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# LEHI'S DREAM AND THE GARDEN OF EDEN

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David Calabro

*Abstract: Lehi's dream in 1 Nephi 8 and Nephi's related vision in 1 Nephi 11–14 contain many features related to the biblical garden of Eden, including most prominently the tree of life. A close reading of the features of Lehi's dream in light of the earliest Book of Mormon text shows further similarities to the biblical garden, suggesting that the setting of Lehi's dream is actually the garden of Eden. But the differences are also informative. These include both substantive features absent from the biblical Eden and differences in the language used to describe the features. Many of the variant features are also found in other ancient creation accounts. In view of these observations, it is likely the Book of Mormon presupposes a variant account of the garden of Eden. This variant account forms the backdrop for Lehi's dream and for other references to the garden in the Book of Mormon.*

**1** Nephi 8 contains a report by Nephi, son of Lehi, of his father's account of a visionary dream. Later, in chapters 11–14, Nephi also reports a vision of his own in which many of the elements of Lehi's dream are explained with the help of two messengers: "the Spirit of the Lord" and an angel. The explicit topographic features of Lehi's dream, as recorded in 1 Nephi 8, can be listed in order of appearance as follows:

"a dark and dreary wilderness" or "a dark and dreary waste"  
(1 Nephi 8:4, 7)

"a large and spacious field" (1 Nephi 8:9, 20)

"a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy";  
the fruit is also described as sweet and extremely white  
(1 Nephi 8:10–12)

“a river of water ... near the tree,” with a “head” or “head of the fountain” (1 Nephi 8:13–14, 17, 20, 26, 32)

“a rod of iron” extending “along the bank of the river” (1 Nephi 8:19, 24, 30)

“a strait<sup>1</sup> and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron” and “which led (un)to the tree” (1 Nephi 8:20–23)

“a mist of darkness” (1 Nephi 8:23–24)

“a great and spacious building” across the river from the tree (1 Nephi 8:26–27)

“forbidden paths” or “strange roads” (1 Nephi 8:28, 32)

Some of these topographic features are presented in a different way in Nephi’s vision in 1 Nephi 11–14. For instance, it seems as if there are two fountains in Nephi’s vision, not just one. Nephi describes one of the fountains as if it were either very near the tree or perhaps even emanating from it, for he writes that the rod of iron led to this fountain, “or,” he says, “to the tree of life.” This fountain Nephi calls “the fountain of living waters ... which waters are a representation of the love of God” (1 Nephi 11:25). The second fountain is mentioned later by Nephi’s angelic guide: “Behold the fountain of filthy water which thy father saw; yea, even the river of which he spake; and the depths thereof are the depths of hell” (1 Nephi 12:16). Later, Nephi affirms that Lehi had seen the filthy river, but that the fact that it was filthy was not part of Lehi’s explicit description (1 Nephi 15:27).

Another topographic feature presented differently in Nephi’s account is what stands between the tree and the great and spacious building. Nephi describes a “great,” “terrible,” and “awful gulf” that separates the wicked people in the great and spacious building from the righteous people near the tree of life (1 Nephi 12:18; 15:28). This gulf is not explicitly mentioned in Lehi’s description of his dream (at least as far as this description is reported by Nephi). In his subsequent explanation of his dream to his brothers, Nephi identifies this gulf with the filthy river (1 Nephi 15:28).

The explanations of elements of the dream, as given in 1 Nephi 11–14, may be summarized briefly as follows:

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1. Here I follow the spelling of the earliest manuscripts and of the 1981 LDS edition, which have “strait and narrow” instead of “straight and narrow.” For discussion of the correct spelling, see below.

tree = tree of life, representing love of God (1 Nephi 11:21–22, 25)

fountain of living waters = love of God (1 Nephi 11:25)

rod of iron = word of God (1 Nephi 11:25)

great and spacious building = pride of the world, or “vain imaginations” (1 Nephi 11:36; 12:18)

river of filthy water = hell (1 Nephi 12:16; 15:27, 29)

mist of darkness = temptations of the devil (1 Nephi 12:17)

great and terrible gulf = God's justice (1 Nephi 12:18; 15:28, 30)

In a 1993 article, Corbin Volluz compared Lehi's dream with the garden of Eden as described in Genesis 2–3.<sup>2</sup> According to Volluz, Nephi's statement that “the justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous” (1 Nephi 15:30) is connected with the presence of the “cherubim and a flaming sword” placed at the entrance to the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24; Alma 12:21; 42:2–3).<sup>3</sup> Volluz also connects the “strait and narrow path” of Lehi's dream with the “way of the tree of life” that the cherubim guarded according to Genesis 3:24.<sup>4</sup> Volluz concludes that the tree in Lehi's dream, which Nephi calls the “tree of life,” is none other than the tree of life in the garden of Eden.

In the present article, I will take Volluz's observations a step further. I will show that the case for matching the setting of Lehi's dream with the garden of Eden is actually stronger than Volluz indicates. Some of the Book of Mormon textual data that support this argument belong to the original text and are not evident in the current edition; these have recently been brought to the attention of Book of Mormon scholarship through Royal Skousen's Book of Mormon Critical Text Project. Based on these newly available data and the use of motifs from Lehi's dream elsewhere in the Book of Mormon text, I will argue that the setting of Lehi's dream represents a conception of the garden of Eden generally consistent with Genesis 2–3 but varying in some significant matters of detail. In addition, the language used to describe the features of the

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2. Corbin T. Volluz, “Lehi's Dream of the Tree of Life: Springboard to Prophecy,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 14–38. See especially pp. 34–37.

3. Volluz, “Lehi's Dream,” 34–35.

4. Volluz, “Lehi's Dream,” 35.

garden differs from the biblical account, making reference to distinctive concepts such as the sweetness of the fruit, falling, and being lost. These differences not only constitute part of the theological worldview that is characteristic of the Book of Mormon, but they may also presuppose a garden of Eden account different from Genesis 2–3.

### The Flaming Sword

According to Genesis 3:24, upon driving Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden, God “placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”<sup>5</sup> The King James Version’s rendition of the Hebrew in the phrase “a flaming sword which turned every way” is not entirely accurate. The phrase in the Hebrew is *lahaṭ haḥereb hammithappeket*, which means “the flame of the swiveling sword.”

