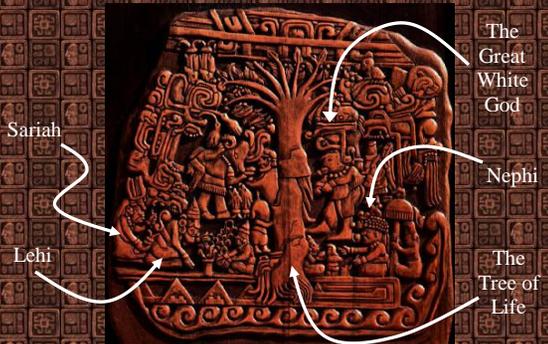


Lehi's Dream



of

the Tree of Life



The wood carving shown above is called Stela 5. It is a possible representation of the dream of the tree of life, discovered at Izapa in Southern Mexico. Archeologist Wells Jakeman found 22 correspondences and 114 points of agreement between the Izapa carving and Nephi and Lehi's tree of life visions. The old man sitting on the left may represent Lehi. The jawbone located immediately behind his head may be a glyph representing Lehi's name (the name Lehi in Hebrew means Jawbone), standing for the Valley of Lehi where Samson slew a thousand Philistines. The headdress on the woman to his left can be considered as actually a kind of name-glyph very much like Egyptian representations of a queen or princess. The name Sariah means 'Princess of Yahweh.' The person on the right with a parasol over his head reveals a serpent projecting out from his forehead; behind the serpent is a human face with a plant rising about and leaves flowing from it down the young man's back, duplicating the representations of the ancient Egyptian grain god, Nepri or Nepi. V. Garth Norman interprets the bird-masked personage to the left and above Nephi as representing Quetzalcoatl, who is holding supposed fruit or medicine bags, and that with his bird beak, forward bag, and forward foot touching the tree, he undoubtedly controls and directs...a journey to the Tree of Life.' (Taken from Light from the Dust, A Photographic Exploration into the Ancient World of the Book of Mormon, Proctor, Scot Facer and Maurine Jensen, Deseret Book, Salt Lake City, 1993, p. 31)



1. Tree of Life
2. Rod of Iron
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4. Gulf of Misery
5. Great & Spacious Building
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The Tree of Life



Trees are often used in ancient Hebrew symbolism to represent shelter, protection and sustenance. This is probably due to the fact that much of the surrounding land was barren and desolate. Trees were of great value when you consider their worth in sustaining life. Because trees usually live longer than man, they have also become symbols of eternal life, immortality, strength, and majesty. The tree is a common symbol in many cultures. It is often associated with the synthesis of heaven, earth, water, and air. In both Hebrew, Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Canaanite cultures, the tree is most often associated with 'the tree of life'. Each culture, though different in specifics, viewed the tree of life as the source of immortality and the key to heavenly power and blessings. The Hebrews associate the tree of life with the tree, by the same name, placed in the Garden of Eden. Rabbinical tradition says that the tree of life was an olive tree and associates it with the Messiah since the word 'messiah' means anointed one and anointing took place with olive oil. The tree of life is associated with the word of God. The Hebrew's required that the Torah scrolls be made using two rods of olive wood. They say that he who holds fast unto the Torah has eternal life planted in their midst'. They associate Menorah with the tree of life as well. In other symbolic applications, the tree has represented family descent, people, military defeat (when referring to destroying trees), rebirth (when referring to planting trees) and a link between heaven and earth.

In Lehi's dream, he saw, "And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy (1st Nephi 8:10)." Nephi saw the same dream and described the trees beauty as "far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow (1st Nephi 11:9)." Nephi inquired of the Lord as to the meaning of this tree, which "is precious above all (1st

Nephi 11:9)." In answer to his question, the Lord showed him "the great city of Jerusalem, and also other cities. And I beheld the city of Nazareth; and in the city of Nazareth I beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white (1st Nephi 11:13)." It was explained to Nephi that the "virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh (1st Nephi 1:18)." Nephi then saw "the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms (1st Nephi 1:20)." Finally, the Lord revealed, "Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?" Nephi could now answer his own question and said, "it is **the love of God**, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things (1st Nephi 11:21-22)." It is interesting that the Lord represented the Love of God by showing Lehi the life of Jesus. It is in harmony with the scripture, "**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).**"



