, “The Place that Was Called Nahom,” 68.) It is informative that when mentioning the association of NHM with Nahom, Vogel appeals to Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, published before the altars were discovered (and which traces the name back to documents from about 600 CE. See Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 17). Then, when first mentioning the altars, he cites Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 120–21, where the dating of the altars is not provided. Since Vogel is aware of at least one source that includes the dating (Brown), it is hard not to conclude that this was a deliberate attempt to avoid sources that undermine his argument on the dating of NHM.

39 “Book of Mormon Linked to Site in Yemen,” *Ensign* (February 2001), 79; Aston, “Newly Found Altars from Nahom,” 56–61, 71, esp. 59–60; Brown, “New Light from Arabia,” 81–82; Brown, “Nahom and the ‘Eastward’ Turn,” 111–12, 120. Note that all of these were published before 2004.

40 Warren P. Aston, “A History of NaHoM,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51/2 (2012): 79–98.

evidence needs to be done, there is no real controversy over the dating of the NHM altars, which easily predate Lehi. Only minimalists like Vogel object to the dating—albeit on ideological, not scholarly, grounds.

(5) **“The pronunciation of NHM is unknown and may not be related to Nahom at all.”**

The tribe and territory of NHM still exist in the area today, and local pronunciations range from “Neh-hem”<sup>41</sup> to “Nä-hum,”<sup>42</sup> and the name has been translated in a variety of ways, including Naham and Nahm.<sup>43</sup> There is no reason “Nahom” should be considered beyond the pale. When written, Semitic languages do not need to include vowels, so the altars simply have NHM (in South Arabian), and Nephi’s record would have been no different.<sup>44</sup> As such, no closer correlation in name could be asked for. As S. Kent Brown puts it, “Such discoveries demonstrate as firmly as possible by archaeological means the existence of the tribal name NHM in that part of Arabia in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., the general dates assigned to

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41 Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 16.

42 Aston, Aston, Welch, and Ricks, “Lehi’s Trail and Nahom Revisited,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 48.

43 See Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 80 n. 20. Cf. Aston, “A History of NaHoM,” 80: “In other languages, including English, the name is transliterated with vowels added. This results in variants such as Nehem, Nihm, Nahm and Nehm, but the consonants—and therefore the essential name—remain the same.” Vogel is evidently aware of this, as he writes, “Some Latter-day Saint writers have associated Nahom with NHM (variously Nehhm, Nehem, Nihm, Nahm) in southwestern Saudi Arabia, a remote place in the highlands of Yemen that has an ancient cemetery nearby.” (Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 609 n. 17.) Given the diversity of possible translations, surely Vogel can figure out that Nahom is no less an acceptable translation than any other.

44 The phenomenon of fixing vowel points to the Hebrew of the books of the Old Testament was accomplished many centuries after the original composition of the texts. Hebrew inscriptions from the time of Nephi, such as those found etched on countless ostraca, lack any vowel points. See generally Dana M. Pike, “Israelite Inscriptions from the Time of Jeremiah and Lehi,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, 193–244.

the carving of the altars by the excavators.<sup>45</sup> But Vogel adds a more specific objection here that deserves additional response.

“This last point deserves further comment,” Vogel insists as he raises this objection to rebut the theory of S. Kent Brown, who, according to Vogel, “associate[s] Smith’s Nahom with a Hebrew root meaning ‘to comfort, console, to be sorry,’ which they believe refers to Ishmael’s death and burial, although the place was named before Lehi’s arrival.”<sup>46</sup> Brown’s specific argument, per Vogel’s citation, is that

in Hebrew, the combination of these three consonants [NHM] points to a root word that can mean “comfort” or “compassion.” (The meanings are different in the Old South Arabian language.) The reason Nephi mentioned this name while remaining silent about any other place names encountered on their trip (with the possible exception of Shazer) was likely because he considered that the existing name of the spot, “comfort” in his language, was evidence of the hand of the Lord over them, although Ishmael’s own family (including Nephi’s wife) seems not to have been at all positive (see 1 Nephi 16:35).<sup>47</sup>

The Hebrew root in question is נחם (*nḥm*). As a Niphal verb it means “to be sorry, to console oneself,” and as a Piel verb it means “to comfort, console.” In its nominal form the root means “comfort” or “sorrow.”<sup>48</sup> Vogel argues that Brown’s

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45 Brown, “Nahom and the ‘Eastward’ Turn,” 112.

