

Some responses to the Kirk Magleby review of Geology of the Book of Mormon

by

Jerry D. Grover, Jr. PE, PG author

February 15, 2015

First, I would like to thank and applaud Kirk for reading and reviewing the book, unfortunately it seems like much of what LDS people are reading these days has more to do with vampires than Book of Mormon research.

There are a few points that do warrant a response, most having to do with data and results that were not necessarily favorable to Magleby's personal geographic model.

Location of the city of Jerusalem: The review seems to imply that I am asserting that the city of Jerusalem is found in the land northward. The section involving one approach to textual construction might indicate that there may be a city called Jerusalem located in the land northward, it was indicated that if that was the case it would have to be a different city named Jerusalem. I do not subscribe to that particular location, the book provides an alternate textual construction that indicates that the list of cities was principally grouped by the method of destruction, only secondarily by geography. The destruction of Jerusalem in the land southward where Sorenson has located it does appear to be geologically possible, however there just isn't enough data at Lake Atitlan to determine how the inundation actually happened.

"Shewing": Magleby takes issue with the textual interpretation that the word "shewing" related to Bountiful actually means talking or conversing, instead of the more common usage which indicates a visual demonstration. He makes the comment that "when you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail". As a geologist, I have used a hammer a lot, and I have never once used it on a nail, but have used it on all types of other things, including a rattlesnake in the middle of Nevada. Magleby's reading of the verses would create a reading of the two verses that doesn't make sense. It would effectively read:

3 Nephi 11:1

1 And now it came to pass that there were a great multitude gathered together, of the people of Nephi, round about the temple which was in the land Bountiful; and they were marveling and wondering one with another, and were shewing [conversing] one to another the great and marvelous change which had taken place.

3 Nephi 11:2

2 And they were also conversing about this Jesus Christ, of whom the sign had been given concerning his death.

The problem is that if “shewing” means “conversing” instead of visually demonstrating than the sentence would have to have an “about” in it, just like verse 2. The verb shewing requires an object, verb conversing cannot. In addition, since a principal purpose of most Mesoamerican temples was to gain elevation, the implication is clearly that the temple was a vantage point for demonstrating the destruction still present. The reading given to these verses in the book is straightforward, easily understood, and consistent with the Book of Mormon itself, not skewed to defend a preferred geographical model.

Ammonihah: In an attempt to deflect the geologic deficiencies in the location selected for Ammonihah, Magleby asserts (without any supporting data) that the prison that collapsed must have been located on ground that was subject to liquefaction which by implication would mean that his chosen location of low magnitude earthquakes would then be acceptable. Even assuming that the soil was susceptible to liquefaction, river deposits would not be expected to increase the shaking intensity by much above 2 points on the Mercalli scale. As Magleby’s own data presented show, the largest earthquake one would expect at his location that would occur once in 500 years would be a Level IV. Adding 2 points to this number accounting for liquefaction one would arrive at a shaking intensity of Level VI, not the Level VIII described in the Book of Mormon causing the collapse of the prison. A Level VIII earthquake is 3 times stronger than a Level VI. Magleby does make a reasonable interpretation that the prison took more damage than the town, which could be based on soil factors or perhaps on proximity to the fault. A Level VI earthquake at the town with a level VIII at the prison would be consistent with the description given in the Book of Mormon. This location for Ammonihah is still not a best fit based on geologic criteria, even considering all conditions favorable to Magleby’s interpretation.

Magleby also asserts that the “great noise” was not in fact a noise generated by the earthquake but was primarily from the collapse of the prison. While the Book of Mormon textual language is not definitive, by placing the prison some distance from the town, Magleby makes it more difficult to support that argument, as the farther away from town to the prison location, the less likely it is that the sound of a prison collapse would be a “great noise” heard in town.

“Plains of the earth”: Magleby implies that the book limits the interpretation of the “plains of the earth” to the Tabasco Coastal Plains. I am not aware anywhere in the book where there is such an assertion, in fact the figures all show potential earthquake and potential liquefaction impact (in fact the most impact) to the land northward which would potentially include many more “plains” than those located in Tabasco. The only assertion made is that the plains that are broken up do not appear to be the narrower strip of coastal plains on the Pacific side of the Isthmus.