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TREES AND THE LOVE OF GOD

David M. Belnap and Nalini M. Nadkarni

Abstract: *Trees play real and metaphorical roles in the beliefs and holy scriptures of many world religions, and believers and non-believers throughout the world are uplifted spiritually by trees. In the Book of Mormon, a tree with delicious, sweet fruit appeared in two visions and one parable. Respectively, the tree represents the love of God as seen through the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ and symbolizes spiritual growth as one experimentally nourishes faith from a seed. Trees and fruit in the world around us can remind us of important lessons from these teachings and help keep us focused on the Lord because trees embody godly attributes and illustrate righteous principles. Trees and God's love are universal, meant to be dispersed, beautiful, long-lasting or eternal, strong, gifts, providers of bounty, givers of joy, and sources of shelter and comfort. From trees, we learn to shun pride, have proper priorities, be patient and persevering, keep growing spiritually, be well-rooted, and pursue spirituality. Trees kindle awe, reverence, and love in us. Whenever we see a tree or eat fruit or nuts from a tree, we can be reminded of God's love and to choose righteousness. Trees can inspire us to continue nurturing our spiritual growth; by doing so, our lives can be monumental like trees.*

The prophet Lehi had a remarkable dream that is symbolic of people's earthly journey: the allure of evil, struggles of life, love of family, and joy of the gospel (1 Nephi 8).¹ He traveled and prayed in darkness and was led to a tree with sweet fruit "desirable to make one happy." Eating the fruit filled his soul with happiness. Other events and objects materialized, but the tree was the preeminent symbol of his dream.

1. Unless stated otherwise, all scriptural references are taken from the 2013 English editions of the scriptures (King James Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price) published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

After learning of the dream, Lehi's son Nephi desired to also experience the vision of this amazing tree and to understand its meaning (1 Nephi 11). His desires were fulfilled. Nephi said the tree was "exceeding of all beauty," and was "precious above all." After seeing a vision of the birth of Jesus Christ, Nephi understood that the tree symbolized "the love of God" manifested to his children. This love "is the most desirable above all things ... and the most joyous to the soul." A further vision of the ministry and death of Jesus Christ amplified that message.

Later in the Book of Mormon, the prophet Alma invited a group of potential converts to experiment with faith in God (Alma 32:26–43). Alma proposed that if spiritual values were true and a person simply allowed the possibility of belief and had a desire to know if the values were true, one's faith would grow like a tree from a seed. A true seed planted in one's heart will sprout and begin to swell. If nourished properly, one's faith in true spiritual values will become a great tree and bear sweet fruit similar to the one in Lehi's dream. If the spiritual values were not true, then the seed would not grow. Or, if a good seed did start to grow but was not nourished, then one's faith would die like an unwatered tree scorched by the sun's heat.

Previous analyses of the tree in Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision often have focused on ties with ancient cultures.² For example, the tree was recognized by both Lehi and Nephi as a sacred symbol, apparently without them being told it was so. They recognized the sacred symbol because of their native Near Eastern culture.³ A related issue has been removal of the sacred tree found in Solomon's Temple.⁴ This tree was removed during King Josiah's purges, during the lifetime of Lehi but

2. A compilation of such studies is John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry, eds., *The Tree of Life: From Eden to Eternity* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011).

3. Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23," in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 191–243; Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 16–25, 80–81; and Daniel C. Peterson, "All Can Partake, Freely," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 42 (2021): vii–xiv, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/all-can-partake-freely/>.

4. For example, Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah" (1998); Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah" (2000); Peterson, "All Can Partake"; Margaret Barker, "Joseph Smith and Preexilic Israelite Religion," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 69–82; and Margaret Barker, *The Mother of the Lord*, vol. 1, *The Lady in the Temple* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

before the Book of Mormon begins. Its precise meaning is unknown, but the temple tree was apparently symbolic of the Divine Mother, or Heavenly Mother as modern Latter-day Saints call her. This is apparently what made the tree easily recognizable to Lehi and Nephi.⁵ Josiah's purge was a significant intra-Hebrew religious conflict and seems directly correlated to the reason Lehi and his family fled Jerusalem and to the tree in Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision.⁶ Other studies associated the tree in Alma's parable with the tree in Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision.⁷

What is the meaning of Lehi's, Nephi's, and Alma's sacred tree to our own culture? Why is a tree an apt metaphor for God's love and our own spiritual journey? The attributes of trees that we encounter in cities, farms, and wild places provide us with real and universal values, and also serve as instructive spiritual symbols. Trees are compelling symbols of righteousness because they embody divine characteristics and exemplify virtuous principles. These include beautiful sights and sweet tastes, like those noted by the Book of Mormon prophets for their trees, and include many other attributes noted by botanists, writers, artists, farmers, woodworkers, and admirers. A common theme is fortification against the storms of life. We submit that trees act as a symbol to remind us of God and God's ways.

Definitions and Caveats

What is a tree? Botanists disagree on a precise definition of trees, but, in general, trees are perennial plants with a single, prominent, self-supporting woody stem or trunk supporting lateral branches and a crown. Usually, trees also are tall and large and have longevity and secondary growth.⁸ Some plants have the shape and other characteristics

5. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah" (1998); Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah" (2000); Peterson, "All Can Partake;" and Barker, "Preexilic Israelite Religion."

6. For example, Val Larsen, "First Visions and Last Sermons: Affirming Divine Sociality, Rejecting the Greater Apostasy," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 36 (2020): 51–55, 57, 58, 63–64, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/first-visions-and-last-sermons-affirming-divine-sociality-rejecting-the-greater-apostasy/>.

7. For example, Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah" (1998), 191–92; and Ryan Atwood, "Lehi's Dream and the Plan of Salvation," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 37 (2020): 144, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/lehis-dream-and-the-plan-of-salvation/>.

8. A good general reference on trees is Peter A. Thomas, *Trees: Their Natural History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). For Thomas's

of a tree but differ from the definition above: for example, bamboos, bananas, palms, Joshua Trees,⁹ large cacti, and tree ferns.¹⁰ Nevertheless, because many of the characteristics of trees are also found in tree-like plants, for the purposes of this essay and to the extent applicable, any tree-like plant will also be considered a tree. Also to simplify, *fruit* will mean any fruit, nut, or seed from a tree, and *tree* may be used by itself when we mean “tree and fruit.” (These words may be used in combination.)

Attributes of trees mentioned here may not be exclusive to trees but may be shared with other plants, animals, humans, and even nonliving things like geologic features. For example, both trees and people are built on the same general structure: upright in form with a crown on top, and limbs stemming from a central trunk.¹¹ The important matter here is that the feature relates to usage of a tree as a sacred symbol in Lehi’s dream, Nephi’s vision, or Alma’s parable. Characteristics are not implied

definition of trees, see pp. 1–5. See also Nalini M. Nadkarni, *Between Earth and Sky: Our Intimate Connections to Trees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 19–24. Colin T. Kelleher, “Evolution and Conservation of Trees — A Review of Salient Issues,” *Annual Plant Reviews* 1 (2018): 355–59; Courtney A. Hollender and Chris Dardick, “Molecular Basis of Angiosperm Tree Architecture,” *New Phytologist* 206 (2015): 541; Rémy J. Petit and Arndt Hampe, “Some Evolutionary Consequences of Being a Tree,” *Annual Review of Ecology, Evolution, and Systematics* 37 (2006): 187, 189–90. Primary growth is elongation of stems and roots. Secondary growth is thickening of stems and roots.