Lehi does not mention cherubim nor a sword in the description of his dream in 1 Nephi 8. Nor is there any mention of these things in the current LDS text of Nephi’s vision in 1 Nephi 11–14. Volluz connects, on an abstract level, the “justice of God” that divided the wicked from the righteous, as mentioned in 1 Nephi 15:30, with the cherubim and the flaming sword. However, this connection receives strong support from the original text of the Book of Mormon, and the connection turns out to be valid on more than an abstract level. In 1 Nephi 12:18, the angel tells Nephi that “a great and terrible gulf divideth” the wicked from the righteous. The angel’s elaboration on this statement reads differently in the original manuscript and in our current edition. Here is the reading of the original manuscript (with punctuation added):

And a great and a terrible gulf divideth them, yea, even the **sword** of the justice of the eternal God, and Jesus Christ, which is the Lamb of God. (1 Nephi 12:18, original manuscript)

The word *sword* was miscopied as *word* in the printer’s manuscript, and this reading persisted until the current edition. The reading with *sword* is undoubtedly correct; not only is it the earliest reading, but the phrase, “the sword of justice,” referring to God’s justice, occurs frequently in the Book of Mormon (Alma 26:19; 60:29; Helaman 13:5; 3 Nephi 20:20; 29:4; Ether 8:23). In Ether 8:23, the same phrase as in the original manuscript of 1 Nephi 12:18 occurs: “the sword of the justice of

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5. Unless otherwise specified, biblical citations are taken from the King James Version, which is the most relevant to the Book of Mormon.

the eternal God.” In contrast, the phrase “the word of the justice of the eternal God” would be an anomaly.<sup>6</sup>

The original reading of this phrase allows us to see Nephi’s statement in 1 Nephi 15:30 in a new light. In this verse, Nephi tells his brothers the following:

Our father also saw that the justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous; and the brightness thereof was like unto the brightness of a flaming fire, which ascendeth up unto God forever and ever, and hath no end. (1 Nephi 15:30)

Both 1 Nephi 12:18 and 15:30 refer to the justice of God that divides the wicked from the righteous. Putting these two verses together, God’s justice is represented as a sword that is bright like a flaming fire, a fire that forever ascends to God. This image is quite close to that of the “flame of the swiveling sword” mentioned in Genesis 3:24.

Even in the earliest text, the cherubim seem to be absent in the descriptions of Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision. However, there are angelic personages, one serving as a guide in Lehi’s visionary journey and the other as a commentator in Nephi’s vision. It is possible the angelic personage (referred to as a “man ... dressed in a white robe”) in Lehi’s dream has the role of keeping the way to the tree, and he could thus be analogous to the cherubic guards in Genesis 3:24.<sup>7</sup> Still, the cherubim are

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6. See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, Part One (Provo: FARMS, 2004), 257–58.

7. This personage is enigmatic in 1 Nephi 8. In verses 5–6, he stands before Lehi and commands Lehi to follow him. This is the last point at which he is explicitly mentioned. However, in verse 8, Lehi prays “unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies,” after which he beholds the large and spacious field. It is possible, though it is not stated, that the “Lord” to whom Lehi prays in verse 8 is the same as the “man ... dressed in a white robe” (compare 3 Nephi 11:8, in which the glorified Christ appears as a “man ... clothed in a white robe”). If so, this may connect with what the angel tells Nephi in 1 Nephi 12:18: “And a great and a terrible gulf divideth them, yea, even the sword of the justice of the eternal God, and Jesus Christ, which is the Lamb of God.” Read in connection with 1 Nephi 8:5–10, this statement may mean that three things separate the wicked world from the garden in which the tree is found: (1) “a great and a terrible gulf,” (2) “the sword of the justice of the Eternal God,” and (3) “Jesus Christ, which is the Lamb of God.” The latter would, then, correspond to the cherubim of Genesis 3:24. This would also accord with 2 Nephi 9:41: “Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him, and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there.” However, the syntax of 1 Nephi 12:18 is ambiguous; the phrase “and Jesus Christ” may connect

a point of difference between the two versions of the garden, at least in the name by which they are called.

### Elevation

The garden of Eden was understood to be on a hill or mountain. This is implicit in the statement that “a river went out of Eden” (Genesis 2:10), since rivers, of course, flow downhill. Moreover, in Ezekiel 28:11–16, “Eden the garden of God” is equated with “the holy mountain of God.”<sup>8</sup>

The elevation of the garden of Eden, as understood in the Hebrew tradition, compares well with Lehi’s dream. Three elements of Lehi’s dream implicitly point to the fact that the tree whose fruit Lehi tasted was located on a height above the surrounding terrain. First, Lehi’s vantage point near the tree gives him a view of everything around him, including the river and its head (1 Nephi 8:13–14), the straight and narrow path leading ultimately to the “large and spacious field” that is said to be like a “world” (1 Nephi 8:20), and “numberless concourses of people” traveling on various paths (1 Nephi 8:21–22, 28). Second, the head of the river is described as being “a little way off” from the place where Lehi stands by the tree (1 Nephi 8:13–14); as with the description of the river in Genesis 2:10, this implies that Lehi’s location is higher than the surrounding area where the river flows. Third, the multitudes coming toward the tree are “pressing forward” (1 Nephi 8:21, 24, 30), which implies that the motion requires physical exertion.<sup>9</sup> Although this could be explained in various ways, it fits with the idea that they are traveling uphill.

Nephi’s version of the dream may also implicitly refer to the great height on which the tree is located, for Nephi beholds the tree only after he is “caught away . . . into an exceedingly high mountain,” although it is not definitely stated that the tree was located on that mountain (Nephi sees other things, such as the city of Nazareth, that are certainly not located on the mountain). Nephi also states that the righteous near the

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back to the preposition *of*, as if the text read, “even the sword of the justice of the eternal God and (the justice of) Jesus Christ, which is the Lamb of God.”

8. Donald W. Parry, “The Garden of Eden: Sacred Space, Sanctuary, and Temple,” *Explorations: Journal for Adventurous Thought* 5 (1987): 84–85; idem, “Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1994), 133–37.

9. Compare 1 Nephi 8:31, which currently reads “and he saw other multitudes feeling their way towards that great and spacious building.” The original manuscript here read “pressing [spelled prssing] their way” instead of “feeling their way”; see Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, Part One, 187.

tree of life were separated from the wicked by a large gulf (1 Nephi 12:18; 15:28), which is characteristic of mountainous terrain.

### The Strait and Narrow Path

According to Genesis 3:24, the purpose of the cherubim and flaming sword placed east of the garden of Eden was to guard “the way of the tree of life.” In Biblical Hebrew, the word *derek*, literally “the way of,” often has the more specific sense of “the path leading toward (a place).” For example, the phrase *derek shur*, literally “the way of Shur,” is rendered (correctly) as “the way to Shur” or “the road to Shur” in most translations of Genesis 16:7 (KJV, RSV, NIV, etc.).<sup>10</sup> Thus the Hebrew phrase *derek 'ets hakhayyim*, translated as “the way of the tree of life” in the King James version of Genesis 3:24, could also be translated as “the path leading to the tree of life.”<sup>11</sup>

The “way” in Genesis 3:24 corresponds to the “strait and narrow path” in Lehi’s dream, which is also called “the path which led (un)to the tree” (1 Nephi 8:22, 23). Once the sense of the Hebrew phrase in Genesis 3:24 is understood, the path as described in 1 Nephi is easily recognized as a precise equivalent.

There has been considerable debate on whether the path that Lehi saw was “strait and narrow” (that is, constricted and narrow) or “straight and narrow” (that is, without curves and narrow). It is worthwhile to revisit this issue here, since it affects the translation of the phrase and relates to the topography of Lehi’s dream. The scribes of the Book of Mormon manuscripts consistently used the spelling *strait* in phrases referring to a path, way, or course, making it unclear which word was intended; the reading *straight* in our current edition is the result of editing based on context. Modern English usage is also equivocal, as some claim that the common English phrase “straight and narrow” arises from a misunderstanding of “strait” (with reference to a gate) and “narrow”

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10. For mention of this meaning and more examples, see Francis Brown, S. A. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1906), 202, under definition 1 of the word *derek*.

11. Compare the RSV and the NIV, which translate the phrase as “the way to the tree of life,” using the word *way* (which is more familiar in this context) instead of *path* or *road*. Note that before the widespread construction of paved roads after the Roman conquest, routes of travel in the biblical world were usually what we would refer to today as paths.

