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## Nephi's Later Reflections on the Tree of Life Vision

An interesting phenomenon concerning 1 and 2 Nephi is that parts of the latter book draw on the tree of life vision that Nephi and his father shared, as recorded in 1 Nephi 8, 11–15.<sup>1</sup> In an earlier FARMS Update, John A. Tvedtnes demonstrated that Nephi drew on this vision when composing the psalm in 2 Nephi 4.<sup>2</sup> Further study suggests the likelihood that Nephi's exhortation in 2 Nephi 31 was similarly informed by that sublime vision.

In concluding his record, Nephi writes “concerning the doctrine of Christ” in order to show “the way . . . whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 31:2, 21). At a culminating point in that final testimony, he exhorts us: “Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall



*Nephi's Psalm*, by Robert T. Barrett. Charcoal.

press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (v. 20).

The latter portion of that verse parallels important elements of the tree of life vision. Lehi described four types of people and their reactions to the tree.<sup>3</sup> One group among the “numberless concourses of people” grasped the iron rod, pressed forward along the path, reached the tree, and partook of the fruit without being ashamed (see 1 Nephi 8:30). This favored group comprises those who do not fall away but endure in faith to the end. Note the parallels (in italic type) between Nephi's description of this scene in 1 Nephi 8:30 and his discourse in 2 Nephi 31:20:

### 1 Nephi 8:30

Behold, he [Lehi] saw other multitudes *pressing forward*; and they came and caught hold of the end of the *rod of iron*; and they did *press their way forward, continually holding fast* to the *rod of iron*, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the *fruit of the tree*.


### 2 Nephi 31:20

Wherefore, ye must *press forward* with a *steadfastness* in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall *press forward*, feasting upon the *word of Christ*, and *endure to the end*, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have *eternal life*.

Both passages contain the phrase “press[ing] forward,” and each passage is preceded by a description of the “strait and narrow path” (see 1 Nephi 8:20; 2 Nephi 31:9, 18–19). Other parallels are found in synonymous ideas and expressions. For example, the phrase “continually holding fast” in 1 Nephi 8:30 equates with “steadfastness” in 2 Nephi 31:20. Further, “the rod of iron” mentioned in the first passage (identified as “the word of God” in 1 Nephi 11:25) corresponds to “the word of Christ” in the second passage.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, “eternal life” parallels “the fruit of the tree.” Explaining the vision to his brothers, Nephi describes the tree as “that tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it is *the greatest of all the gifts*

of God” (1 Nephi 15:36). Significantly, Doctrine and Covenants 14:7 defines “eternal life” in the same terms—“the greatest of all the gifts of God” (compare Romans 6:23; Helaman 5:8), thereby reinforcing the linkage between “eternal life” and “the fruit of the tree.”

The striking parallels between Nephi’s account of the tree of life vision and his final exhortations suggest that his closing testimony was based, at least in part, on the great, life-changing truths he learned from that vision. 

#### Notes

1. For a comparison of the visions, see John W. Welch, “Connections between the Visions of Lehi and Nephi,” in *Pressing*

*Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), 49–53.

2. John A. Tvedtnes, “Reflections of Nephi’s Vision in His Psalm,” FARMS Update, *Insights* (February 2000): 2.
3. For more on these four groups, see John A. Tvedtnes, “A New Testament Parallel to Lehi’s Tree of Life Vision,” in his *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 113–15.
4. See John A. Tvedtnes, “Rod and Sword as the Word of God,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 (1996): 148–55.

By Michael B. Parker

#### NIBLEY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

### Nibley Fellowship Application Deadline, Guidelines

Each year at about this time we remind graduate students about the Nibley Fellowship Program. Those interested in applying for the first time or who wish to renew their fellowships for the 2002/2003 academic year must do so by 30 June 2002.

According to new guidelines recently approved by the Institute’s board, successful candidates must be enrolled in accredited Ph.D. programs in areas of study directly related to the work and mission of the Institute, particularly work done under the name of FARMS—studies of the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, the Old and New Testaments, early Christianity, ancient temples, and related subjects. Applicants cannot be employed at the Institute or be related to an Institute employee.

Nibley Fellowship guidelines and application forms can be obtained by contacting:

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The Institute awarded Nibley Fellowships to 19 graduate students for the 2001/2002 academic year: **Wade Ardern**, Anthropology, Brigham Young University; **Stephen M. Bay**, Classical Philosophy, Classic Arabic, University of Illinois at Urbana-

Champaign; **Daniel Belnap**, Near Eastern Languages and Civilization, Northwest Semitic, University of Chicago; **RoseAnn Benson**, Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Ancient Scripture, Brigham Young University; **David Calabro**, Hebrew Bible, Ebla Studies, Vanderbilt University; **Cory Daniel Crawford**, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Hebrew Bible, Harvard University; **John Crawford**, Near Eastern Studies, Hebrew Bible, Johns Hopkins University; **D. Morgan Davis**, Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Utah; **Robert Garrett**, New Testament and Early Christianity, Loyola University of Chicago; **Taylor Halverson**, Biblical Studies, Indiana University; **Ronan J. Head**, Cuneiform Studies, University of Oxford; **Robert D. Hunt**, Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Brigham Young University; **Kerry Muhlestein**, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, Egyptology, University of California, Los Angeles; **Boyd Petersen**, Comparative Literature, Bible as Literature, University of Utah; **Taylor Petrey**, Early Christianity, Divinity School at Harvard University; **Mauro Properzi**, New Testament and Early Christianity, Divinity School at Harvard University; **Aaron Schade**, Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, Northwest Semitic Epigraphy, University of Toronto; **Thomas B. Spackman**, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Old Testament Languages, University of Chicago; **Valerie Triplet**, Sciences Religieuses, Ancient Judaism and Dead Sea Scrolls, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris. 