9. A popular legend says Joshua Trees were named by Latter-day Saints who crossed the Mojave Desert in the 1800s, because the trees helped guide the people through the desert or because the branches reminded them of Joshua’s outstretched arms (Joshua 8:18–26). However, this tale appears to be undocumented.

10. Bamboos are grasses. Banana trees — which can grow to be 6 meters (20 feet) high — have a tree-like structure but are actually giant herbs, as they don’t have woody tissues. Palms also look and “behave” like trees, but they are in the group called *monocots*. Unlike the group of plants called *dicots* — which most trees belong to — they can only grow taller in height, but not broader in girth as they age. Another monocot with a tree-like appearance lives in the Mojave Desert and is the Joshua Tree. Some botanists classify this as a tree (Thomas, *Trees*, 3), but others do not. Large cacti, such as the saguaro and cardón of the Sonoran Desert and the *Opuntia* of the Galapagos Islands, also have tree-like features, including the designation of *forests* where many grow together. Although they have an erect and branching structure and can grow as tall as “normal” trees, large cacti have succulent, rather than woody tissues. Tree ferns also exist, but these “trees” are rarely branched, do not have bark like other trees, and have woody strands within their trunks (Thomas, *Trees*, 2).

11. Jesus had to heal a blind man twice because when asked if he could see anything after the first healing, the man said, “I see men as trees, walking” (Mark 8:22–25).

to be exclusive to trees. Although individual attributes may be shared between trees and other things, the totality of the attributes makes trees potent symbols of God.

To be clear, we seek to increase devotion to God and love of trees. But this article is not about tree worship or replacing worship in chapels or temples with worship in forests. This article concerns the enhancement of our spiritual lives with something familiar. We present multiple ways that trees can repeatedly remind us to remember the Lord.

Like other symbols that remind us of God, trees around us are not the real tree of life but can still remind us of sacred things. Latter-day Saints are encouraged to have depictions of Christ or temples in their homes. These paintings, sculptures, photographs, and models obviously are not the real Christ or temple. They are imperfect representations. But the similarities they do have can remind us of Jesus and his teachings and sacred temple experiences. Likewise, from the scriptural descriptions, the tree of Lehi's dream, Nephi's vision, and Alma's parable is more magnificent and its fruit more sweet than any tree we might see or fruit we might taste in our world. But ones we do see and taste can nevertheless help us remember God and gospel principles.

Divine Characteristics Embodied by Trees

Trees symbolize several characteristics of God. The gospel says God's love and message are for everyone, and trees are universal. Like tree seeds, God's love and message are meant to be dispersed. Trees and God's love and gospel are beautiful. God is eternal, and trees live for many years. God is all-powerful, and trees are strong. Trees and love are gifts from God. Both trees and God provide bountiful sustenance. We receive joy from God and trees. Both give shelter, peace, and comfort.

A Universal Symbol of God's Love

Nephi's vision tells us that the tree he saw means God has deep love for us. The universality of trees fortifies that message and allows all people to experience this metaphor by seeing trees or eating fruit from trees.

Trees have a universal shape. They have a rooted stem that reaches upward from the ground; this can remind us of the connection between the earth and the heavens. Both the branches and roots of trees have a branching shape and form — called *dendritic* — meaning *tree-like* (from the Greek word, *dendron*, meaning *tree*). This parallels the architecture of our own blood vessels, the tubes in our lungs, and the

neurons in our brains. Dendritic forms are found throughout nature, for example, in the flows of streams and rivers and in caves.¹²

Trees are amazingly diverse and numerous. An estimated 73,000 different species are found on earth, of which an estimated 9,000 species are yet undiscovered.¹³ In 2015, a research team estimated the earth contained 3.04 trillion trees.¹⁴

Trees are found throughout the terrestrial world, except in extremely cold¹⁵ or dry places. Some trees grow in swamps or other shallow waters (e.g., mangrove trees), but none is found in deep water or long-term snowpack or ice. Trees do not grow naturally in areas with inadequate soil or nutrients. However, with human care, some trees can be sustained in normally inhospitable places by providing them with fertilizer or

12. In her essay on Jacob's allegory of the olive tree in the Book of Mormon, M. Catherine Thomas wrote, "Most often in scripture ... the tree is an anthropomorphic symbol. A tree serves well as such a symbol because it has, after all, limbs, a circulatory system, the bearing of fruit, and so forth. Specifically, scriptural trees stand either for Christ and his attributes or for man." M. Catherine Thomas, "Jacob's Allegory: The Mystery of Christ," in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; and Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 13.

13. Forty-three percent of these species are estimated to live in South America, with 22% in Eurasia, 16% in Africa, 15% in North America, and 11% in Oceania (many species live on more than one continent). Roberto Cazzolla Gatti et al., "The Number of Tree Species on Earth," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 119, no. 6 (2022): e2115329119. These researchers "used the tree definition agreed on by IUCN's (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Global Tree Specialist Group (GTSG): 'a woody plant with usually a single stem growing to a height of at least two meters, or if multi-stemmed, then at least one vertical stem five centimeters in diameter at breast height.'"

14. T. W. Crowther et al., "Mapping Tree Density at a Global Scale," *Nature* 525 (10 September 2015): 201–205. The authors estimated 422 trees per person in 2015. The number of trees per person is likely lower today. Of course, the human population has increased since then, and also Crowther et al., estimated a loss of 15.3 billion trees per year due to deforestation, forest management, disturbances, and land use change.

15. "At the low-temperature treeline, trees become victims of their height. It is the aerodynamics of the life-form tree that impose critically low, growth-limiting air temperatures on trees, from which small-stature plants escape." Christian Körner, "The Cold Range Limit of Trees," *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 36, no. 11 (November 2021): 979.

water. For example, people living in deserts or prairies often successfully cultivate trees that would not grow there naturally.¹⁶

Trees are not genetically isolated in their own group but are nearly universally found among all taxonomic orders of plants. For example, among the eudicots (flowering plants that germinate with two seed leaves), only two orders (out of 35 total orders) do not contain tree-like species.¹⁷ Genetic analysis of trees and herbaceous plants strongly suggests that characteristics of trees are not because of unique genes but rather how those genes are regulated; no tree-specific set of genes has been found.¹⁸

The Book of Mormon does not define what kind of a tree Lehi, Nephi, and Alma envisioned. We only learn that the fruit was sweeter and whiter than anything Lehi had experienced before (1 Nephi 8:11). Nephi said the tree “was a representation of the tree of life,”¹⁹ and that the tree exceeded all beauty and “did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow” (1 Nephi 11:8). Alma’s tree also lacked a specific definition, although his reference to white and sweet fruit (Alma 32:42) suggests the tree of Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions. Other scriptural accounts of the tree of life also leave it undefined.²⁰

Nevertheless, a sacred tree, often labeled the tree of life, was important anciently, and some tree species were either sacred or had characteristics of the sacred tree.²¹ In the Near East, both Hebrews and others had sacred trees. These included several well-known trees: almond, apple, cypress, date palm, fig, olive, persea (Ished), pomegranate, sycamore, and at least eight others (Table 1, Appendix). Closest to the Book of Mormon description is a Gnostic (Nag Hammadi) statement

16. Efforts to restore trees to some human-modified lands also require human intervention, such as planting seeds, transplanting seedlings, or applying fertilizer or herbicides.