(with reference to a way) in Matthew 7:13–14.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, it is uncertain to what degree the considerations of modern usage are relevant for a text such as 1 Nephi 8 that claims a pre-exilic Hebrew background.

Discussions of the phrase “strait/straight and narrow” prior to 2001 did not decide between the two homophonous adjectives.<sup>13</sup> A 1992 study by Welch and McKinlay addressed the issue but did not prefer one reading over the other, instead suggesting insights to be gained from both.<sup>14</sup> In 2001, an article by Reynolds and Skousen argued for the reading *straight* based on Skousen’s work on variant readings of the Book of Mormon, and the position articulated in that article was further elaborated by Skousen in 2004.<sup>15</sup> The only substantial reply to this view, supporting the reading *strait*, was published in 2003 by Hoskisson; Welch responded to this article, arguing for *straight*, in 2007.<sup>16</sup>

Basically, the arguments for the reading *straight* boil down to two. The foremost argument is the seemingly blatant redundancy of “strait and narrow.” Support is also drawn from other scriptural passages thought to allude to Lehi’s dream or to be thematically linked to it. The most significant of these other passages are Nephi’s plea that the Lord “make my path straight before me” in 2 Nephi 4:33; Jacob’s statement in 2 Nephi 9:41 that “the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him”; and Nephi’s references to the “straightness of the path” and the “straight and narrow path” (according to an emended reading of the text) in 2 Nephi 31:9, 18–19.

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12. See Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Straightening Things Out: The Use of *Strait* and *Straight* in the Book of Mormon,” *JBMS* 12/2 (2003): 63 with note 23, who refers to the Oxford English Dictionary. But the phrase “straight and narrow” is also used by the early Church fathers Cyprian and Origen, for whom the mixup based on homophony would not apply. For this, see John S. Welch, “Straight (Not Strait) and Narrow,” *JBMS* 16/1 (2007): 19–20.

13. See, for example, Daniel B. McKinlay, “Strait and Narrow,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1419, assuming (not arguing) for “strait.”

14. John W. Welch and Daniel B. McKinlay, “Getting Things Strai[gh]t,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 260–62.

15. Noel B. Reynolds and Royal Skousen, “What the Path Nephi Saw ‘Strait and Narrow’ or ‘Straight and Narrow?’” *JBMS* 10/2 (2001): 30–33; Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, vol. 1 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 174–81.

16. Hoskisson, “Straightening Things Out,” 58–71; Welch, “Straight (Not Strait) and Narrow,” 18–25.

In his 2003 article, Hoskisson suggests that the seemingly redundant phrase “strait and narrow” may have a precise equivalent in the Hebrew Bible, in which the synonymous and alliterative roots *šwr/šrr* “confine, be restricted, narrow” and *šwq* “constrain, bring into straits” are conjoined in some passages.<sup>17</sup> For example, Isaiah 30:6, according to one possible rendering, refers to a “strait and narrow land.” Words from these roots are also conjoined in Psalm 119:143 and Job 15:24. It is possible that Lehi, under influence of the Hebrew literary tradition, used the same conjoined pair in his description of the path leading to the tree of life.<sup>18</sup> (It is also possible that Nephi, who wrote in Egyptian, according to 1 Nephi 1:2, rendered this phrase in his own record using equivalent Egyptian words. In the ancient Egyptian Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, for example, a path is similarly described as being “narrow and not wide.”<sup>19</sup>) In support of Hoskisson’s suggestion, other seemingly redundant phrases occur not only generally in the Book of Mormon, but specifically in reference to the elements of Lehi’s dream in 1 Nephi 8. For example, note the phrases “large and spacious field” (1 Nephi 8:9, 20) and “great and spacious building” (1 Nephi 8:26–27).<sup>20</sup> It is difficult to understand why the phrase “strait and narrow path” would be any more objectionable than these. Indeed, the occurrence of these other phrases describing size, in reference to elements of the same dream, rather lead one to expect the redundant phrase describing the width of the path.

The other textual passages frequently cited in support of the reading “straight and narrow” seem to me less persuasive than this clear

17. For these roots, see Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 847–48, 864.

18. Hoskisson, “Straightening Things Out,” 63–64.

19. See F. Vogelsang and Alan H. Gardiner, *Literarische Texte des mittleren Reiches I: Die Klagen des Bauern* (Leipzig, Germany: J. C. Hinrichs, 1908), 9 (German translation), plate 1 (original hieratic), plate 1a (hieroglyphic transcription).

20. Skousen lists these and other synonymous conjuncts in the Book of Mormon in *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 1:176. He acknowledges that they represent a “potential argument . . . that the redundant ‘straight and narrow’ is permissible,” although he ultimately decides on the reading “straight and narrow.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *spacious* means “of vast or indefinite extent or area; wide, extensive,” or “that has a large surface area; that covers a wide area; extensive, expansive, large” (definition 1.a–b). It is true that the word in reference to “a room, dwelling, etc.” can mean “that has or provides ample space or room; large, roomy, commodious” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, definition 2.a). However, this sense does not easily fit Lehi’s description of the building, since it is not clear whether he was able to see inside it; we only learn of his impression that it was “filled with people” (1 Nephi 8:27).

evidence from the Hebrew background and the immediate context. Each of these passages, on closer examination, turns out to support the reading “straight and narrow path” only weakly, if at all. In the case of Nephi’s plea to “make my path straight” in 2 Nephi 4:33, the thematic relationship to the path in Lehi’s dream is doubtful. The Hebraic phrase “to make a path straight” (*pinnah derek*; see Isaiah 40:3; 57:14; 62:10; Malachi 3:1) refers to clearing obstacles out of the path and not to rendering a path less curved; thus it belongs to a different type of imagery than the straight path or course in passages such as 2 Nephi 9:41.<sup>21</sup> As for 2 Nephi 9:41, the thematic link with the path in Lehi’s dream seems likely; yet Jacob’s imagery here, which includes a gate and the presence of the Holy One of Israel as the gatekeeper, seems quite different from the landscape around the tree of life in Lehi’s dream. A “straight course” is to be expected in a built environment, but not in mountainous terrain such as Lehi’s description implies. And while I also agree that 2 Nephi 31 is thematically related to 1 Nephi 8, this would support the reading “straight and narrow” only if one follows the subjective emendation of *strait(ness)* to *straight(ness)* in 2 Nephi 31:9, 18–20. Other passages that may be thematically related to the path in Lehi’s dream are subject to similar considerations. Thus I remain convinced by Hoskisson’s argument that the path in Lehi’s dream was “strait and narrow,” not “straight and narrow.”

### The Fertile Garden and the Wilderness Beyond

In Genesis 2–3, there is a basic contrast between the garden, on the one hand, and the world from which Adam and Eve were taken and into which they were later driven, on the other. The latter was characterized by dust (Genesis 2:7; 3:19), thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:18), and toil (Genesis 3:17, 19). The garden was the antithesis of this, a place of rivers and of “every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food” (Genesis 2:8–10).

This basic contrast is reflected in the “dark and dreary wilderness/waste” and the “large and spacious field” of Lehi’s dream (1 Nephi 8:4, 7, 9, 20). McConkie and Millet, commenting on the “dark and dreary waste,” state that “this seems to be a symbolic representation of fallen man in the lone and dreary world.”<sup>22</sup> It is only after Lehi is brought into the “large and spacious field” that he encounters the tree and rivers.

