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## The Lehi Stone

Author: Richard O. Cowan

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**Abstract:** A monument in Chiapas, Mexico (the Lehi Stone) has several correlations with the Book of Mormon tree of life pericope (1 Nephi 8, 11). Author provides a drawing and brief explanation of the monument.

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# THE LEHI STONE

(STELA 5)

by Richard O. Cowan

While Lehi and his colony were encamped in the Valley of Lemuel on the shores of the Red Sea, Lehi experienced a most interesting vision or dream. He beheld a tree whose fruit was most desirable. Also, he saw a rod of iron running along a path which led to the tree, and by the side of the path was a deep gulf. Beyond this was a great building. (See 1 Nephi 8.) Lehi's son Nephi received a subsequent vision in which he learned more concerning the meaning of what his father had seen. (See 1 Nephi 11-15.) The tree was a representation of God's love, while the rod symbolized his word, which, if steadfastly adhered to, would lead them to the point where they could enjoy the fruits of the gospel. The large building depicted pride.

Lehi saw several groups of people in his dream. One group (1 Nephi 8:31-33) sought only materialistic ends; some reached their goal, while others were lost. Another group (see 1 Nephi 8:21-23) professed spiritual intentions, but not having a firm hold in the faith, they were lost in the mists of temptation. Others (see 1 Nephi 8:24-28), with the word of God as their guide, were able to reach their goal but fell away in the face of worldly concerns and did not endure to the end. Thus Lehi learned the importance of enduring in faith to the end in order to partake of the fruits of God's love, the greatest of which is eternal life. (See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.)

Concerning these special channels of revelation Elder James E. Talmage has written: "Visions and dreams have constituted a means of communication between God and men in every dispensation of the Priesthood."<sup>1</sup>

Ancient America has provided another glimpse into Lehi's vision or dream of the tree of life. In 1941 archaeologists unearthed a stela or stone monument at Izapa, Chiapas, in southeastern Mexico. The monument measures ten feet in height, five feet in width, and two feet in thickness. Archaeologists

designated it "Stela 5" and first published a description of it in 1943. Dr. M. Wells Jakeman of the BYU Department of Archaeology was impressed by the similarities between this stone's carvings and the record of Lehi's experience. He has discussed these similarities in several books and articles.<sup>2</sup> In 1958 BYU archaeologists made a casting of the stone, and today a full-size replica of Stela 5 is on display in the archaeology department there.

The accompanying chart, taken from a drawing prepared by Dr. Jakeman, illustrates the features of the carving on the stela. The central feature is the tree, around which are found six figures. An old man (1) is shown in an attitude of worship and instruction. The person sitting behind him is holding over the old man's head a carved emblem, symbolizing a crocodile (2), which in ancient American tradition is often a name-glyph for the "great father" who was supposed to have come with his family to settle the land after a legendary "great flood," and who was considered the first ancestor of the ancient Guatemalans.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, a large jaw is a prominent feature of this nameglyph; the Hebrew place-name *Lehi* is defined as *jaw, jawbone, or cheek*.

Behind the old man is a female figure (3).<sup>4</sup> Her elaborate headdress corresponds to those in ancient Old World representations of royalty; it might be remembered that Sariah's name meant "princess of Jehovah."<sup>5</sup> Another large figure (4), whose light beard probably signifies youth, appears to be writing. The account of this dream was written by Nephi, whom the Book of Mormon describes as "being exceeding young, nevertheless being large in stature." (1 Nephi 2:16.) In the carving, his headdress closely resembles that of the Egyptian grain god, Nepi.<sup>6</sup> The young man seems to be assisted by another (5), who might correspond to Sam in the Book of Mormon. Finally, two others (6 and 7) are closer to the old man, perhaps suggesting their seniority in the family; at the same time, however their backs are turned to the tree, which might symbolize their rejection of that for which it stood.<sup>7</sup> The parallel with Laman and Lemuel is apparent. In the original stone carving, one of the most definite features is a straight deep groove (8), which might be a representation of the rod of iron.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See "Izapa Stela 5 and the Book of Mormon," by M. Wells Jakeman, *The Instructor*, December, 1961, page 410. For more detail, see "Stela 5, Izapa, as the Lehi Tree-of-Life Stone; a Reply to Recent Attacks," by M. Wells Jakeman, *Newsletter of the S.E.R.A.* No. 104, November 27, 1967, pages 2-11 (published by the Department of Archaeology, Brigham Young University).

<sup>2</sup>M. Wells Jakeman, *Stela 5, Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico (A Major Archaeological Discovery of the New World)*; Department of Archaeology, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 1958; page 23. (This work is out of print, but is available in libraries.)

<sup>3</sup>M. Wells Jakeman, *Stela 5, Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico*, pages 32, 33.

<sup>4</sup>M. Wells Jakeman, *Stela 5, Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico*, page 37.

<sup>5</sup>M. Wells Jakeman, *Stela 5, Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico*, page 40.

<sup>6</sup>M. Wells Jakeman, *Stela 5, Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico*, page 58.

<sup>7</sup>M. Wells Jakeman, *Stela 5, Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico*, page 58.

<sup>8</sup>Library File Reference: LEHI.

(For Course 9, lesson of May 5, "The Book of Mormon—Another Sacred Record"; for Course 27, lessons of March 17 and May 19, "Enduring to the End" and "The Role of the Prophet"; for Course 29, lesson of May 5, "The Book of Mormon"; and of general interest.)  
<sup>1</sup>James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 14th edition; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1925; page 226.



# THE LEHI STONE

Stela 5, Izapa;  
Chiapas,  
Mexico



*And the angel said unto me: . . . Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him, saying: Yea, 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. (1 Nephi 11:21, 22.)*

*And . . . I beheld that the rod of iron . . . was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life. . . . And it came to pass that I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the pride of the world. . . . (1 Nephi 11:25, 36.)*

Taken from the Book of Mormon syllabus, by College of Religious Instruction, Brigham Young University.  
See article opposite (Page 132) for explanation of numbered figures.

\*"This feature, although unrecognizable, corresponds, somewhat, to the 'great and spacious building' that Lehi . . . says he also saw in his vision." (Stela 5, Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico by M. Wells Jakeman; page 66.)