17. Andrew T. Groover, “What Genes Make a Tree a Tree?,” *Trends in Plant Science* 10, no. 5 (2005): 211.

18. Groover, “Genes,” 210–14; Nathaniel Robert Street, “Genomics of Forest Trees,” *Advances in Botanical Research* 89 (2019): 12–13.

19. 1 Nephi 15:21–22; see also 1 Nephi 11:25.

20. For example, Genesis 2:9, Moses 3:9, Abraham 5:9.

21. Reviewed by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *In God’s Image and Likeness*, vol. 1, *Creation, Fall, and the Story of Adam and Eve* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2014), 163–67; C. Wilfred Griggs, “The Tree of Life in Ancient Cultures,” *Ensign* 18, no. 6 (June 1988) 26–31; and Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah.” Many of their sources also are referenced herein. See these reviews for further sources and discussion. See also, Douglas Estes, ed., *The Tree of Life* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

that the tree of life was in color “like the sun” with beautiful branches, cypress-like leaves, and white grape-like fruit.²² The Book of Enoch, another non-canonical text, describes a beautiful tree with a fragrance “sweeter smelling than all spices” and with fruit like dates.²³ Ancient American Olmec, Maya, and other cultures also had sacred trees, and representations imitating or describing the ceiba, calabash, and cacao trees are known.²⁴ Wilfred Griggs stated, “Lehi and Nephi portrayed the spiritual meaning of that symbol [the tree] much the same way other ancient cultures portrayed it.”²⁵

The Book of Mormon gives another powerful account of God’s love for people via an allegory to a declining olive tree in a vineyard (Jacob 5). The master or Lord of the vineyard, representing God, loves the tree and grieves at the thought of losing the tree (vv. 7, 11, 13, 32, 46, 47, 51, and 66). The Lord of the vineyard even weeps and asks “what could I have done more?” (vv. 41, 47, 49). In this allegory, the tame olive tree represents the House of Israel, and wild olive trees represent Gentiles. The Lord of the vineyard and his servants used both and worked very hard to preserve “natural fruit, which was most precious unto him” (v. 74). Analogous to this allegory, when we see trees, we can be reminded that God loves us.

The universality and diversity of trees makes them a powerful, all-inclusive symbol for God’s love. The lack of a specific species definition of the tree of life makes the symbolism powerful because each of us can experience the metaphor of God’s love and spiritual growth when we see any tree or eat any nut or fruit. Except for the relatively few places where humans live but trees cannot,²⁶ most people frequently encounter trees and their fruits, and therefore can experience this divine symbol often. (But because of modern global trade and food-preservation

22. See Table 1 (Appendix), entry *cypress*. Margaret Barker noted the similarity to the Book of Mormon account in Barker, “Preexilic Israelite Religion,” 76.

23. See Table 1 (Appendix), entry *date palm*.

24. Linda Schele, “The Olmec Mountain and Tree of Creation in Mesoamerican Cosmology,” in *The Olmec World: Ritual and Rulership*, ed. Jill Guthrie (Princeton, NJ: The Art Museum, Princeton University; 1995), 105–17; Allen J. Christenson, “The Sacred Tree of the Ancient Maya,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 1997): 1–23. Maize was also depicted as a sacred “tree.”

25. Griggs, “Tree of Life,” 27.

26. For a touching story of Emil Arnalak’s first encounter with trees (Emil is an Inuit from Arviat, Nunavut — in the tundra region of northern Canada), see Nadkarni, *Between Earth and Sky*, 1–4. The native Inuit language, Inuktitut, has over 25 words for snow, but no word for tree. “‘We use the word *nabaaqtut*,’ Emil explained, ‘which means “pole.”’ And forest? ‘We use *nabaaqtut juit*, which means “many poles”’” (pp. 2–3).

methods, even people who live where trees do not grow can eat fruit from trees, at least occasionally.) Also, as ancient people apparently did with their sacred trees, each of us may identify the tree in Lehi's dream, Nephi's vision, and Alma's parable with familiar or beloved trees.²⁷ Our "sacred" trees need not be some exotic species in a far-off land one only sees in pictures. Therefore, the tree-fruit-God metaphor is applicable to all people, and the universality reminds us that God's love is also for everyone.²⁸

Dispersing the Love of God

In Lehi's dream, people come to the tree to partake of the delicious fruit. The biological function of fruit, seed dispersal, suggests the gospel teaching that God's love is meant to be spread so it can grow throughout the world.

As is well known, fruiting is the reproductive mechanism of trees.²⁹ Seeds from most flowering trees (angiosperms) are hidden in tasty, edible flesh (the common definition of *fruit*) or embedded in a hard shell (nut). Seeds from conifers and related plants (gymnosperms) lie within a cone or fruit where the seed can be seen without cutting anything open (although the scales of conifer cones must be bent apart to see the seeds). But reproduction is an expensive process, requiring much of the tree's energy. Tree growth is slowed.

Why should trees invest nutrients and energy in creating edible coverings or seeds? After all, seeds that are dispersed by wind — which have no expensive outer covering — can be transported great distances. But the proportion of seeds that end up in places that are suitable for germination and growth is very small. Seeds that simply fall to the

27. "While the imagery of the tree of life vision is much less fantastic than that of the book of Revelation, it nonetheless invokes the reader's imagination. For example, readers know that the tree may look somewhat like trees with which they are familiar, but the image of Lehi's tree is not limited by their experience. What shape does the tree of life take? Specific trees are mentioned in the Book of Mormon, such as fir trees and cedars (see 2 Nephi 24:8) and olive trees (see Jacob 5), but the tree of life is not identified as a specific type of tree found in the real world. And what about the tree's purely white fruit? What is its texture, and how does it taste? Once again, we are not given any details or names of fruit with which we are familiar, but we are left to exercise our imagination." Charles Swift, "Lehi's Vision of the Tree of Life: Understanding the Dream as Visionary Literature," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005): 58.

28. Acts 10:34–35, Romans 2:11, 2 Nephi 26:33.

29. Thomas, *Trees*, 2–3, 184–202.

ground due to gravity end up directly underneath the parent tree, and cannot compete for the sunlight, nutrients, and water they need to flourish.