21. See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 815.

22. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 1:56.

Although the words *field* and *garden* have different meanings, the two concepts are close, especially in the context of the biblical world. The Hebrew word *karmel*, meaning “plantation, garden-land,” is translated as “fruitful field” in several places in the King James Bible (Isaiah 10:18; 29:17; 32:15, 16). Other passages also associate fields with fruitfulness and luxuriance (Isaiah 32:12; Ezekiel 17:5). According to one possible etymology, the Hebrew name *Eden* may derive from a Semitic word meaning “plain,” which suggests an expansive piece of land, similar to a field.<sup>23</sup> Thus, while the field of Lehi’s dream is obviously larger than what most people would call a “garden” today, it is possible this field reflects an ancient conception of Eden (on the large-scale character of the topography of Lehi’s dream in comparison with the biblical garden of Eden, see below).

### Rivers and Heads

Genesis 2:10 (KJV) states that “a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.” The word *heads* is a literal translation of the Hebrew word *rashim*. Some translations render this word loosely as “rivers” (RSV, cf. *Jerusalem Bible* “streams”); however, the specific sense is captured by the NIV rendering, “headwaters” — that is, “the part of a river or stream closest to its source.”<sup>24</sup> The four rivers are described in Genesis 2:11–14.

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23. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 726–27; Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, study edition (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1:792.

24. *Oxford English Dictionary* online, under “headwater,” definition 3. (Note that definition 1, “a main or principal river,” is now obsolete or rare and thus is not likely the intended meaning in the NIV.) The NIV rendering agrees with Brown, Driver, and Briggs, who give the meaning of *rashim* in Genesis 2:10 as “river-heads,” meaning “sources of rivers” (*Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 911, under *rosh*, definition 4c; *Oxford English Dictionary* online, “river-head,” found under “river,” C3). The renderings in the RSV and the *Jerusalem Bible* agree with Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 2:1166, under *rosh*, definition 9f ii: “of a stream, meaning branching streams.” The meaning given by Brown, Driver, and Briggs and adopted by NIV — that is, a river at the point where it emanates from its source — agrees better with the etymological meaning of the word *rashim* (“heads”). It also provides an acceptable sense in the context of the description of Eden. Rather than picturing a single river coursing through Eden and then parting into four rivers outside of Eden, this interpretation pictures the river parting into four immediately at its source. This allows the center of Eden to function as the point from which the four rivers flow out toward the four points of the compass. For this concept, which is present in many ancient traditions of the creation, see

The river that Lehi sees in his dream is also described as having a “head.” According to 1 Nephi 8:14, Lehi looked “to behold whence [the river] came,” and he “saw the head thereof a little way off.” It was at this head, or source, that Lehi saw some of his family members. The “head of the river” or “head of the fountain” is also mentioned in 1 Nephi 8:17 and 20.<sup>25</sup> As mentioned above, Nephi’s vision includes not just one but two “fountains”: (1) “the fountain of living waters” (1 Nephi 11:25), which is not mentioned in Lehi’s account; and (2) “the fountain of filthy water” (1 Nephi 12:16), which is identified with the fountain Lehi describes. The first of these, very much like the second, appears to have had its source very close to the tree of life.

As with the flaming sword (without mention of cherubim) and the “large and spacious field” (instead of a “garden”), the correspondence between the two rivers of Lehi’s dream and the river with four heads of Genesis 2:10–14 is not perfect. However, on a basic level, the motif of waters emanating from the vicinity of the tree of life is common to both. A life-giving water source (*meqor khayyim* “spring of life,” or *meqor mayim khayyim* “spring of living waters”), thought to be located at God’s garden abode, features prominently in other biblical passages (see Psalm 36:8–10; Jeremiah 17:12–13). The motif is also common in Near Eastern mythology and temple ideology.<sup>26</sup> Fawcett makes reference to various ancient creation traditions that feature two rivers, one being the celestial waters and the other the subterranean waters; these, he writes, may “appear at first to be in conflict with the usual motif of four rivers,” but they embody “a related concept.”<sup>27</sup>

### Mist

Genesis 2:6 mentions a “mist” that arose from and watered the ground. In the context of Genesis 2, this mist serves the function of allowing

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Thomas Fawcett, *Hebrew Myth and Christian Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 279–81.

25. It seems the words *fountain* and *river* are used interchangeably. This is clear in 1 Nephi 12:16: “Behold the fountain of filthy water which thy father saw; yea, even the river of which he spake; and the depths thereof are the depths of hell.” Compare 1 Nephi 8:32: “many were drowned in the depths of the fountain”; also 1 Nephi 2:9: “the waters of the river emptied into the fountain of the Red Sea.”

26. See John M. Lundquist, “What Is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 88–89; Dexter E. Callender, Adam in *Myth and History: Ancient Israelite Perspectives on the Primal Human* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 50–54.

27. Fawcett, *Hebrew Myth*, 281.

vegetation to grow, just as the creation of Adam serves the function of providing for the tilling of the soil (Genesis 2:4–7). The Hebrew word translated as “mist,” *ed*, occurs only here and in Job 36:27. In both places, it is associated with watering the ground.

Although the functions are clearly different, the mist in Genesis 2:6 may correspond on some level to the “mist of darkness” in Lehi’s dream. The latter is not associated with the watering of the ground but rather with an obscuring of vision that results in the wicked becoming lost. This mist seems to be associated with the filthy river. Note, for example, that the river and the mist are mentioned side-by-side in 1 Nephi 12:16–17. The Hebrew word *ed* “mist” has a homophone that means “distress, calamity,” often used in reference to the paths of the wicked or to their fate,<sup>28</sup> and it is possible that the similarity between these two words prompted a sinister understanding of the biblical mist in the context of Lehi’s dream.

It may be noted that there is some textual variation between *mist* and *mists* in references to the mist of darkness in the Book of Mormon. In its first instance (1 Nephi 8:23) and in all subsequent instances in which the word is indefinite, the word is singular: “a(n exceeding great) mist of darkness” (1 Nephi 8:23; 12:4). But when the word is preceded by the definite article *the*, it is always plural in the earliest text: “the mists of darkness” (1 Nephi 8:24; 12:17; 3 Nephi 8:22).<sup>29</sup> The one instance of the word *ed* in Genesis 2 is singular and indefinite, which agrees with the usage in the Book of Mormon. Thus the variation in the Book of Mormon instances of “mist(s) of darkness” does not necessarily constitute a point of difference from the biblical mist.

### The Rod and the Word

One of the most salient elements of Lehi’s dream is the rod of iron, which, according to 1 Nephi 8:19, “extended along the bank of the river and led to the tree” by which Lehi stood. Descriptions of how the people in Lehi’s dream used the rod to approach the tree are found in 1 Nephi 8:24, 30:

And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness,

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28. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 15.

29. The instance in 1 Nephi 8:24 reads as *mist* in our current edition, but the original manuscript reads *mists*. See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 1:182–83.

clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree. (1 Nephi 8:24)

But, to be short in writing, behold, he 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. (1 Nephi 8:30)

Most modern artistic renderings of Lehi's dream depict the rod of iron as a railing alongside the path leading to the tree.<sup>30</sup> Yet it is curious that people in both verses are described as catching hold of the end of the rod (rather than some point along its length), and they are described as "clinging" or "continually holding fast" to the rod (rather than moving along it hand over hand).