46 Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 609 n. 17, citing Brown, “The Place that Was Called Nahom,” 67.

47 Compare Brown’s comments here with Brown, “New Light from Arabia,” 81–83. Brown is not alone in making this argument. See Alan Goff, “Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1991), 92–99.

48 F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, rep. ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2010), s.v. נחם;

association between Nahom in 1 Nephi 16:34 and the root *nḥm* is untenable because “the NHM on the altars and on an eighteenth-century map are written with a soft H whereas the root for consolation in Hebrew is written with a hard H.”<sup>49</sup> Vogel does not offer any sources for his assertion that “an eighteenth-century map” renders NHM with a soft H. We must turn, therefore, to James Gee, who has compiled a number of maps from the 18th century that do mark the presence of the Nehem/Nehhm region of south Arabia.<sup>50</sup>

The issue with the maps aside, the real problem with Vogel’s argument is his assumption that because the Book of Mormon is a modern text originally composed in English, the soft H in Nahom therefore rules out Brown’s intriguing suggestion of a word play on the name with the Hebrew root *nḥm*, which Vogel correctly notes is not spelled with an aspirated  $\eta$  (*hê*) but rather with the guttural  $\eta$  (*hêt*). This argument, however, only works insofar as one accepts Vogel’s assumption that the Book of Mormon is modern. If in fact the underlying text of the Book of Mormon was the product of Hebrew-speaking Israelites of the 6th century BCE, then there is no good reason to rule out the likelihood of Brown’s proposal, but good reason to accept it.

If in fact the Book of Mormon’s Nahom was originally written, or at least pronounced, with a *hêt*, the question then arises as to why Joseph Smith rendered Nahom with a soft H and not a guttural H in his translation. The answer is actually quite simple. English lacks a guttural H. The closest vocalization English has that is comparable to the Hebrew guttural *hêt* is a palatal “ch” or “k” (as in the “ch” in “chaos” or the “k” in

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See also Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), S.V. נחם.

49 Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 609 n. 17. Vogel personally has no training in Semitic languages, and bases this argument on a personal communication between him and David P. Wright of Brandeis University.

50 James Gee, “The Nahom Maps,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 17/1–2 (2008): 40–57.

“king”). A problem still remains for English speakers though, as Thomas Lambdin, in his prestigious Hebrew grammar, straightforwardly notes that there is “no Eng[lish] equivalent” for the Hebrew letter *hêt*.<sup>51</sup>

As such, English translators, with no other recourse, are obliged to render the Hebrew *hêt* with a soft *h*. (Academic transliterations, such as those recommended by the *SBL Handbook of Style*, at least extend us the courtesy of transliterating a *hêt* with “*h*,” so as to distinguish between it and *hê*.<sup>52</sup>) Accordingly, there is no shortage of Hebrew words spelled with a *hêt* that, as standard practice, are transliterated with a soft “*h*” in English. Words like Messiah (Hebrew משיח), and Hittite (Hebrew חתי), and names including (Mt.) Horeb (Hebrew חרב), Nahum (Hebrew נחום), Haggai (Hebrew חגי) and Noah (Hebrew נח) all feature a *hêt* that is simply rendered with a soft “*h*” in English.

Of course, Brown is not oblivious to the fact that *Nahom* and the root *n̄hm* are vocalized differently. “In Arabic and in Old South Arabian,” Brown writes, “the letter *h* in *Nihm* represents a soft aspiration, whereas the *h* in the Hebrew word *Nahom* is the letter *het* and carries a stronger, rasping sound.”<sup>53</sup> All Brown is saying is that “it is reasonable that when the party of Lehi heard the Arabian name *Nihm* (however it was then pronounced), the term *Nahom* came to their minds.”<sup>54</sup> More

51 Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (Upper Saddle River, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1971), xvi.

52 Patrick H. Alexander et al., ed., *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 26. In some instances one can render the *hêt* with “*ch*” (such as in the word Chanukah/Hanukkah), but this is usually done in the transliteration of certain Hebrew words into Roman letters rather than rendering the English equivalent of the word itself.