The biological advantage of fruits is that seeds are distributed to appropriate places more specifically than wind, and more widely than gravity. People and animals take the fruit and seeds from the parent tree and move seeds some distance away, where the seeds can sprout. Some trees have especially helpful relationships with certain animals, and this association helps tree seeds be distributed more efficiently. For example, squirrels store acorns or pine seeds or cones for consumption later, and many will not be eaten and can grow into new trees. Elephants in low-land tropical forests eat succulent fruits with lozenge-shaped seeds and then deposit the seed somewhere else in the forest in a fertile mass of manure.³⁰ On the African savanna, shed seedpods of the umbrella thorn acacia are eaten by impala, kudu, and steenbok. After the seedpods are digested, these animals scatter the acacia seeds fertilized with their dung.³¹

Fruit spreads the biological influence of a tree, and eating fruit can remind us that the gospel is meant to be shared and spread through each person's personal influence. The goal is to invite everyone to come and partake of delicious gospel fruit. Just as different tree species have unique ways of scattering seeds, each person who partakes of gospel fruit often has unique ways of receiving and sharing the gospel.

Fruit also protects the seed while it develops.³² If the seed were taken from the tree and planted too early, the seed will not grow. This is wasted effort. Therefore, fruits are often sour or otherwise unattractive until they are ripe and the seed is mature. Likewise, planting gospel seeds cannot be forced or coerced. It must be done in a righteous way, with kindness, patience, and meekness, as Joseph Smith taught (Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–42). As with eating unripe fruit, influencing people by unrighteous means will only have sour results. In Lehi's dream, the tree stood with quiet dignity, beckoning people by its beauty and its desirable, ripe fruit. No one was compelled to come and pick and partake, though Lehi encouraged his family to come. Likewise,

30. Douglas H. Chadwick, "Elephants — Out of Time, Out of Space," *National Geographic* 179 (May 1991): 28.

31. Johan T. du Toit, "Winning by a Neck," *Natural History* 101, no. 8 (August 1992): 32.

32. Thomas, *Trees*, 187–90, 201.

Alma used no coercion but simply and lovingly invited people to plant the gospel seed.

Alma's parable says each person's faith journey is like planting the seed of a tree, and seed dispersal through edible fruits suggests that journey may include forces outside one's control but destined to help us grow. For example, Latter-day Saint young women and men who serve missions for the church are sent to places not of their own choosing. There, away from parents, friends, and familiar things, they are exposed to new situations and people. Often they must learn a language and culture that is strange to them. They usually find great spiritual growth wherever they are sent. Throughout our lives, each of us encounters difficult situations that at first feel like we are embedded in stinky manure. However, if we choose righteously, we usually find these experiences help us grow spiritually in critical ways.

Beauty and Aesthetics

Beauty and trees are synonymous. The scriptures say, "And out of the ground made I, the Lord God, to grow every tree, naturally, that is pleasant to the sight of man; and man could behold it."³³ Planting trees outside homes makes a home more attractive. Beautiful objects are made from trees — for example, wood sculptures, bowls, and furniture. Many musical instruments are made from wood or include parts made from wood — for example, strings, woodwinds, drums, bullroarers, and pipe organs. The beautiful sounds from these instruments bless our lives.

The beauty of trees reminds us that the gospel and God's love are beautiful. Analogous to Alma's message (Alma 32:41–43), our lives will be beautiful, like trees, when we follow the Lord. Jeremiah, Lehi's contemporary, wrote,

Thus says the LORD: ... "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."³⁴

33. Moses 3:9; cf. Genesis 2:9; Abraham 5:9.

34. Jeremiah 17:5, 7–8, English Standard Version. Two other translations of these verses:

Thus saith the LORD; ... Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters,

Thus, if we will follow the Lord, we will be like beautiful green trees along a stream, even when the weather is hot, that is, when our life is difficult. If we accept the Lord, the prophet Isaiah said we “might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.”³⁵ Jeffrey Bradshaw noted that the tree of life is “a symbol of embodied deity” and “that [scriptural] trees can represent not only Deity but also humans who have, through temple rites of investiture, become kings. The same concept applies in a more general way to all the righteous who are ultimately destined to share the same status.”³⁶ Seeing trees in the world around us can remind us of our beautiful, divine potential.

Time and Eternity

Many trees live a long time. Many trees can live hundreds of years, and some trees live millennia. For example, well-documented ages are known for a baobab tree in Namibia (1275 years), a Qilian juniper in China (2230 years), a bald cypress in the eastern United States (2624 years), and an alerce tree in Chile (3613 years).³⁷ Other trees are known

and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see [or fear] when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit. (King James Version; *Fear* noted in brackets is an alternative translation from Hebrew for the the word *see*.)

This is what the Lord says: ... “But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” (New International Version).

See also Psalm 1:1–3, Psalm 92:12–13, and Doctrine and Covenants 97:8–9.

35. Isaiah 61:3. The English Standard Version and New International Version state that people would be called “oaks of righteousness” instead of “trees of righteousness.”

36. Bradshaw, *In God’s Image and Likeness*, 1:163–64. See also Simo Parpola, “The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 52, no. 3 (July 1993): 167–68, 173.

37. Adrian Patrut et al., “Radiocarbon Dating of a Very Large African Baobab,” *Tree Physiology* 27 (2007): 1569–74; Jiajia Liu, Bao Yang, and David B. Lindenmayer, “The Oldest Trees in China and Where to Find Them,” *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 17, no. 6 (2019): 319–22; D. W. Stahle et al., “Longevity, Climate Sensitivity, and Conservation Status of Wetland Trees at Black River, North Carolina,” *Environmental Research Communications* 1 (2019): 041002; Antonio Lara and Ricardo Villalba, “A 3620-Year Temperature Record from *Fitzroya cupressoides* Tree Rings in Southern South America,” *Science* 260, no. 5111 (21 May

to be very old, but even approximate dating is difficult. Examples of these trees include the Llangernyw Yew in North Wales, the Patriarca da Floresta (“the patriarch of Floresta”) in Brazil, and the Olive Tree of Vouves in Crete. Remarkably, this olive tree and many other old olive trees still produce olives.

The oldest known trees on Earth are bristlecone pines,³⁸ which can reach ages that exceed 4500 years (Figure 1).³⁹ When standing in their presence, one marvels at how short and ordinary they look from the outside; they have neither the height nor breadth of other trees of great longevity, like the redwoods. Because they live in very cold places, they have only a few weeks a year to grow, and the annual growth rings they lay down each year are less than a millimeter in width.

Some trees are very old because they can reproduce by cloning, meaning their (seemingly) separate trunks sprouted from a single seed via connected underground roots. The resulting groves can be exceedingly old, and the entire grove must be considered a single genetic organism that lives many times longer than individual shoots. North American quaking aspen trees are one such species. The largest known aspen grove is called “Pando” (Figure 2), which grows in central Utah.⁴⁰ Most of the entire grove is one organism despite having thousands of above-ground trunks. The age of Pando is estimated to be up to 14,000 years.⁴¹

Even in death, trees persist. Dead trees provide shelter for animals and nutrients for the natural community for many years after the tree dies. Wood that has been incorporated into buildings and ships can endure for centuries. Under certain conditions, dead trees can become

1993): 1104–106. A useful database of old trees is OLDLIST maintained by Rocky Mountain Tree-Ring Research (www.rmtrr.org).

38. Two species of bristlecone pine are known and live in western North America: the Rocky Mountain bristlecone pine and the Great Basin bristlecone pine. The Great Basin variety is longer living.