Matthew Bowen has pointed out that the rod of iron in Lehi's dream, which signifies the word of God, according to 1 Nephi 11:25 and 15:23–24, has an interesting parallel in the Egyptian word *mdw*, which means both "staff, rod" and "speech, word"; Bowen argues that Nephi's record, which was written in "the language of the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 1:2), contains a wordplay on the two senses of this word.<sup>31</sup> Nephi's understanding of the significance of the rod may even have been informed by his knowledge of this word's two meanings. John Tvedtnes has also shown, again in connection with the rod as the word of God in Lehi's dream, that shepherd's rods and royal scepters were symbolically linked with the word of God in the cultural milieu of the ancient Near East.<sup>32</sup> If the evidence cited by Bowen and Tvedtnes is appropriate, however, then this would imply that the rod of iron was actually a rod or staff and not the usually-depicted railing. Zachary Nelson observes that railings are "seldom seen in ancient architecture," and he argues that the rod of iron

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30. Lehi's dream is a very popular subject for artworks by Latter-day Saints. For many interesting examples with discussion, see Richard G. Oman, "Lehi's Vision of the Tree of Life: A Cross-Cultural Perspective in Contemporary Latter-day Saint Art," *BYU Studies* 32 (Fall 1992): 5–34.

31. Matthew L. Bowen, "What Meaneth the Rod of Iron?" *Insights* 25/2 (2005): 2–3; Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford, UK: Griffith Institute, 1962), 122.

32. John A. Tvedtnes, "Rod and Sword as the Word of God," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 (1996): 148–55.

in Lehi's dream was a kind of staff or walking stick. "Though railings were rare in Lehi's world," writes Nelson, "rods or staffs were not."<sup>33</sup>

The idea that the "rod of iron" was actually a staff and not a railing thus seems to make the best sense in terms of the ancient context of Lehi's dream, and it accords with the description of how people grasped the rod in 1 Nephi 8. It may be difficult to see how this fits with Lehi's statement, as recorded in 1 Nephi 8:19, that the rod "extended along the bank of the river and led to the tree by which I stood." However, this problem may be solved by the double meaning of another Egyptian word, *mꜣꜥ*. This verb means both "lead, guide, direct" and "extend."<sup>34</sup> If the text used this Egyptian word, then the original meaning of 1 Nephi 8:19 could have been something like "it guided (people) along the bank of the river, up to the tree by which I stood." The current translation could arise from an assumption that the "rod" was a railing.<sup>35</sup> The idea that this Egyptian word was used in the text is especially likely in view of Bowen's arguments about the Egyptian word *mdw*. In fact, there may be a similar wordplay at work with the word *mꜣꜥ*, since the homonymous Egyptian adjective *mꜣꜥ* means "true (of speech); just, righteous."<sup>36</sup> The wordplay would imply that the word of God is true and that it leads people in righteous actions.

There does not appear to be an equivalent of the rod of iron in biblical descriptions of the garden of Eden. However, if the rod of iron is understood as a supernatural staff rather than a railing, there is a possibility of an indirect connection. There is a "rod of iron" mentioned in Psalm 2:9: "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." A similar reference to a rod is found in Psalm 110:2: "The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of

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33. Zachary Nelson, "The Rod of Iron in Lehi's Dream," *The Religious Educator* 10/3 (2009): 49–57.

34. Faulkner, *Concise Dictionary*, 102.

35. Joseph Smith's mother Lucy records a dream that Joseph's father, Joseph Smith Sr., had that closely resembles Lehi's dream. In Joseph Smith Sr.'s dream, he saw a stream, and "as far as my eyes could extend I could see a rope, running along the bank of it, about as high as a man could reach." Lucy records this experience as taking place soon after the family's move to Lebanon, New Hampshire, in 1811 — more than a decade before Joseph Smith even knew of the Book of Mormon. However, Lucy's history was not recorded until 1845, long after the Book of Mormon had been published, and it is an open question whether the dream influenced Joseph Smith's interpretation of 1 Nephi 8 or vice versa. See Lucy Mack Smith, "History of the Prophet Joseph by His Mother," *Improvement Era*, 1902, 55–57.

36. Faulkner, *Concise Dictionary*, 101.

Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.” Here it is clear that the rod, although it is associated with the royal addressee of the Psalm, is that of the LORD. The word *send* in this verse corresponds to the verb *shalakh* in the original Hebrew; this Hebrew verb can also mean “stretch out, extend,” and it may have this sense here. However, the image of the Lord “sending” his iron rod from the place of his throne in Zion, as if it could move of its own volition, would accord with the interpretation of the iron rod in 1 Nephi 8 as a supernatural staff. Elsewhere, the scriptures speak of God’s word or voice going forth from Zion (Isaiah 2:3; Joel 3:16; cf. the image of “send[ing] out his voice” in Psalm 68:33). Thus the iron rod in 1 Nephi 8 may be understood as the Lord’s rod sent forth from the tree of life.<sup>37</sup> Of course, this is quite speculative, and at most it establishes only an indirect connection, but it shows that a rod of iron would not necessarily be out of place in an ancient Israelite conception of the environs of the tree of life.

### Two Trees?

In the biblical account of the garden of Eden, two trees are central to the garden itself and to the story: “the tree of life” and “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:9). The description of Lehi’s dream in 1 Nephi 8 contrasts with Genesis 2–3 by focusing on just one tree, the tree of life. Is there an equivalent of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Lehi’s dream? It can be stated with certainty that there is no explicit mention of a second tree in any of the textual sources for 1 Nephi 8. However, in 1 Nephi 8:29, Nephi writes, “And now, I, Nephi, do not speak all the words of my father.” Thus it is possible that a second tree was originally part of Lehi’s narrative of his dream and that it was left out of the written account. If this is so, it would fit with some aspects of the dream as reported by Nephi. Just as the strait and narrow path led to the tree of life, it would make sense to have a forbidden tree to which the “forbidden paths” mentioned in 1 Nephi 8:28 led. In similar fashion, one may note that Nephi’s version of the dream included two fountains, namely the “fountain of living waters” and the fountain from which the river of filthy water emanated; and since the former fountain was located near the tree of life, it would make sense for the latter to be associated with a tree as well.

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37. According to Jewish tradition, the rod of the kings of Judah was none other than the rod of Moses, given to him by the Lord, which he used to lead the Israelites through the sea. See Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968), 6:106–7n600.