53 Brown, “New Light from Arabia,” 113 n. 69.

54 Brown, “New Light from Arabia,” 82. Compare Brown’s remarks with Kevin Barney, “A More Responsible Critique,” *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 131–32 n. 56; Ricks, “On Lehi’s Trail,” 67; Tvedtnes, “Names of People: Book of Mormon,” 787. Other critics have criticized the connection between *Nahom*

recently, Stephen D. Ricks similarly wrote, “these etymologies [of the Hebrew *nĥm*] are not reflected in the geographic name *Nehem* because both contain the dotted *h*, not the simple *h*. Still, it is possible that the name *Nahom* served as the basis of a play on words by Lehi’s party that Nephi recorded.”<sup>55</sup>

The wordplay suggested by Brown, Ricks, and others is reasonable. Such wordplays are common in Semitic and ancient Near Eastern texts, especially on proper nouns.<sup>56</sup> And words need not look or sound exactly alike in order to evoke such plays on words. In fact, Gary A. Rendsburg suggests a similar bilingual wordplay in Genesis on the name Ham (*Hām*), where the Hebrew name is played off of the Egyptian biconsonantal noun *ḥm*, which can mean either “majesty” or “slave.”<sup>57</sup> As Rendsburg points out, Ham is the progenitor of “the extent of the Egyptian Empire during the New Kingdom”<sup>58</sup> in Genesis

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and *Nehem* on the grounds that the vowels in the two names are different. On this accusation, see Matthew Roper, “Unanswered Mormon Scholars,” *FARMS Review of Books* 9/1 (1997): 117.

55 Ricks, “On Lehi’s Trail,” 67, brackets added. Also see the online article by John A. Tvedtnes, “The Language of the Book of Mormon,” at Book of Mormon Research, [http://bookofmormonresearch.org/book\\_of\\_mormon\\_articles/book\\_of\\_mormon\\_4](http://bookofmormonresearch.org/book_of_mormon_articles/book_of_mormon_4) (accessed November 12, 2013).

56 See Scott B. Noegel, ed., *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, 2000) in general, but especially the chapter by Gary A. Rendsburg, “Word Play in Biblical Hebrew: An Eclectic Collection,” 137–62. For further reading on the topic, consult Scott B. Noegel, “Bibliography on ‘Wordplay’ in the Hebrew Bible and Other Ancient Near Eastern Texts,” 42-pages, online at <http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/Wordplay-Bibliography.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2013).

57 Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, rep. ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2007), 581; Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1962), 169. Lest there is any confusion by the reader, it should be remembered that the dotted ḥ (*h*) uniliteral in Egyptian is not vocalized the same as the letter *hêt* in Hebrew. In Egyptian ḥ is vocalized as a soft or aspirated ḥ. There are two other ḥ uniliterals in Egyptian that are vocalized like the Hebrew *hêt*, but they are transliterated as “ḥ̄” and “ḥ̄.” See James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14–15, 19.

58 Rendsburg, “Word Play in Biblical Hebrew,” 143.

10:6, making Ham (symbolizing Egypt) the “majesty” or ruler of those territories. Likewise, in Genesis 9:20–27 Ham’s son, Canaan (*Kěna’an*)<sup>59</sup> becomes a slave (*‘ebed*) to Ham’s brothers because Ham saw Noah naked.<sup>60</sup> This is interesting in light of the wordplay suggested for the Book of Mormon between the Hebrew *nĥm* and the South Arabian place name NHM not only because both are bilingual, but also because Rendsburg’s suggested wordplay also involves different *h* phonemes (i.e., the *h*’s sound different in the two words being compared). Rendsburg explains:

True, the *h* of both Egyptian words, “majesty” and “slave,” is a voiceless pharyngeal /ħ/, whereas the *h* of the Hebrew *Ĥām* “Ham” represents a voiceless velar or voiceless uvular, that is, Semitic /ħ/ (a point that can be determined by the Septuagint transcription of the proper name as Χάμ)... . But this issue does not militate against the overall conclusion that *Ĥām* “Ham” and *Kěna’an* “Canaan” work together in the pericope to produce the desired effect.<sup>61</sup>

But even if we suppose that Vogel is right, and the idea of a wordplay between Nahom and *nĥm* is untenable, there is still the matter of the Book of Mormon correctly placing an archaeologically verified toponym at the right place and during the right time in south Arabia, which is something that Vogel does not account for in his arguments against the Book of Mormon.