39. Edmund Schulman and W. Robert Moore, “Bristlecone Pine, Oldest Known Living Thing,” *National Geographic* 113, no. 3 (March 1958): 354–72; C. W. Ferguson, “Bristlecone Pine: Science and Esthetics,” *Science* 159, no. 3817 (23 February 1968): 839–46; Donald R. Currey, “An Ancient Bristlecone Pine Stand in Eastern Nevada,” *Ecology* 46, no. 4 (July 1965): 564–66.

40. Jennifer DeWoody et al., “‘Pando’ Lives: Molecular Genetic Evidence of a Giant Aspen Clone in Central Utah,” *Western North American Naturalist* 68, no. 4 (2008): 493–97.

41. Chen Ding et al., “Post-Glacial Biogeography of Trembling Aspen Inferred from Habitat Models and Genetic Variance in Quantitative Traits,” *Scientific Reports* 7 (2017): 4672 (see p. 4).



Figure 1. Bristlecone pine in Wheeler Peak Grove, Great Basin National Park, Nevada, United States. Top left, a bristlecone pine tree. Top right, bristlecone pine cones, its “fruit.” Note the namesake bristles on the cones. Bottom, old bristlecone pines often have just a small portion living (bottom left). Regions such as these are connected to the roots by a thin strip of living tissue and bark around a small portion of the trunk and connecting branches (bottom right, green arrow). Photographs by David Belnap.

petrified, their living cells becoming replaced by minerals that turn into rainbow-colored rocks.

God is eternal, and the longevity of trees reminds us to remember God and eternal values, rather than our short-term desires. Trees’ prolonged existence reminds us that God is also a constant in our lives. The remarkable longevity of trees evokes the scripture’s promise of a future time of peace when “an infant shall not die until he is old; and his life shall be as the age of a tree” (Doctrine and Covenants 101:30).

Strength

Trees have great strength. Trees support tremendous weight throughout their lives. For example, a single giant sequoia tree exceeded 83 meters



Figure 2. Two autumn views of the Pando grove of quaking (trembling) aspen, Fishlake National Forest, Utah, United States. Most of the aspen trees had lost their leaves in preparation for winter. Photographs by David Belnap.

(272 feet) in height and had an above-ground weight of 582 metric tons (642 U.S. tons).⁴² The heavy load increases significantly when strong winds blow against a tree. Wood from trees can not only last centuries, but it can support tremendous loads in homes, ships, and other structures. Laminate wood products have strength capabilities similar to or better than steel and concrete.⁴³

The great strength of trees can remind us that God has strength beyond our abilities. We can also be reminded God will give us strength when we accept the gospel. Many people report receiving power to meet great challenges when they have turned to God.

God's Gifts

God is a giver of gifts, and the tree in Lehi's dream symbolizes God's greatest gift to us. The scriptures say, "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). Nephi's vision specifically connected the tree he and his father saw to Christ's life and sacrifice (1 Nephi 11:9–33). God's gift symbolized by the tree is well stated in the well-known verse from the apostle John, "for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Therefore, seeing trees can remind us of Jesus' life and willing sacrifice for us.

Other writings connect Christ or his sacrifice directly to a tree. Isaiah prophesied, "there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of

42. Stephen C. Sillett et al., "How Do Tree Structure and Old Age Affect Growth Potential of California Redwoods?," *Ecological Monographs* 85, no. 2 (2015): 181–212.

43. "Design freedom, warmth of appearance, long-term performance, environmental soundness, and availability allow glue-laminated timber to vigorously compete not only with solid-sawn material but also with other structural products such as concrete and steel in many applications." Rubin Shmulsky and P. David Jones, *Forest Products & Wood Science: An Introduction*, 7th ed. (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 332. Cross-laminated timber (layers of boards oriented at right angles and glued together) provides "exceptional strength and stiffness as well as two-way span capabilities similar to a reinforced concrete slab." Glued laminated timber (multiple layers with grain parallel to the longest length) "has excellent strength and stiffness properties and a very high strength-to-weight ratio, meaning that by weight it is stronger than structural steel." Joseph Abed et al., "A Review of the Performance and Benefits of Mass Timber as an Alternative to Concrete and Steel for Improving the Sustainability of Structures," *Sustainability* 14 (2022): 5570, see pp. 4–5.

Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”⁴⁴ Interestingly, as part of providing us the gospel gift, Jesus Christ was “hanged on a tree”⁴⁵ or to a cross most likely fashioned from a tree.⁴⁶ Furthering the connection, Wilfred Griggs noted that some early Christians saw a direct correlation between Christ’s cross and the tree of life and that “the Greek word [for tree] used [for the cross] in [Acts 5:30, Galatians 3:13, and 1 Peter 2:24] is the same as that used for the tree of life in the Septuagint,⁴⁷ different from the usual New Testament word for *tree*.”⁴⁸ Charles Stang wrote, “the Cross on which [Christ] works that salvation becomes the second Tree of Life. It was an association especially common in Syriac Christianity.”⁴⁹ Saint Ephraem the Syrian, an early Christian, wrote,

The tree of life is the cross which gave a radiant life to our race. On the top of Golgotha Christ distributed life to men. And henceforth he further promised us the pledge of eternal life.

Our Savior typified his body in the tree, the one from which Adam did not taste because he sinned.⁵⁰

Like Nephi, Justin Martyr, another early Christian, said that Christ “was symbolized . . . by the tree of life.”⁵¹

Seeing trees can remind us that neither trees nor eternal life are something we can provide for ourselves; both are gifts from God.⁵² Humans may nurture trees, but we cannot make them grow and bear fruit. We may cultivate spirituality by making good choices or by being

44. Isaiah 11:1 (English Standard Version). The King James Version reads, “and there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.”

45. Acts 5:30, 10:39. See Acts 13:29; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24.

46. Matthew 27:31–35, 40, 42; Mark 15:20–25, 30; Luke 23:33; John 19:16–18, 25; 1 Nephi 11:33.

47. The ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament.

48. Griggs, “Tree of Life,” 30.

49. Charles M. Stang, “Digging Holes and Building Pillars: Simeon Stylites and the ‘Geometry’ of Ascetic Practice,” *Harvard Theological Review* 103, no. 4 (2010): 451–52.

50. Quoted by Griggs, “Tree of Life,” 30; see also Stang, “Digging Holes,” 452. In Griggs’ article, he lists other correlations of the tree of life to Christ’s crucifixion.

51. St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas B. Falls, revised by Thomas P. Halton, ed. Michael Slusser (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 133.

52. The following scriptures teach us that trees are a creation of God: Genesis 1:11–12, 2:9; Moses 2:11–12, 3:9; Abraham 4:11–12, 5:9.

in beautiful or holy places, but spiritual feelings and blessings are gifts from a higher source.

