

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



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were caught up by the powers of heaven into Zion” (Moses 7:27).

After the Flood, others were also translated. In his inspired rendition of the Bible, Joseph SMITH tells of many who “were translated and taken up into heaven” (JST Gen. 14:32–34). Fewer translations apparently occurred in the New Testament era, though JOHN THE BELOVED (John 21:20–23; D&C 7) and the THREE NEPHITES were translated (3 Ne. 28).

Translated beings are assigned special ministries, some to remain among mortals, as seems to be the case of John and the Three Nephites, or for other purposes, as in the case of MOSES and ELIJAH, who were translated in order to appear with physical bodies hundreds of years later on the MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION prior to the resurrection of Christ. Had they been spirits only, they could not have laid hands on the mortal Peter, James, and John (cf. D&C 129:3–8). Why those of Enoch’s city were translated, we are not specifically informed, although the Prophet Joseph Smith explained the role of translated beings thus: “Many have supposed that the doctrine of translation was a doctrine whereby men were taken immediately into the presence of God, and into an eternal fullness, but this is a mistaken idea. Their place of habitation is that of the terrestrial order, and a place prepared for such characters He held in reserve to be ministering angels unto many planets, and who as yet have not entered into so great a fullness as those who are resurrected from the dead” (TPJS, p. 170).

The scriptures do not define differences between TRANSFIGURATION and translation, but it appears that transfiguration is more temporary, as in Matthew 17:1–9 and Moses 1:11, occurring primarily to permit one to behold spiritual things not possible in the mortal condition.

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TREE OF LIFE

Four images of the Tree of Life are significant for Latter-day Saints: in the GARDEN OF EDEN; in LEHI’s vision (1 Ne. 8); the parable of ALMA₂ comparing the word to a seed that can grow to be “a



Izapa Stela 5, discovered in 1935 in southwestern Mexico near the Guatemalan border. This preclassic Mayan monument (c. 300 B.C. to A.D. 50) and parts of its imagery have been linked by some archaeologists to Lehi’s dream (1 Ne. 8). Standing behind the stone with a native boy are (left to right) Ernest L. Wilkinson (president of Brigham Young University), Thomas S. Ferguson, Mark E. Petersen, Marion G. Romney, and one other person. Courtesy Rare Books and Manuscripts, Brigham Young University.

tree springing up unto everlasting life” (Alma 32:28–43); and the so-called Tree of Life Stone from pre-Hispanic Mexico.

From earliest times, people in many cultures have venerated trees because they are majestic and, compared to a person’s life span, seemingly immortal. Groves were among the first places used for sacred rites, and many cultures envisioned the heavens supported by the branches of a giant tree whose roots led to the underworld and whose sturdy trunk formed the link between the two realms. The most important attribute ascribed to the Tree of Life by those for whom such a symbol existed was its ability to provide immortality to those who ate its fruit. The Tree of Life was present in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9) and is a standard symbol in ancient TEMPLES, as well as in temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It will be present at the end and its fruit available to eat “for him that overcometh” (Rev. 2:7).

Lehi's vision conveys an unforgettable message of the need to "give heed to the word of God and remember to keep his commandments always in all things" (1 Ne. 15:25). In his vision, Lehi saw by a fountain of living waters a tree "whose fruit was desirable to make one happy" (1 Ne. 8:10). The tree represented "the love of God" (1 Ne. 11:25). A path led to the tree, and great numbers of people walked the path, but many became lost in a mist of darkness. A "rod of iron" ran along the path, and only those in the multitude who pressed "their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod" (1 Ne. 8:30), reached the tree and partook of the desired fruit.

Alma used the Tree of Life image to teach about the acquisition of faith in the word of God, which he compared to a seed. When planted in one's heart and "nourished with much care," it would grow in the believer to yield the same sweet and pure fruit described by Lehi. By diligence and patience, one can "feast upon [this fruit] even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst" (Alma 32:42). Other ancient texts also describe the faithful as trees in God's paradise (Ps. 1:3; Odes of Solomon 11).

Interest was generated among Latter-day Saints in the 1950s by the discovery of a pre-Columbian sculpture that bore a complex Tree of Life scene similar to those found in the ancient Near East. Izapa Stela 5, carved sometime between 100 B.C. and A.D. 100, portrays a large tree in full leaf, laden with fruit, and surrounded by several persons and objects, including water. Some investigators are convinced that the scene is a depiction of Lehi's vision; others are less certain, since the scene also contains items that are difficult to understand, such as triangles and U-shaped elements. The elaborate clothing and headdresses worn by the people, the various objects they hold, and an array of other elements make this carving, which is one of the most complex from this period in Mexico, exceptionally difficult to interpret.