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59 This name, according to Rendsburg, is meant to make a play on the root *kn*’, “be low, be humble, be subdued.” See Rendsburg, “Word Play in Biblical Hebrew,” 144. See also Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. כנע.

60 See Rendsburg, “Word Play in Biblical Hebrew,” 143–45 for the full discussion of this wordplay.

61 Rendsburg, “Word Play in Biblical Hebrew,” 144–45, also see pp. 149–50.

## Does the Bible provide a simpler explanation?

After raising his five objections, Vogel concludes, “It seems simpler to suggest that Smith’s Nahom is a variant of Naham (1 Chronicles 4:19), Nehum (Nehum 7:7), or Nahum (Nehum 1:1).”<sup>62</sup> Once again, though, Vogel’s suggestion reflects a minimalist reading, which merely accounts for the presence of the word in the text. The connection between Nahom and the Nihm tribal territory, however, is much more intricate and complex than this. Both Nahom in the Book of Mormon and Nihm in Southern Arabia match in the following interlocking details:

1. Both are places with a Semitic name based on the tri-consonantal root NHM.
2. Both pre-date 600 BCE (implied in 1 Nephi 16:34).<sup>63</sup>
3. Both are places for the burial of the dead (1 Nephi 16:34).<sup>64</sup>
4. Both are at the southern end of a travel route moving south-southeast (1 Nephi 16:13–14, 33), which subsequently turns toward the east from that point (1 Nephi 17:1).<sup>65</sup>
5. Both have “bountiful” lands, consistent in 12 particular details, approximately east of its location (1 Nephi 17:4).<sup>66</sup>

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62 Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 609 n. 17.

63 See Aston, “A History of NaHoM,” 85–87.

64 See Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 19–20.

65 See Brown, “Nahom and the ‘Eastward’ Turn,” 111–12.

66 See Aston, “Arabian Bountiful Discovered?” 4–11. In arguing for a different location for Bountiful, Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 124–34 provide a similar set of 12 criteria. Wm. Revell Phillips, “Mughsayl: Another Candidate for Land Bountiful,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16/2 (2007): 48–59 argues for yet another candidate, using Aston’s same 12 criteria. Warren P. Aston, “Identifying Our Best Candidate for Nephi’s Bountiful,” *Journal of Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 17/1–2 (2008): 58–64 evaluates all three proposals and argues that Khor Kharfot, his own candidate, is the best fit. We tend to agree with Aston, but, regardless, all three are “nearly

While the presence of similar names in the Bible might be able to explain the first of these correlations, it simply cannot account for all the ways the two places correspond. As Daniel C. Peterson once commented, “NHM isn’t just a name. It is a name and a date and a place and a turn in the ancient frankincense trail and a specific relationship to another location.”<sup>67</sup> Suggesting that Joseph Smith simply got the name Nahom from the Bible is an insufficient explanation of the correlation.

### Other Minimalist Arguments

In addition to Vogel’s attempted explanation that the name was just being pilfered from the Bible, others have also attempted to dismiss this evidence in ways that also betray minimalist readings.

Some have suggested that Joseph Smith may have seen one of the 18th century maps already mentioned.<sup>68</sup> There are several problems with this suggestion:

1. There is no evidence that Joseph Smith ever saw one of these maps. One online article counters by saying “there is also no evidence that he *or one of his acquaintances* did not have access to these sources.”<sup>69</sup> Though negative proof can, at times, be informative on a topic, positive claims like this come with a burden of proof. Historians don’t

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eastward” from Nihm. Having more than one specific location within a generally “bountiful” region that is east of Nihm that adequately fit the text is certainly not a problem for the Book of Mormon, though it may be difficult for a minimalist like Vogel to explain.

67 Comment posted to an Internet discussion board on December 7, 2006; quoted in Michael R. Ash, *Shaken Faith Syndrome: Strengthening One’s Testimony in the Face of Criticism and Doubt*, 2nd ed. (Redding, Calif: Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, 2013), 84.

68 For this attempted explanation, see the argument under the heading “Early References to NHM” in the online article “Nahom,” at MormonThink, <http://mormonthink.com/book-of-mormon-problems.htm#nhm> (accessed November 10, 2013), screenshot in possession of one of the authors.

69 “Early References to NHM,” emphasis in original.

entertain pure speculation simply because there is no evidence that something didn't happen. This tactic, in this context, is fallacious.