Fruit and the gospel are gifts even though we must expend effort to obtain them. The people striving to reach the tree in the dream traveled through the mist of darkness and continually pressed forward to the tree by holding fast to the iron rod.⁵³ Similarly, harvesting fruit from a tree requires that we travel to the tree and then reach, climb, and lift to harvest its delicious fruit, sometimes working in difficult weather or other trying circumstances to get and preserve the harvest. However, these are trivial efforts compared to the rewards of the harvest and the impossibility of humans themselves making the fruit. Thus, coming to the tree in Lehi's dream is symbolic of people choosing to accept the gospel and enduring trials to receive God's delicious reward. Harvesting fruit reminds us that although we must choose to follow the Lord and come to him, our efforts are trivial compared to the cost of providing the gospel fruit for us and the rewards the gospel brings into our lives. Nephi said the fruit of the tree is not only "most precious and most desirable above all other fruits," but "it is the greatest of all the gifts of God" (1 Nephi 15:36).

Bounty

Trees provide bounteous harvests of fruits and nuts.⁵⁴ The elongated trunk and multiple branches extend their production high above the ground. For the same area of earth, a tree produces much more than is produced by plants that only rise a short distance above the earth, such as wheat, tomato, carrot, corn, melon, and pineapple plants. The perennial nature of trees means harvests will occur for many years. Combining its long life with the abundance for each season, a tree seems to give limitless fruit.⁵⁵

53. 1 Nephi 8:30, see also verses 23–25. Although 1 Nephi 8 does not explicitly say, the assumption here is that the group described in verse 30 also encountered the "mist of darkness" but unlike the group in verses 23–25 did not fall away. Apostle David Bednar suggested "clinging" to the iron rod (vv. 23–25) is less faithful than "continually holding fast" to the iron rod (v. 30) because clinging suggests periodic effort compared to continuous effort (see also 1 Nephi 15:24). See David A. Bednar, "Lehi's Dream: Holding Fast to the Rod," *Liahona* 35 (October 2011): 32–37.

54. Producing an overabundance of seeds is an effective biological strategy to ensure survival of the species.

55. Some trees have "mast years" in which seed production is high. Other years may see low production. For example, "acorn production in one British oak tree can

Both people and animals benefit from the bounty provided by trees. Most fruit and nuts consumed by humans comes from cultivated trees, but people also harvest from wild trees, such as pine nuts from coniferous trees in many parts of the world and Brazil nuts from South American forests. Nutrient-rich acorns, the fruit of oak trees, are consumed by many animals such as squirrels, mice, rabbits, and foxes. Acorn woodpeckers of North and South America gather and store thousands of acorns in a single “granary,” which is used year after year to sustain them. The hornbill, found in Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and southeast Asia, is famous for its consumption of fruit.⁵⁶

Trees also provide bountiful sustenance in other ways besides fruit. Flowers (the beginning stage of fruit production), sap, roots, and decaying tree matter all provide sustenance. Many animals receive nourishment as they interact with tree flowers. Pollination of flowers is facilitated by the offering of sugar- and energy-rich nectar. Hummingbirds,⁵⁷ other bird species, bats, other mammals, and many species of insects are known pollinators of trees.⁵⁸ Lemurs in Madagascar⁵⁹ and a lizard in Brazil⁶⁰ also receive nourishment as they pollinate the flowers of trees. Some valued edibles and other products have been harvested from the sap of trees, including sweet syrup from sugar maples, natural latex from rubber trees, and turpentine from pine trees. Root exudates are liquid secretions from roots and contain energy-rich sugars and other

vary from almost none to over 50,000 and occasionally 90,000 per year.” Thomas, *Trees*, 190–93.

56. Rohit Naniwadekar, Charudutt Mishra, and Aparajita Datta, “Fruit Resource Tracking by Hornbill Species at Multiple Scales in a Tropical Forest in India,” *Journal of Tropical Ecology* 31 (2015): 477–90.

57. Helmuth O. Wagner, “Food and Feeding Habits of Mexican Hummingbirds,” *The Wilson Bulletin* 58, no. 2 (June 1946): 69–93.

58. In Peter Thomas, *Trees*, 154–66, the following animals are listed as pollinators of trees: insects (bees, beetles, butterflies, flies, biting midges, moths, thrips, fig wasps, weevil), birds (honeycreepers, honeyeaters, hummingbirds, lorikeets, blue tits, warblers), and mammals (bats, giraffes, lemur, marsupial mice, and honey possum).

59. The ruffed lemur was shown to pollinate the native traveler’s tree. W. John Kress et al., “Pollination of *Ravenala madagascariensis* (Strelitziaceae) by Lemurs in Madagascar: Evidence for an Archaic Coevolutionary System?,” *American Journal of Botany* 81, no. 5 (May 1994): 542–51.

60. The mulungu tree is pollinated by the Noronha skink. Ivan Sazima, Cristina Sazima, and Marlies Sazima, “Little Dragons Prefer Flowers to Maidens: A Lizard That Laps Nectar and Pollinates Trees,” *Biota Neotropica* 5, no. 1 (2005): 185–92.

compounds. This material provides sustenance for microorganisms that dwell in the soil. Dead and decaying parts of trees become sustenance for many organisms. These parts include leaves that are shed while the tree is living and the trunks of dead trees after the tree dies.

The bounty provided by trees can remind us that gospel fruit is unlimited. Membership in God’s Kingdom is not an exclusive club. Rather, every human being is invited to pick and partake of unlimited spiritual fruit. When the number of potential converts expands, rather than creating strict admission rules, the prophet Isaiah noted that God wants his tent made larger.⁶¹ The tree metaphor in the Book of Mormon helps us see this because trees provide essentially unlimited fruit in their crowns that spread outward and upward in all directions. In the dream and vision, the limiting factor was people’s choices, not a shortage of fruit on the tree.

The bounty provided by trees blesses not just people, but other living things as well. This can remind us that living the gospel will not just benefit us and our fellow human brothers and sisters. As we live the gospel — especially by thinking of others and being unselfish — animals, plants, and the earth also will benefit.

Joy

The happiness of picking and eating fruit is like the joy we can gain through accepting the gospel and God’s love. Lehi said the fruit of the tree in his dream was “most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted ... as I partook of the fruit ... it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy” (1 Nephi 8:11–12). Picking and eating fruit from trees is joyous. As Elder Neil L. Andersen said in an address on Lehi’s dream, “fruit has long been a treasured delicacy.”⁶² Like Lehi (1 Nephi 8:12, 15), we want to share with beloved family and friends. Many people have commented on the joy the gospel has brought into their lives. Yolanda Morales Posadas from Veracruz, Mexico, noticed her mother “seemed much younger and happier” after she was baptized, and “her happiness and peace filled our

61. “Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited” (Isaiah 54:1–3).

62. Neil L. Andersen, “Fruit,” *Liahona* 43, no. 11 (November 2019): 116.

house immensely.” This helped Yolanda also accept the gospel, and “the void I had felt was no longer there” and “was replaced by tremendous joy in my soul.”⁶³ Each of us can be reminded of gospel joy when we eat fruits we or others have picked from a tree. Though usually not as delicious as fruit fresh from a tree, eating well-preserved fruit out-of-season or fruit from far-away lands⁶⁴ is also wonderful and can remind us of the Lord. (Seeing a beautiful tree brings similar joy, and hence can be a similar reminder.)