The Fruit of the Tree of Life

Closely associated with the symbolism of the tree, fruit carries the idea of immortality and life. Where partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge brought death to Adam and Eve, the fruit of the tree of life brings eternal life. Fruit is also associated with seed and symbolizes posterity and increase. Fruit can also symbolize the result of ones work or actions, thus there are good and bad fruits. The fruit in Lehi's dream was described with some specifics. It was desirable to make one happy (1st Nephi 18:10). It was sweet and white and those that partook of it found joy (1st Nephi 18:11-12). We learn from Lehi that after he partook, he desired that his family would do likewise. Laman and Lemuel refused to partake (1st Nephi 8:17-18); however, Nephi, Sam, and Sariah all partook (1st Nephi 8:16). There were others that partook of the fruit, but were soon ashamed

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and fell away (1st Nephi 8:25). Partaking of the fruit represents partaking of the powers of Christ and his atonement. It is forgiveness from our sins and the feelings of peace, joy and happiness that are associated therewith. In the end, partaking of the gospel qualifies one for the greatest fruit of all – the Atonement, which in turn qualifies us for eternal life and exaltation. Like the tree from which it came, the fruit represents **‘the love of God’**.



The Iron Rod

Iron is a symbol of absolute strength. It is used to represent hardness, inflexibility, firmness, and durability. The rod is a symbol of power, authority, and dignity. A wooden rod is often a representation of the tree of life, especially in the case of a blossoming or blooming rod. The two symbols combined would represent inflexible and absolute power, strength and authority. Is it any wonder that Nephi learned the iron rod in his father’s dream represented **‘the word of God’**. Ezra Taft Benson said, “Success in righteousness, the power to avoid deception and resist temptation, guidance in our daily lives, healing of the soul – these are but a few of the promises the Lord has given to those who will come to His word. Does the Lord promise and not fulfill? Surely if he tells us that these things will come to use if we lay hold upon His word, the blessings can be ours. And if we do not, then the blessings may be lost. However diligent we may be in other areas, certain blessings are to be found only in the scriptures, only in coming to the word of the Lord and holding fast to it as we make our way through the mists of darkness to the tree of life (Ensign, May 1986, page 81).” Even though the rod leads us down the right path, we must not think that we can relax our grip, or stop our dependence of the word of God. Boyd K. Packer said, “Note that the test came after they had followed the iron rod, after they had partaken of the fruit.... What is the test? Why did they falter? It had something to do with becoming ashamed in the face of scoffing and mocking or pointing fingers (BYU Speeches, April 12, 1966, page 4).” Lehi’s dream is as applicable today as it was in his day. Ezra Taft Benson said, “Some of our members have become disturbed because of derogatory things said about the Church and it’s leaders, or because of misrepresentations about our doctrines or our practices. But opposition is not new to the Church. We have had opposition in the past, and we will have continue to have opposition in the future. Do not become discouraged by what others say or do. Stay on the strait and narrow path. You do this by holding fast to the Iron Rod – the words of God as contained in the scriptures and as given by His living servants on this earth (Ensign, April 1984, page 8).”



The Mist of Darkness

Darkness is typically used to represent evil. It is opposition to every thing that is light or good. Mist is used symbolically to show a state of error and confusion. It symbolizes chaos. Many earthly religious rites consist of a person coming out of a mist into a place of clarity and light. Lehi saw the people of this world lost in the mist of

Darkness. The Mist of Darkness is the temptation and false doctrine of the Adversary designed to lead us away from returning home to Father. Nephi said the mist of darkness represented **“the temptations of the devil, which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men, and leadeth them away into broad roads, that they perish and are lost (1st Nephi 12:17).”**