Another intricate Tree of Life carving discovered in Mexico is the beautiful sarcophagus lid from the tomb in the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque. Once thought to depict a deity, it is now thought to portray a king named Pacal (meaning "shield") at the moment of his death. As he falls to the earth (represented by the monster face), the sacred ceiba tree rises toward the heavens, topped by the divine serpent-bird, and flanked by two oval cartouches emblematic of the sun.



This sarcophagus cover from the tomb of king Pacal in the Mayan Temple of Inscriptions, Palenque (c. 683 A.D.) shows a ceiba tree emerging from the center of the reclining ruler as he is about to be reborn as a god. Similar imagery may be seen in Alma 32:41–42, which speaks of the tree of God's goodness taking root in the believer and growing up to eternal life. Courtesy Merle Greene Robertson.

Whether or not such artworks are related to the Book of Mormon, the remains of cultures from the Near East (*CWHN* 6:254–55; 7:189–92) and Mesoamerica show that the Tree of Life was a significant image in many areas of the world.

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TRIALS

Encountering trials, or testing, is one of the purposes of mortality. A key verse of Latter-day Saint understanding is from the Book of Abraham: "And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them" (Abr. 3:25). Although often painful and difficult, trials are an essential and expected part of life and provide experiences necessary for developing Christlike qualities and spiritual strength (Abr. 3:25; D&C 98:12–14; Mosiah 23:21–22).

Abraham's trials provide a prototype for man's dilemma in the world. Early in life he was placed on an altar amidst idol worshippers and delivered by divine intervention (Abr. 1). Later, God commanded him to offer his son Isaac for a burnt offering. Prophets have said that if Abraham's feelings could have been touched more deeply in any other way than by the instruction to offer up his own son (Gen. 22:1–19), that way would have been followed. Modern scripture says that all must eventually be "chastened and tried even as Abraham" (D&C 101:4; 132:37, 51). For Latter-day Saints, trials are not evidence of an indifferent God who allows his children to suffer, but rather evidence of a loving Father who honors the desire of his children to grow (Zech. 13:9; Heb. 12:6; Prov. 3:11–12).

Adversity may be a test of faithfulness and endurance. These tests allow persons to demonstrate to God and to themselves that they will love and trust him "at all hazards" (*TPJS*, p. 150). Ironically, God's love is often felt more closely and abundantly during times of adversity, when prayers are intensified and thoughts are turned to God, than during times of prosperity, when it seems easy to forget the need for divine help. Thus, the Lord has said: "In the day of their peace they esteem lightly my counsel" (D&C 101:8). Prosperity itself can therefore be viewed as a type of trial. Faith grows as one recognizes that, whether or not divine intervention modifies circumstances, God's

power may change persons, enabling them to endure well (Mosiah 24:13–15; John 9:1–3). In a very real sense, whatever one's circumstances, life is a trial, a test of faithfulness (Hel. 12:1–3; D&C 101:4; Rom. 5:3–5). Adversity also may generate and perfect attributes of godliness, such as patience, empathy, sacrifice, and compassion.

Like all persons of faith, Latter-day Saints sometimes struggle to reconcile their acceptance of adversity with another important concept: that God has promised to bless and prosper the righteous. Latter-day Saints believe still in this ancient Deuteronomic covenant, renewed in modern times. During times of adversity, often the greatest anguish comes not from dealing with the difficult circumstances, but from introspectively determining whether they came as a result of personal unworthiness. In these situations, adversity can provide the motivation needed to repent (Deut. 11:26–28; 2 Ne. 1:20).

Even with this understanding, faithful Latter-day Saints often find the vicissitudes of life challenging. Nevertheless, they derive great strength and comfort from the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, and the promise that God will never test them beyond their ability to withstand (1 Cor. 10:13). Jesus' own mortal life was a perfect example of trials well endured. Latter-day Saints believe that Christ suffered every feeling of temptation, pain, sorrow, and despair that anyone has ever felt in the darkest hours of adversity so that he would be able to give comfort (D&C 122:5–8). In addition, they find hope in his assurance that these difficult times are a small moment in the span of eternity with great blessings to follow for those who, without bitterness or despair, prove worthy and endure to the end (D&C 98:3; 121:7–8; 122:5–9; Alma 7:11–13).

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