

Lehi's Council Vision and the Mysteries of God

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1 Nephi 1:8 "surrounded with numberless concourses of angels"

When Lehi saw God seated on his throne among the council of his heavenly hosts, he was entrusted to deliver the decree of woe and judgment to be issued upon Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 1:8-13). His vision was fully consistent with the spiritual experiences of other Israelite prophets of his day. Several other prophets, like Lehi, expressed their visions in terms of participating in an assembly in heaven and receiving the judgments of that council concerning God's will about the destiny of man and the world (see, for example, 1 Kings 22:19-22; Isaiah 6:1-10; 40:1-8; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Zechariah 1:8-13; 3:1-7; 6:1-8; Jeremiah 23:18). This theme has been discussed at length by Theodore Mullen,¹ and his work is a valuable tool for placing Lehi's words more specifically in their preexilic Israelite context.

Interestingly, the Hebrew word for the "council" is *sod*. By association, it has also come to mean "a decree of the council." Because the council and its actions were not open to the general public but were private and intimate, these decrees were secrets, known only to the prophets. Accordingly, Raymond E. Brown has concluded that the Semitic background of the concept of the "mysteries" of God resides in the idea of prophets (like Lehi) being "introduced into the heavenly assembly and gaining a knowledge of its secret decrees"² (see also Amos 3:7).

Thus, it is remarkable yet understandable that when Nephi described his desire to receive a personal confirmation of the truth of his father's words, he said that he wanted to "know of the mysteries of God." Those "mysteries" (*sod*) were apparently synonymous, in Nephi's inquiring mind, with the decrees and knowledge that Lehi had received in the council (also *sod*).

Based on research by John W. Welch. This study first appeared in the Fall 1986 F.A.R.M.S. newsletter. This topic was then developed further in John W. Welch, "The Calling of a Prophet," in Monte Nyman and Charles Tate, eds., First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1988), 35-54.

Footnotes

1. See *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1980).
2. "The Pre-Christian Semitic Concept of 'Mystery,'" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 20 (1958):417-43, esp. 421.