The Gulf of Misery

A gulf is opposite in symbolic definition to the mountain. A mountain is used to symbolize the abode of God. Temples are often referred to as the mountain of the Lord. Mountains are places of light, tranquility, knowledge, and blessing. A gulf is a place of darkness, confusion, chaos, and trial. The Gulf of Misery represents **the space that “divideth them” (the wicked from the righteous) “; yea, even the word of the justice of the Eternal God (1st Nephi 12:18).”**



The Great & Spacious Building

Buildings represent the creations of man. They represent the advances and accomplishments of mankind in general. Hugh B. Nibley wrote, “By now most of us have seen photographs of those wonderful ancient houses (first discover in the 1930’s) built after the Babylonian design of Lehi’s day, ‘ten-and-twelve-story skyscrapers that.... represent genuine survivals of ancient Babylonian architecture,’ with their windows beginning, for the sake of defense, twenty to fifty feet from the ground. At night these lighted windows would certainly give the effect of being suspended above the earth. The eighth book of Hamdani’s alKlil is devoted to describing the early castles of Arabia, ‘great and spacious’ which ‘stood as it were in the air, high above the earth’ (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, 6:257-258).” Nephi wrote, **“vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men (1st Nephi 12:18).”**



The River

Symbolically, rivers are used to represent the passage of life. The condition of the river would indicate the state of that passage. A clean river would indicate a pure and righteous life. A dirty or filthy river would be one of wickedness and sin. In ancient legends, four rivers came from the tree of life. They rose from a fountain at the base of tree. The water from such a fountain was one of live water. Interestingly, Nephi saw a fountain of living water at the tree of life when he saw his fathers dream. Hugh B. Nibley wrote, “When he dreams of a river, it is a true desert river, a clear stream a few hundred yards wide it’s source but a hundred paces away (1st Nephi 8:13-14) or else a muddy wash, a sayl of ‘filthy water’ that sweeps people away to their destruction (1st Nephi 8:32; 12:16; 15:27). In the year 960 CE, according to Bar Hebraeus, a large band of pilgrims returning from Mecca’ encamped in the bed of a brook in which water had not flowed for a long time. And during the night, whilst they were sleeping, a flood of water poured down upon them all, and it swept them and all their possessions out into the Great

Sea and they all perished (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, 5:45).” Nephi explained that the river was filthy and the depths thereof are **‘the depths of Hell’**.



The Straight and Narrow Path

Anciently, passages or paths were associated with religious rites that elevated one from a mortal state to something more heavenly. To the ancients, a narrow path or a path with restrictions or dangers indicated limitations or requirements for traveling the path. They typically required divine intervention since the requirements were typically beyond mortal capabilities. They Savior taught similar principles as His doctrine. He said, “Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:13-14).” Like wise he taught, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6).” The straight and Narrow path is **‘the Law of the Gospel’**. It is all the covenants and ordinances associated therewith. Ezra Taft Benson said, “There is a power in the book that will begin to flow into your life the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path (Ensign, November 1986, page 7).”



The Fountain of Living Water

According to the ancients the fountain of living water springs forth from the tree of life. It therefore shares in the symbolism of immortality and eternal life. Water from this spring brings about cleanings, forgiveness, and youth. In some cases, the fountain is thought to bring about enlightenment and knowledge. The early Christian church associated the water of this fountain with the Holy Ghost. It also represents **‘the love of God’**.



Large and Spacious Field

In almost all ancient cultures a field is used to symbolize mother earth. It is the great provider of nourishment to and substance to man. Lehi also refers to the Large and Spacious field as the Dark and Dreary Waste or Wilderness. All of which symbolize **‘the world in it’s fallen state’**. It should be noted that Lehi’s dream, like our own dreams, was full of images and emotions familiar to him. Note that Lehi and his family were alone in a ‘dark and dreary wilderness’. They had traveled for ‘many hours in darkness’. They relied on the Lord’s mercy for salvation. A common nightmare for an ancient Arabian, as recorded in poetry and rock carvings, was to travel long distances in dark and dreary wastes alone. Hugh Nibley said, “Only one who had actually seen those things could have dreamed them; only one who had been haunted by those fears and frightened by those situations would ever have been visited by them in a dream of the night (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, 6:263).”