There is actually another tree mentioned in the same speech in which Lehi reported his dream. In 1 Nephi 10, Nephi paraphrases more of his father's words:

Yea, even my father spake much concerning the Gentiles, and also concerning the house of Israel, that they should be compared like unto an olive-tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth. . . . And after the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; or, in fine, after the Gentiles had received the fulness of the Gospel, the natural branches of the olive-tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer. (1 Nephi 10:12, 14)

The text does not state that this olive tree was part of Lehi's dream; however, as it was part of the same speech by Lehi, it is possible it was connected with the dream in ways left out of Nephi's abbreviated account. Later in the Book of Mormon, Jacob, quoting from the brass plates, describes a very similar olive tree in an allegory by Zenos (Jacob 5). In this allegory, the "Lord of the vineyard" and his servant scatter and then graft in the branches of the tree. The tree in the allegory represents the house of Israel, just like the tree which Lehi describes. At one point in the allegory, the master, who represents God, tastes the fruit in order to ascertain its goodness:

And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard did taste of the fruit, every sort according to its number. And the Lord of the vineyard said: Behold, this long time have we nourished the tree, and I have laid up unto myself against the season much fruit. But behold, this time it hath brought forth much fruit, and there is none of it which is good. And behold, there are all kinds of bad fruit; and it profiteth me nothing, notwithstanding all our labor; and now it grieveth me that I should lose this tree. (Jacob 5:31-32)

This clearly represents God's knowledge of the righteousness or wickedness of his people (see Jacob 6:7). It is possible to equate this olive tree with the biblical tree of knowledge of good and evil. Zenos's allegory locates the olive tree in the Lord's "vineyard," which is similar to the

tree of knowledge of good and evil located in the garden.<sup>38</sup> By tasting the individual fruits, the Lord ascertains the goodness or badness of the various branches, and this in turn represents the good or evil status of his people. The fruit therefore imparts knowledge of good and evil. In the same way, one can speculate that the biblical tree of knowledge of good and evil was a means by which God would foretell the goodness or evil of mankind. By partaking of the forbidden fruit, then, Adam and Eve would have usurped a divine privilege. This understanding would add symbolic meaning to Lehi's statement that the "remnants of the house of Israel," by being grafted into the tree, will "come to the knowledge of the true Messiah" (1 Nephi 10:14).

Ultimately, there is not enough evidence to point with certainty to a counterpart of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Lehi's dream, although some details are suggestive enough to allow for such a possibility. From the standpoint of narrative typology, the role of the biblical tree of knowledge of good and evil, the opposite of the tree of life (cf. 2 Nephi 2:15), is taken by the great and spacious building in Lehi's dream. Note in this connection that after some people partook of the fruit of the tree of life, "they were ashamed" because of the scoffing inhabitants of the building (1 Nephi 8:25–28). This is similar to Adam and Eve's realization of their nakedness and their experience of shame after partaking of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 2:25; 3:7, 10).

### **A Variant Conception of the Garden of Eden**

The elements of correspondence between the garden of Eden as described in Genesis on the one hand, and the environs of the tree of life as described in the Book of Mormon on the other, are summarized in Table 1 (listed in order of discussion).

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38. For the general connection of the "vineyard" of Zenos's allegory with the garden of Eden, see Matthew L. Bowen, "I Have Done According to My Will": Reading Jacob 5 as a Temple Text," in *The Temple: Ancient and Restored*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2016), 245. Bowen links the olive tree of Jacob 5 to the biblical tree of life. See also the insightful discussion of olive trees and date palms in connection with the tree of life in Jeffrey Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Book of Moses* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Publishing, 2010), 65–67. Notwithstanding these studies, it seems to me that the olive tree of Jacob 5 compares more fruitfully with the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

**Table 1: Elements of Lehi's Dream and the Garden of Eden**

<b>Garden of Eden</b>	<b>Lehi's Dream</b>	<b>Degree of Similarity</b>
tree of life	tree of life	high
a flaming sword which turned every way (Genesis 3:24)	“the sword of the justice of the eternal God,” which is bright like “the brightness of a flaming fire” (1 Nephi 12:18; 15:30)	high
elevated location	elevated location	high
“the way of the tree of life,” meaning the path leading to the tree (Genesis 3:24)	“a strait and narrow path ... which led (un)to the tree” (1 Nephi 8:20–23)	high
contrast between fertile garden and world of toil	contrast between “large and spacious field” and “dark and dreary wilderness/waste” (1 Nephi 8:4, 7, 9, 20)	high
four rivers with “heads”	two rivers with “heads” or “fountains”	medium
“mist” that waters the garden	“mist of darkness”	low
divine “rod (of iron)” associated with the royalty of Judah (Psalm 2:9; 110:2)	“rod of iron” leading to the tree (1 Nephi 8:19)	uncertain
“tree of knowledge of good and evil”	second tree implicit in Lehi's dream, or great and spacious building	uncertain

The two topographies, while differing in some respects, are similar in terms of their essential elements. Given this fundamental similarity, along with the fact that the various differences in detail fit within a

coherent topography that also matches other Near Eastern mythological motifs (for example, the two rivers instead of four), the setting of Lehi's dream can be understood as the garden of Eden. However, it is not the familiar version of the garden as depicted in the Genesis account. The version of the garden that we find described in Lehi's dream may presuppose a variant scriptural account belonging to the literary milieu of Lehi's day (possibly contained in one of the records on the brass plates). Or, if not a variant scriptural account, it may presuppose an ancient popular conception of the garden. By being set in the garden of Eden, the dream would resonate in powerful ways with Lehi and those who would later study the dream. The setting would evoke the circumstances of the fall of man and a return to the location of God's presence.

The differences between the biblical garden and the setting of Lehi's dream are informative. In addition to the differences noted already (including the absence of cherubim in Lehi's dream, the number of rivers, the nature of the mist, the presence of the iron rod, and the focus on one tree instead of two), there are other differences that involve a major shift from the garden of Eden in Genesis. One difference is that of scale. This is evident through the description in 1 Nephi 8. The field surrounding the tree is explicitly "large and spacious," and it is further described in 1 Nephi 8:20 as "a large and spacious field, as if it had been a world." The building across the river from the tree of life was also "great and spacious" (1 Nephi 8:26). This contrasts with the biblical garden of Eden. Although there are no explicit indicators of scale in Genesis 2–3, it is significant that the entire narrative can be imagined as taking place in a very small space. No travel takes place in the narrative, unlike Lehi's dream, in which "numberless concourses of people" are "pressing forward" toward the tree (1 Nephi 8:21).<sup>39</sup> When Adam and Eve hear the voice of God and hide themselves in the trees (Genesis 3:8), one gets the impression that the action is taking place in a very small setting, for they are close enough to hear the voice, and they hide rather than escaping to a more remote location. Elsewhere, I have argued that the Genesis account of the garden is purposely constructed to fit a ritual performance, which would take place in the confines of the Solomonic

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39. A reviewer of an earlier version of this article makes the intriguing suggestion that the multitudes pressing forward are pilgrims to the ancient sacred site of Eden. This would explain why the multitudes would be traveling there in the first place.

temple.<sup>40</sup> This would explain the implicit smallness of scale in the Genesis account. The large scale of Lehi's dream, however, would actually make for a more realistic setting for the narrative. After all, with a whole world to themselves, why would Adam and Eve be confined to a tiny garden? This suggests that alongside the ritual text found in Genesis 2–3, there may have been a more expansive scriptural account of the fall of man, whose setting became the basis for Lehi's dream.

The fact that the number of humans present in Lehi's dream is much greater than those in the biblical garden of Eden should not be surprising, since the latter deals with the parents of the human race, whereas Lehi's dream deals with the destinies of the human family. However, the comparison between the two is strengthened by the fact that one can understand the humans in both cases as representative of the whole human family. "Adam" in Hebrew means "man," and it is not a stretch to understand Adam and Eve as types of all men and all women respectively.

