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**Title**

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**Abstract** Review of *Step by Step through the Book of Mormon: The Story in Scriptures—A Geographical, Cultural, and Historical System of Understanding* (1996), and *Step by Step through the Book of Mormon: A Cultural Commentary, Part 1—Through the Wilderness to the Promised Land* (1996), by Alan C. Miner.

Alan C. Miner. *Step by Step through the Book of Mormon: The Story in Scriptures—A Geographical, Cultural, and Historical System of Understanding and Step by Step through the Book of Mormon: A Cultural Commentary, Part 1—Through the Wilderness to the Promised Land*. Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 1996. v + 131 pp. and vii + 211 pp. \$14.95 ea.

Reviewed by Fred W. Nelson

These two books are apparently the first in a continuing series attempting to assemble current thought on the controversial subjects of geography, culture, and history of the Book of Mormon. In the first volume, *Step by Step through the Book of Mormon: The Story in Scriptures—A Geographical, Cultural, and Historical System of Understanding*, the author has printed only the verses and phrases in the Book of Mormon that contain references to geography, culture, and chronology. I would prefer, rather, to have these scriptures in context with the entire text in order to gain additional insights. One can read the verses Miner has extracted and then refer to the Book of Mormon, but it seems like a waste of time and effort.

Appendixes A, B, and C (dealing with chronology, people, and places) may be useful to some as they study the history in the Book of Mormon. They could be followed as one studies the text or used to locate items of interest in the text. However, they should be used with caution. In a rapid review of these appendixes, I found what I consider to be important omissions. For example, in Appendix A (pp. 101–10), no mention is made of Lehi's death, which event is certainly at least as significant as the appearance of Lehi's and Sariah's gray hairs, which is listed. Also, in Appendix B (pp. 111–7) Miner lists Nephi<sub>1</sub>, Lehi<sub>1</sub>, Jacob<sub>2</sub> (the son of Lehi), as key historical characters but not as significant religious characters. To me their greatest contribution to their people and to us was their religious contributions. It is interesting that the author has chosen to list Jeremiah (from the Bible) as a key historical

character and Isaiah as a significant religious character. Many other inconsistencies appear in his list.

The second volume of this series, *A Cultural Commentary, Part 1—Through the Wilderness to the Promised Land*, is completely different in style and content from the first volume. Here, Miner lists a Book of Mormon reference with a word or phrase and then comments on it by quoting others who have written commentaries about the verse or, in some cases, writes his own commentary. In his commentary on the verses, Miner quotes almost everyone who has had anything to say about geography, chronology, and archaeology of the Book of Mormon. Some of those he quotes are reputable scholars—e.g., John Clark, Hugh Nibley, John Sorenson, John Tvedtnes, John Welch. Unfortunately he also uses material from many much less reputable sources—Milton Hunter and Thomas Ferguson, Scot and Maurine Proctor, and Joseph Allen.

It appears that Miner knew what he wanted to say about each verse and searched the literature until he found support for his ideas, without regard for the credibility of the source. A major concern is that many potential readers would accept all the references and explanations as equally credible and authoritative. Also, when Miner does not quote others, he writes his own commentary. These sections are full of assumptions and suppositions with no data to support them. For example, see “Omni 1:20 Large Stone” on page 97, where a long explanation with no facts or data is given.

A major problem with Miner’s book is his apparent lack of professionalism. For example, John Sorenson’s *The Illustrated Companion to the Book of Mormon* is frequently cited. This book has not been published, a manuscript does not exist, and much of it has not even been written. Miner has made a serious error in not even asking for, much less obtaining, permission from Sorenson to use his material. This demonstrates at the very least poor scholarship.

To me, the book has the appearance of the personal notes one would use for individual study and interest—not what one would print for everyone to see. Many of the references Miner uses demonstrate poor scholarship and are assumptions without data

and as such have been reviewed and discussed for years.<sup>1</sup> Scholarship presupposes the knowledge and judgment to know which source to use.

On pages 135–6, an illustration and an explanation of Stela 10 from Kaminaljuyu are presented. I see nothing in Stela 10 that would indicate any connection to the Book of Mormon. Also, the literature about this stela does not describe anything that would tie it to a Book of Mormon event.<sup>2</sup>

I am not convinced that Miner's book is necessary. It is similar in some respects to the much more reliable FARMS 1992 publication, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Milton R. Hunter and Thomas S. Ferguson, *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon* (Oakland, CA: Kolob, 1950); Scot F. Proctor and Maurine J. Proctor, *Light from the Dust* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993); F. Richard Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> For very different interpretations, see S. W. Miles, "Sculpture of the Guatemala–Chiapas Highlands and Pacific Slopes, and Associated Hieroglyphs," in *Archaeology of Southern Mesoamerica*, part 1, ed. Gordon R. Willey, Handbook of Middle American Indians, vol. 2 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 254, 255–6; and Lee A. Parsons, "Proto-Maya Aspects of Miraflores–Arenal Monumental Stone Sculpture from Kaminaljuyu and the Southern Pacific Coast," in *Maya Iconography*, ed. Elizabeth P. Benson and Gillett F. Griffin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 28–30.