Shelter, Peace, and Comfort

Universally, trees provide shelter and places of peace and comfort. In hot climates, trees shelter people by providing shade. Shade cast by banyan trees in India and baobab trees in Africa are where villages hold their markets, and where elders sit to make decisions. People have even lived or worked inside hollow trunks of baobab trees. Urban “heat islands” can be tempered by the presence of trees in city centers.⁶⁵ In cold climates, homes made from trees provide warmth.

Trees have been part of human shelters for millennia, including tents and tent-like structures like tipis, long houses in Europe⁶⁶ and North America, log houses, and modern homes. Trees are used to construct houses of worship and places of business. The Bible describes the use of cedar of Lebanon to build Solomon’s Temple and palace:

So he built the house, and finished it; and covered the house with beams and boards of cedar. And then he built chambers against all the house, five cubits high: and they rested on the house with timber of cedar. (1 Kings 6:9–10)

He built also the house of the forest of Lebanon ... upon four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams upon the pillars. And it was covered with cedar above upon the beams. (1 Kings 7:2–3)

63. Yolanda’s father passed away when she was 15; the pain of his death was the void that she felt. Yolanda Morales Posadas, “Like Sweet Milk,” *The New Era* 40 (December 2010): 6–7.

64. Fruit that must be transported long distances is usually picked unripened to prevent spoilage and allowed to ripen later or is artificially ripened.

65. Douglas Kelbaugh, *The Urban Fix: Resilient Cities in the War Against Climate Change, Heat Islands and Overpopulation* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 18, 26, 84, 150–72.

66. Petr Květina and Václav Hrnčíř, “Between Archaeology and Anthropology: Imagining Neolithic Settlements,” *Anthropologie* 51 (2013): 323–47.

Trees also have been important to build structures needed to support human life, such as water wells.⁶⁷

Animals as well as people rely on trees for shelter. Trees provide homes or nesting sites for many animals, from squirrels in urban parks to numerous wild birds, mammals, reptiles, and insects. Many animals fly or run to trees for protection from other animals. In tropical rainforests, a single tree can provide nesting and feeding sites for dozens of species of birds. Primates also occupy trees, using them for places of safety and sustenance. For example, the nocturnal beds of orangutans may include additional features such as “pillows,” for which they clump leafy branches with the leaves in the center, with the twig shoots pointed outward. They make “blankets” from large leafy branches to cover themselves after lying down, and sometimes add a waterproof overhead shelter for their nest by braiding together a loose selection of branches.⁶⁸ Even after they die, large old trees that remain standing — so-called *snags* — provide unique habitats that sustain wildlife.

Trees even provide homes for other plants, around and on the tree. The shade trees make creates environments that allow understory plants and tree seedlings to flourish. Epiphytes are a diverse group of plants that derive physical support from the branches and trunks on which they perch, but are not parasitic, as they do not take water or nutrients from their host trees (Figure 3). These arboreal communities reach their greatest abundance and diversity in tropical rainforests. There, weight of the epiphyte community has been seen to be more than four times higher than that of other forest foliage.⁶⁹ Some trees support hundreds

67. An ancient wooden lining for a water well was discovered in the Czech Republic. The oak trees used to build the well “were felled in the years 5256/55 BC” Michal Rybníček et al., “World’s Oldest Dendrochronologically Dated Archaeological Wood Construction,” *Journal of Archaeological Science* 115 (2020): 105082.

68. Didik Prasetyo et al., “Nest Building in Orangutans” in *Orangutans: Geographic Variation in Behavioral Ecology and Conservation*, ed. Serge A. Wich et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 269–78, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199213276.003.0019>.

69. In a Costa Rican forest, biomass of “canopy organic matter” (epiphyte community) on tree trunks, branches, and so forth was found to be 33.1 tonnes/hectare (14.8 tons/acre). The biomass of tree foliage, reproductive parts, and parasites and subcanopy and understory foliage was only 7.6 tonnes/hectare (3.4 tons/acre). For comparison, biomass of tree trunks and branches and subcanopy and understory stems was 482.4 tonnes/hectare (215.2 tons/acre), the vast majority of biomass in the forest. Nalini M. Nadkarni et al., “Biomass and Nutrient Pools of Canopy and Terrestrial Components in a Primary and a Secondary Montane



Figure 3. Epiphyte examples from the cloud forest in Monteverde, Costa Rica. Two views of branches in the tree canopy. The branches are extensively covered with epiphytes (non-parasitic plants). Note the pink ribbons used to mark specific plants for study and climbing ropes (used to access the canopy). Photographs by Nalini Nadkarni.

of different species of orchids, bromeliads, and ferns. With the water they retain, epiphytes on two Chilean ulmo trees weighed approximately 450 kg (half a ton) on each tree.⁷⁰ Even soil is present on the branches, with accompanying soil organisms, including earthworms.⁷¹

Stands of trees (forests) or individual trees are places where people go for spiritual comfort, to renew themselves and to seek God. Joseph Smith went to a grove of trees to pray and received the vision that started his prophetic mission. This forest is revered today as the Sacred Grove (Figure 4). Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph Smith’s mother, stated that their family had a tradition of going into the woods to pray.⁷² In the Book of Mormon, Enos offered a prayer in a forest and there communed with God



Figure 4. A mid-summer (July) view in the Sacred Grove, near Palmyra, New York, United States. Photograph by David Belnap.

Cloud Forest, Costa Rica,” *Forest Ecology and Management* 198 (2004): 223–36 (see especially Table 5).

70. The ulmo trees were 25 and 28 meters (respectively, 82 and 92 feet) tall. 427 and 462 kg of epiphyte (fresh weight) were measured on the two trees. Iván A. Díaz et al., “Epiphyte Diversity and Biomass Loads of Canopy Emergent Trees in Chilean Temperate Rain Forests: A Neglected Functional Component,” *Forest Ecology and Management* 259 (2010):1490–1501.

71. Nadkarni, *Between Earth and Sky*, 24–27; Walter H. Lyford, “The Ecology of an Elfin Forest in Puerto Rico, 7. Soil, Root, and Earthworm Relationships,” *Journal of the Arnold Arboretum* 50, no. 2 (April 1969): 218–19, 223, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43781655>.

72. Speaking of the time when the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon were shown the ancient record by Joseph Smith, the following two accounts report: “Together they repaired to a place in the woods where members of the Smith family were wont to hold secret prayer.” *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 1:58. “Soon after they came, all the male part of the company, with my husband, Samuel [Smith], and Hyrum [Smith], retired to a grove where the family were in the habit of offering up their secret devotions to God.” Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His*

(Enos 1:1–18), and about 450 people knew a forest as a beautiful place because there they “came to the knowledge of their Redeemer” (Mosiah 18:4–5, 30, 35). Countless others have found spiritual nourishment in jungles, woods, and even cactus forests (Figure 5).⁷³ So, in essence, stands of trees are spiritual temples. Even individual trees in wild or non-wild places can give spiritual comfort. Many have sought and found peace at an individual tree. After he was baptized, “Jesus was led up of the Spirit, into the wilderness, to be with God” (Joseph Smith Translation Matthew 4:1–2). Although he was most likely in the harsh Judean Desert, trees such as the acacia and tamarisk do grow there and may have given Jesus physical and spiritual comfort.