2. These maps were not accessible to Joseph Smith. The claim in the online article that "Allegheny College in Meadville Pennsylvania is about 50 miles from Harmony"<sup>70</sup> is simply false. There is a Harmony, Pennsylvania, that is close to 50 miles from Meadville, but the Harmony Township where Joseph Smith did most of the translating of the Book of Mormon is where Oakland, Pennsylvania, is now located.<sup>71</sup> Oakland is approximately 275–325 miles of travel from Allegheny College.<sup>72</sup>
3. These maps have hundreds of toponyms. Why is Nahom the only one that shows up in the Book of Mormon, and how is it that Joseph Smith was so lucky that the one he just happened to pick is the only one that can be traced as far back as Lehi's day?<sup>73</sup>
4. Even these maps give no indication of the eastward turn.<sup>74</sup>
5. The maps do not show the presence of a place fitting the description of Bountiful.<sup>75</sup>
6. These maps could not have informed Joseph Smith that the area would provide suitable burial grounds for a deceased member of the traveling party.

In short, this theory leaves just as much unexplained as Vogel's appeal to the Bible does.

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70 "Early References to NHM."

71 See Brandon S. Plewe, ed., *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2012), 21.

72 Distance estimates derived using Google Maps and exploring alternate routes. Though available roads/routes in the 19th century may not have been the same, it is unlikely the distances were substantially different.

73 See Aston, "A History of NaHoM," 93.

74 See Brown, "Nahom and the 'Eastward' Turn," 112; Brown, "New Light from Arabia," 73, 89.

75 See Aston, "A History of NaHoM," 90.

Others have tried to diminish the significance of the correlation by suggesting that NHM is a very common name. This has been done in two ways. The first is by suggesting that there are several locations along the Arabian Peninsula that have the root NHM in their toponym, and insinuating that LDS scholars have been all over the map proposing these different NHM's as Nahom.<sup>76</sup> This argument is flat out wrong. Writing in 1976, the Hiltons did not identify any toponyms with the root NHM. A couple years later, Ross T. Christensen first noticed one of the 18th century maps and observed, "Nehhm is only a little south of the route drawn by the Hiltons [in 1976]."<sup>77</sup> In other words, though they were a bit farther to the north, the Hiltons had us already looking in the right general area. All proposals since then have been that the Arabian Nihm/Nehem is the Book of Mormon Nahom. Warren P. Aston, who has presented on his findings on the NHM tribe/territory in an academic conference at Cambridge University,<sup>78</sup> has stressed that there is only one place on the whole of the Arabian Peninsula with NHM as a toponym.<sup>79</sup>

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76 See the argument made in bullet 4, under the heading "Critic's Answer #1 – Interpreting the evidence," in the Online article "Nahom," at MormonThink, [http://mormonthink.com/book\\_of\\_mormon\\_problems.htm](http://mormonthink.com/book_of_mormon_problems.htm) nhm (accessed November 10, 2013), screenshot in possession of one of the authors.

77 Ross T. Christensen, "The Place Called Nahom," *Ensign* (August 1978): 73.

78 See Warren P. Aston, "Some Notes on the Tribal Origins of NHM," paper presented at the Seminar for Arabian Studies, July 22, 1995, held at Cambridge University.

79 See Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 12; Aston, "A History of NaHoM," 80. Only Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 112–13; cf. Potter and Wellington, "Lehi's Trail," 32 say that there are multiple places called NHM and they identify a mountain, a valley, a hill, and they even differentiate between the cemetery and the Nihm region. But, these are all in the same general area, and as Aston, "Identifying Our Best Candidate for Nephi's Bountiful," 59, 63 n. 2 points out, "it is a mistake to conclude that there are separate places called NHM. They are all simply features of one tribal area—only one south Arabian location has the name NHM." In a footnote, Aston adds, "The bottom line, however, is that the name NHM is found only once in southern Arabia, even

More recently, an attempt has been made to diminish the apparent significance by expanding the search for NHM's beyond the Arabian Peninsula to worldwide locations.<sup>80</sup> Chris Johnson explains:

It's three letters... . But what is the significance of the evidence for the Joseph Smith as a prophet-translator? What is the evidence?... So here's the significance: We have NHM in Germany, Austria, Iran, Zimbabwe, Angola, Israel, Canada, and basically everywhere you look you can find those three letters. I'm sure there's a dozen companies named NHM that all around the world as well... NHM happened to be some of the most common letters. So the significance of NHM is lacking.<sup>81</sup>

The insinuation is that such names are so common that NHM/Nahom is lacking in statistical significance, or, in other words, this kind of match could just be random chance. This

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though a mountain, a valley, and a hill within the area also have NHM in their name, formal or otherwise. The site of Provo offers a useful analogy: even though people speak of Provo Canyon, the Provo River, Provo city, and the Provo cemetery, for example, there is still only one place called Provo, not several."