Another difference that constitutes a major shift in the setting is the presence of the "great and spacious building" in Lehi's dream, which is absent from the biblical account in Genesis 2–3. In Nephi's subsequent vision, the building is interpreted as a symbol of "the world and the wisdom thereof" (1 Nephi 11:35), "the pride of the world" (1 Nephi 11:36), and "vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men" (1 Nephi 12:18). This building is a countertype to the tree of life and the church of Christ; it represents those who "fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (1 Nephi 11:36). In the latter part of Nephi's vision, the building (which is destroyed in the first part of the dream) is replaced by another countertype, the "mother of abominations" or church of the devil, which fights against the church of the Lamb. I argued above that the great and spacious building, as a countertype to the tree of life, corresponds to the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the biblical garden of Eden account. But by virtue of its role as the opponent of God and his work, the building also corresponds to the serpent in the biblical account. The building and the serpent are thus equivalent symbols in terms of their role, although they are vastly different from a physical standpoint.

### **Distinctive Language**

Another important difference between Lehi's account and the garden narrative in Genesis 2–3 is that of the terms used to describe elements of the garden. In some cases, these descriptive terms refer to substantive

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40. See David Calabro, "Joseph Smith and the Architecture of Genesis," in *The Temple: Ancient and Restored*, 165–81.

elements not present in the biblical account; in other cases, however, the difference is simply a matter of word choice. For example, the tree in Lehi's dream is described as being "white" (1 Nephi 8:11; 11:8), and its fruit is said to make one "happy" (1 Nephi 8:10) and to impart "joy" (1 Nephi 8:12; 11:22–23). Surprisingly, the wording of the tree's description in 1 Nephi 8:10 most closely matches Genesis' description not of the tree of life but rather of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Yet there is a critical difference in the condition (happy vs. wise) that is expected to result from partaking of the fruit:

a tree whose fruit was desirable to make one happy  
(1 Nephi 8:10)

a tree to be desired to make *one* wise (Genesis 3:6)

Whiteness and the effect of happiness or joy are substantive features of the tree of life that are not found in the biblical account. Descriptions of partaking of fruit, however, are found in both accounts but show a difference in word choice. In Genesis 2–3, references to partaking of fruit, including both the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and that of the tree of life, consistently use the verb *eat* (Hebrew *akal*). This verb occurs in reference to partaking of these trees' fruit 16 times in Genesis 2–3, while the verbs *partake* and *taste* are never used (Genesis 2:16–17; 3:1–3, 5–6, 11–13, 17, 22). By contrast, 1 Nephi 8 uses *partake* (13 times) and *taste* (2 times) in reference to the fruit of the tree of life, but never *eat* (1 Nephi 8:11–12, 15–18, 24–25, 27–28, 30, 33, 35). People also "fall down and partake" of the fruit in 1 Nephi 8:30; this curious expression perhaps means that the people prostrate themselves in thanksgiving and then arise to pluck and eat the fruit.<sup>41</sup>

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41. Interestingly, the Book of Moses includes one instance of the verb *partake*, and this happens to be in the only reference in Moses 3–4 (the chapters corresponding to Genesis 2–3) to partaking of the fruit of the tree of life: "and now lest he put forth his hand and partake also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever" (Moses 4:28). The corresponding verse in the KJV, Genesis 3:22, is virtually identical, but with the verb *take* instead of *partake*. The KJV reading (which follows the received Hebrew text) describes a sequence: reaching with the hand, taking the fruit, and then eating (cf. the sequence of taking fruit and then eating in Genesis 3:6). The reading in Moses 4:28 replaces this three-part sequence with a two-part one (reaching and partaking), and the verb *eat* that follows then repeats the idea of partaking. The reading *partake* in Moses 4:28, referring to the fruit of the tree of life, is very likely connected to the use of the same verb in 1 Nephi 8, but the nature of the connection is uncertain. Possibly Joseph Smith's change here restores a reading to which Lehi had access, so that the use of the verb *partake* in 1 Nephi 8

In the Genesis account, after Adam and Eve had eaten of the fruit, they “hid themselves” when they heard the voice of God (Genesis 3:8), after which God appeared and “sent forth” or “drove out” the man and, implicitly, his wife (Genesis 3:23–24). These verbs emphasize God’s agency in orchestrating the outcome of Adam and Eve’s transgression. By contrast, the Book of Mormon uses verbs that call attention to the agency of man. This is evident, for example, in 1 Nephi 8:28:

And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.

While the reference to being “ashamed” may call to mind the forbidden fruit, the reference here is actually to the fruit of the tree of life. The term *fall away* also occurs in 1 Nephi 8:34. The term suggests apostasy (compare 2 Thessalonians 2:3; Alma 24:30), but the motif of departure from the tree of life is also suggestive of Adam’s transgression and subsequent expulsion. The adverb *away* accords with the fact that Lehi, as an actor within the vision, sees people going down and away from where he stands near the tree of life; it contrasts with the verb *come* by which he describes people moving toward the tree. If the vision had been narrated from an outside perspective, the verb *fall* by itself would have been appropriate, which would more readily suggest the fall of man. The ultimate result of the people’s departure from the tree is that they are “lost,” a notion also found in verses 23 and 32. These other verses make clear that what is described is not merely being unable to find one’s way:

insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost. (1 Nephi 8:23)

and many were lost from his view, wandering in strange roads. (1 Nephi 8:32)

In verse 23, people do lose their way, and wandering off and being lost are ensuing results. Being “lost” is thus a final state here, not synonymous with losing one’s way. In verse 32, it is clear that the people are lost specifically from Lehi’s view. The sense in all instances could be

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simply follows the Genesis account available to Lehi. However, it could also be that Joseph Smith was influenced by 1 Nephi 8 (and other Book of Mormon passages that refer to partaking of the fruit of the tree of life, such as Alma 42:5) as he made the change in Moses 4:28. In any case, the use of the verb *taste* and the expression “fall down and partake” are still distinctive in 1 Nephi 8.

that of being hidden from view. However, in verses 23 and 28, there may also be the sense of “ruined, esp. morally or spiritually.”<sup>42</sup>

### The Variant Garden of Eden in 2 Nephi 2

The connection between Lehi’s dream and the garden of Eden is evident in Lehi’s discourse to his sons in 2 Nephi 2. Here Lehi makes explicit reference to the garden of Eden and the actions of Adam and Eve in the garden, but the conception of the garden in this discourse, as well as the language Lehi uses to describe it, are strongly reminiscent of the dream described in 1 Nephi 8 and 11–14.

In his discourse, Lehi describes the opposition between the two trees in the garden in terms of the taste of the fruit:

[I]t must needs be that there was an opposition, even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life, the one being sweet and the other bitter (2 Nephi 2:15)

Here it must be assumed that it is the fruit of the tree of life that is sweet and the forbidden fruit that is bitter. This accords with Lehi’s description of the fruit in his dream (1 Nephi 8:11; cf. Alma 32:42), although it is at odds with the notion, repeated in Latter-day Saint ritual settings, that the forbidden fruit was delicious and desirable (compare the statement that the fruit was “good for food” in Genesis 3:6). Lehi also implicitly associates the tree of life, the embodiment of eternal life, with joy; this is opposed to misery, which is the object of the devil’s enticements (2 Nephi 2:23, 25, 27). As with eating the fruit of the tree of life in 1 Nephi 8, Lehi uses the verb *partake* twice in reference to eating the forbidden fruit (2 Nephi 2:18, 19), but never the verb *eat*.

