

Joseph Fielding Smith, before he became President of the Church, argued for a New York location as the scene of the final battle

One review of this topic notes:

In 1938 Elder Joseph Fielding Smith wrote an article published in the Deseret News arguing against what he then termed the "modernist" theory that the final battlefield of the Nephites and Jaredites may have been in Central America rather than in New York. In 1956 this article was included in a selection of Elder Smith's writings compiled by his son-in-law Bruce R. McConkie. Although Elder Smith would later become president of the church in 1970, his article arguing for a New York location as the scene of the final battlefield was written many years before he assumed that position, and he apparently never revisited the question as president of the church. There is evidence that Elder Smith may have softened his opposition on the Cumorah question.

In a letter written to Fletcher B. Hammond, who argued emphatically for a Central American location and had sent Elder Smith a copy of his findings, the apostle explained, "I am sure this will be very interesting although I have never paid any attention whatever to Book of Mormon geography because it appears to me that it is inevitable that there must be a great deal of guesswork." Apparently, he did not consider his 1938 argument as settled and definitive or as a measure of doctrinal orthodoxy.

Joseph Fielding Smith acknowledged that this was his opinion, and that others were entitled to their own opinions regarding this subject

Sidney B. Sperry, after whom an annual Brigham Young University symposium is named, was also one who initially supported the New York Cumorah view (that is, an area of New York as the final battlefield of the Nephites and Jaredites). During the 1960s, as he began to explore the issue, he came to a different conclusion... Reversing his earlier position, he wrote: "It is now my very carefully studied and considered opinion that the Hill Cumorah to which Mormon and his people gathered was somewhere in Middle America. The Book of Mormon evidence to this effect is irresistible and conclusive to one who will approach it with an open mind. This evidence has been reviewed by a few generations of bright students in graduate classes who have been given the challenge to break it down if they can. To date none has ever been able to do so."

Sperry, who was very familiar with what Joseph Fielding Smith had previously written, told him that he did not feel comfortable publishing something that contradicted what the apostle had written, but that he and other sincere students of the Book of Mormon had come to that conclusion only after serious and careful study of the text. Sperry said that Elder Smith then lovingly put his arm around his shoulder and said, "Sidney, you are as entitled to your opinion as I am to mine. You go ahead and publish it." [3]

It seems clear, then, that Elder (later President) Smith did not regard his views as the product of revelation, nor did he regard it as illegitimate to have a different view of the matter.

http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon/Archaeology/Hill_Cumorah