80 Chris Johnson, "How the Book of Mormon Destroyed Mormonism," paper presented at Life After Mormonism: 2013 Ex-Mormon Foundation Conference, held October 19, 2013; online video at <http://buggingmos.wordpress.com/2013/10/25/chris-johnson-how-the-book-of-mormon-destroyed-mormonism/> (accessed December 27, 2013); comments on Nahom at approx. 6:53–8:05 in the video. For a response to the main point of Johnson's presentation, see Benjamin L. McGuire, "The Late War Against the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 7 (2013): 323–55, <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-late-war-against-the-book-of-mormon/> (accessed December 27, 2013).

81 Johnson, "How the Book of Mormon Destroyed Mormonism," based on the transcript done by Jeff Lindsay, "The Significance of Nahom: Just Three Letters?" *Mormanity: A Mormon Blog, but not just for Mormons*, December 12, 2013 at <http://mormanity.blogspot.com/2013/12/the-significance-of-nahom-just-three.html> (accessed December 27, 2013); punctuation slightly altered, and ellipses represents our omission of material.

argument, like Vogel's, reduces the evidence to just a name in order to make the name seem insignificant.

This isn't simply a matter of how common NHM toponyms are today. The only NHM in the Book of Mormon (Nahom)<sup>82</sup> shows up in a position along a path, in relation to other places, in a narrative set in the early 6th century BCE.<sup>83</sup> It *just happens* to appear in a context that converges in location, date, and descriptive details with the only NHM toponym along the ancient Arabian trail. Johnson needs to show the probability, based on how NHM toponyms were distributed ca. 600 BCE, that one of them would show up in a position, along a path, that could be reasonably interpreted as fitting the narrative in 1 Nephi.<sup>84</sup> Only then would all the appropriate factors have been accounted for, but to do so would also greatly reduce the probability of a random correlation and increase its significance, something Johnson does not want.

## Conclusion

We've looked at Vogel's five points of argumentation on this matter, as well the arguments of some others, and find them wanting. The discovery of the NHM altars remain as, if

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82 See all Book of Mormon names in "Name Index," *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/onoma/index.php/NameIndex>, accessed December 27, 2013. No other name has the consonants NHM in that order and/or without other consonants.

83 Many of the NHM's Johnson has found can't even be confidently traced back to Joseph Smith's time, let alone Lehi's. See Jeff Lindsay, "Noham, That's Not History (Nor Geography, Cartography, or Logic): More on the Recent Attacks on NHM," *Mormanity: A Mormon Blog, but not just for Mormons*, December 21, 2013, at <http://mormanity.blogspot.com/2013/12/noham-thats-not-history-nor-geography.html> (accessed December 27, 2013); cross-posted to the *FairMormon Blog*, December 23, 2013, at <http://www.fairblog.org/2013/12/23/noham-thats-not-history-nor-geography-cartography-or-logic-more-on-the-recent-attacks-on-nhm/> (accessed December 27, 2013).

84 We have silently borrowed some verbiage, and this overall point, from a personal communication from S. Hales Swift to one of the authors, December 28, 2013. We appreciate his help in formulating our arguments on this point.

not more, significant for the historicity of the Book of Mormon as the Tel Dan inscription is for the historicity of the Davidic kingdom recorded in the Hebrew Bible. Book of Mormon minimalists like Vogel will have to try much harder to dismiss this significant evidence for the antiquity of the Book of Mormon. For, as Brant Gardner comments, “the data pointing to the connection between the Book of Mormon Nahom and the now-confirmed location of a tribe (and likely place) called NHM are extremely strong. The description fits, the linguistics fit, the geography fits, and the time frame fits. Outside of Jerusalem, NHM is the most certain connection between the Book of Mormon and known geography and history.”<sup>85</sup>

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85 Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:289.