People in various Christian denominations today are accustomed to speaking of the “forbidden fruit” and the “fall of man” in connection with the garden of Eden narrative. These terms are foreign to the account as given in Genesis 2–3, but they do occur in reference to the garden in 2 Nephi 2. Lehi refers to the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil as “the forbidden fruit” (2 Nephi 2:15, 18). He describes partaking of the fruit and being driven out of the garden as “the fall” (2 Nephi 2:26; compare the phrase “the fall of man” earlier in verse 4, and the phrase “Adam fell” in verse 25). The result of the fall is that mankind have become “lost” (2 Nephi 2:21). In Lehi’s use of these terms, we can discern

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42. *Oxford English Dictionary* online, “lost,” definition 1a.

links with his earlier dream, in which the people enticed away from the tree of life “fell away into forbidden paths and were lost” (1 Nephi 8:28).

Another aspect of the garden of Eden that is present in Lehi's understanding as expressed in 2 Nephi 2, but that is absent in the Genesis version, is the explicit presence of the devil. Lehi tells his son Jacob:

And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God. And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind. Wherefore, he said unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies, wherefore he said: Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil. (2 Nephi 2:17–18)

The devil is also mentioned in verses 27 and 29. This contrasts with the Genesis account, in which the antagonist is known only as “the serpent.” The term *devil* does occur in Moses 4:12 (which is part of the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis), in a passage that may well be the text to which Lehi refers in 2 Nephi 2:17:

Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down; and he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice. (Moses 4:3–4)

However, the mention of the devil in this passage does not fully explain Lehi's version of the account. In the book of Moses, instead of the devil and the serpent being the same being, they are partners in tempting Eve:

And Satan put it into the heart of the serpent, (for he had drawn away many after him,) and he sought also to beguile Eve. . . . And he said unto the woman: Yea, hath God said — Ye

shall not eat of every tree of the garden? (And he spake by the mouth of the serpent.) (Moses 4:6–7)<sup>43</sup>

The term *devil*, although absent from Lehi’s description of his dream in 1 Nephi 8, does appear in Nephi’s later vision, in connection with the mist of darkness and the great and abominable church (1 Nephi 12:17; 13:6–9). The implication is that the devil is present but invisible in Lehi’s dream, working behind the scenes to tempt people and to establish opposition.

The elements of the garden of Eden story that share the same imagery or language in the descriptions of Lehi’s dream and in 2 Nephi 2, and that are not found in the Genesis version, are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Elements of Lehi’s Notion of the Garden Not Found in Genesis 1**

Element	Lehi’s Dream	Lehi’s Discourse
sweet	1 Nephi 8:11	2 Nephi 2:15
joy	1 Nephi 8:12	2 Nephi 2:23, 25
partake	1 Nephi 8:11, 12 (2x), 15, 16, 17, 18, 24, 25, 27, 30, 33, 35	2 Nephi 2:18, 19
forbidden	1 Nephi 8:28	2 Nephi 2:15, 18
fall	1 Nephi 8:28, 34	2 Nephi 2:22, 25, 26
lost	1 Nephi 8:23, 28, 32	2 Nephi 2:21
devil	1 Nephi 11–14	2 Nephi 2:17–18

43. Note the difference in terms in the Book of Moses between “the devil” (Moses 4:4) and “Satan” (Moses 4:1, 3–4, 6–7), the latter being the more frequent term (compare Moses 5:13, 18, etc.). Similar variation occurs in Islamic versions of the Genesis account, in which the antagonist is variously described as “the serpent” (*al-ḥayya*), “Iblis,” and “Satan” (*al-shayṭān*). Another point of similarity between the book of Moses and the Islamic accounts is that Satan speaks from the mouth of the serpent, as a separate being. In the Islamic accounts, however, the serpent is clearly female (the devil ends up marrying the serpent in some accounts), which corresponds to the fact that the Arabic word *ḥayya* is feminine. Lehi’s understanding of the devil and the serpent being one being, by contrast, depends on an assumption that the serpent is masculine, corresponding to the fact that the Hebrew word for “serpent,” *naḥaš*, is masculine. Lehi’s understanding is reminiscent of the ancient Ugaritic notion of the “fleeing serpent,” a “consubstantial” being that is occasionally understood as an antagonistic human-like deity or as the sea. See Terry Fenton, “Baal au foudre: Of Snakes and Mountains, Myth and Message,” in *Ugarit, Religion and Culture*, edited by Nicolas Wyatt, Wilfred G. E. Watson, and J. B. Lloyd (Münster, Germany: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), 58–59.

The similarity in imagery and language between Lehi's dream and his discourse in 2 Nephi 2 could be interpreted in different ways. It is possible that Lehi recognized the connection between the dream he had received and the garden of Eden account in Genesis, and this influenced the way he visualized and described the latter. In this interpretation, neither 1 Nephi 8 nor 2 Nephi 2 would necessarily point to a variant account of the garden of Eden existing in Lehi's day.

Although this interpretation makes sense, there is little or no support for the idea that Lehi modified his personal understanding of the garden from what was written in the textual sources available to him. In fact, Lehi seems to have put great stock in the scriptural account(s), specifically mentioning that his knowledge of the devil's role in the fall was "according to the things which [he had] read." The important point here is that Lehi was not just making up his information, but rather relied on a textual source, whether it was the Book of Moses or some other text. Further, some aspects of the garden of Eden account in 2 Nephi 2 that are not found in Genesis have no extant parallel in the account of Lehi's dream. For example, although the sweetness of the tree of life is mentioned in both, the bitterness of the other tree (2 Nephi 2:15) is not. The inability of Adam and Eve to have children before partaking of the forbidden fruit (2 Nephi 2:23) is another aspect that has no parallel in Lehi's dream.<sup>44</sup> In addition, many of the distinctive aspects to which I have drawn attention are matters of language and phraseology common to both pericopes but not necessarily arising from either one. From these considerations, the idea that Lehi's understanding of the garden was influenced by a third source seems likely. I would suggest that this was a variant scriptural account of the garden of Eden available to Lehi, perhaps from the brass plates.

### Conclusions

I have argued that the setting of Lehi's dream, as described in 1 Nephi 8 and expanded in 1 Nephi 11–14, is best understood as the garden of Eden. In terms of its fundamental features, this setting is basically the same as the biblical Eden. However, in many matters of detail, it differs from the way Eden is described in Genesis. This includes distinctive terminology

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44. As discussed above, it is possible that Lehi's dream included a vision of a second tree opposed to the tree of life. If this was so, then the absence of the bitterness of the other tree from the abridged account in 1 Nephi 8 would not be a valid argument here. Adam and Eve's inability to have children, however, is something that one would not expect to have been part of Lehi's dream.

which Lehi uses to describe the garden in 2 Nephi 2. In answer to the question of why these differences occur, I have suggested that the Book of Mormon presupposes an alternate version of the Genesis account, perhaps a version from the brass plates. As with any study dealing with reconstructed texts, there remain many points that are speculative. However, the suggestion of a variant account of events in the garden of Eden seems to work well with the indications in the Book of Mormon.

This study adds new significance to the visions described in 1 Nephi 8; 11–14 and also to Lehi’s discourse in 2 Nephi 2. It also illuminates the Book of Mormon’s implicit presentation of a complex ancient Israelite literary milieu, in which the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2–3 stood alongside other versions with different details, much like the variant accounts known from pseudepigraphical literature.

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