Along with providing spiritual nourishment and physical protection, trees can remind us that God’s love and teachings provide shelter from the stresses and storms of life. Seeing trees can stimulate remembrance of God’s protective care. God’s love gives us comfort during times of distress. God’s teachings are a place of safety and peace and will guide us to a happier and more fulfilling life.

Virtuous Principles Exemplified by Trees

Trees also give examples of righteous principles that a disciple of the Lord should follow. These principles help us overcome temptations and the trials of life. Relating to Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision, seeing



Figure 5. Saguaro and saguaro forest. Foreground, flowering ocotillo in front of a large saguaro. In the background are several more saguaro and this is a saguaro forest. Location is Saguaro National Park, near Tucson, Arizona, United States. Photograph by David Belnap.

Mother, ed. Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 201–202.

73. Stands of large cacti are sometimes called forests, e.g., in the Galapagos Islands and Sonoran Desert.

trees can encourage us to choose righteousness over pride. Lessons we learn from trees also can help us to have proper priorities, have patience and persistence, continually grow, be well-anchored, and seek unseen spiritual values. Trees stimulate awe, reverence, and love. Relating all these principles with the experiences and teachings of Lehi, Nephi, and Alma, we have additional reasons to see the powerful link between a tree and the Lord because living these principles brings *us* closer to God.

Righteousness versus Pride

The ultimate symbol of righteousness in Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision is a tree. It was the final destination sought by the faithful people in the dream. Lehi's and Nephi's words suggest a simple fruit tree in a field (1 Nephi 8:9–10), but a tree that “is precious above all”⁷⁴ and which represented “the love of God” felt in human hearts, “the most desirable above all things ... and the most joyous to the soul.”⁷⁵

In Lehi's dream, the simple but unique tree stood in contrast to the “great and spacious building” (1 Nephi 8:26), a man-made edifice that symbolized human arrogance, “the pride of the world” (1 Nephi 11:36). The building “stood as it were in the air, high above the earth” and “was filled with people” old, young, male, and female who were dressed “exceedingly fine” and were “mocking and pointing fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit” of the tree (1 Nephi 8:26–27). In Nephi's vision, the building falls, “and the fall thereof was exceedingly great” (1 Nephi 11:36).

Seeing trees can remind us to put righteousness first, before wealth, fame, appetite, or any other worldly desire. But how easily do we choose the seemingly sophisticated instead of the simple, beautiful and joyous! How often do we all ignore small and simple things that can have a big difference in our lives and instead choose the boisterous, the great, the famous, or the palatial! Humans have developed many amazing things — musical instruments, communications systems, photography, computers, scientific instruments, and engineering marvels. Yet, none of these matches the amazing natural world that God created, including trees. The late apostle M. Russell Ballard noted,

Men and women in all parts of the world have a desperate need to take time from their demanding routines of everyday

74. 1 Nephi 11:9; see also fruit “desirable above all other fruit” in 1 Nephi 8:12, 15.

75. 1 Nephi 11:22–23, 25; see also 1 Nephi 15:36.

life and to quietly observe God's miracles taking place all around them. Think of what would happen if all of us took time to look carefully at the wonders of nature that surround us and devoted ourselves to learning more about this world that God created for us! ...

We sometimes feel great respect and reverence for creative genius as expressed in great art or music. How much more should we revere the power and majesty of our Divine Creator? We may stand in awe of man's creations of beautiful buildings or bridges. But remember the Apostle Paul's words to the Hebrews: "He who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God" (Hebrews 3:3–4).

Those who feel no reverence for the creations and the divine attributes of God likely will have little appreciation for other sacred things. Such a lack of veneration for God's creations may diminish until a person becomes totally insensitive to the feelings of others. This, I am afraid, is the condition in some parts of the world. ...

To truly reverence the Creator, we must appreciate his creations. We need to plan to take time to observe the marvels of nature. Today, we can easily become surrounded by brick buildings and asphalt surfaces that shelter us from real life around us.⁷⁶

Thus, encounters with trees in their natural and cultivated states can remind us that human creations and worldly desires distract us from what is truly important and that we must put God first in our lives.

Prominence and Priorities

In Lehi's dream, the tree apparently stood alone in or by a "large and spacious field" and against the voluminous and high building. We do not know the tree's size, but it was prominent enough that people in the large building could see it and make fun of people eating fruit at the tree.

Many trees are prominent features of a landscape or have special cultural or personal significance. In the Old Testament, we read that trees were markers of places and references to locations (Table 2,

76. M. Russell Ballard, "God's Love for His Children," *Ensign* 18, no. 5 (May 1988): 57–59.

Appendix). For example, “So Abraham moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron where he built an altar to the Lord.”⁷⁷ In Utah, the Jardine Juniper has been growing in the Bear River Mountains for over 1500 years,⁷⁸ and it is a marker to those that walk the trail to stand in its presence. Its contorted limbs grow upward, marking the place where it has endured, silently and simply persistent, through centuries of drought, fire, and bounty, just as many people have sustained themselves through good and difficult times. Other prominent trees stand alone in a field, by the side of a road, in a special place in a city, or even in a forest. Some trees have such value to people that great efforts are made to save the tree. The great German writer, Hermann Hesse, wrote an essay, called “Trees” (see the Appendix). His words echo those of our scriptures:

For me, trees have always been the most penetrating preachers. I revere them when they live in tribes and families, in forests and groves. And even more I revere them when they stand alone ... Nothing is holier, nothing is more exemplary than a beautiful, strong tree.⁷⁹

When we see a prominent tree, this can remind us to put God first in our lives. The tree in Lehi’s dream was simple but prominent and stood out against the allure of worldliness symbolized by the great and spacious building and the numerous well-dressed people there who mocked and scoffed at the people who went to the tree and ate the fruit (1 Nephi 8:10–12, 26–28). The building likely was larger and sat higher than the tree, but the building later fell despite its grandeur (1 Nephi 11:36). Wickedness, the scriptures say, will likewise fall. Through their quiet dignity, prominent trees can remind us that

77. Genesis 13:18 (New International Version, 1984 Edition). Other translations render this passage slightly differently: “So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the Lord” (New International Version, 2011 Edition). The King James Version states, “Then Abram removed *his* tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which *is* in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.” However, in the footnotes, an alternate translation of “in the plain of Mamre” is “by the terebinth(s) of Mamre” indicating a tree or trees. The Revised Standard Version and English Standard Version refer to the trees as “oaks of Mamre.”

78. Edmund Schulman, “Longevity under Adversity in Conifers,” *Science* 119, no. 3091 (26 March 1954): 396–99.

79. Hermann Hesse, “Trees,” in *Wandering: Notes and Sketches by Hermann Hesse*, trans. James Wright (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 57.

despite the gospel's simplicity and seeming lack of sophistication, the gospel's rewards are worth more than artificial, man-made, and fleeting worldliness. These trees remind us that meekness is a strength. The gospel stands prominently and meekly against worldly values that are attractive but ultimately do not bring joy.

Persistence and Patience

The tree in Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision was not in an ideal environment. In the dream, we learn the tree grows by a river and a fountain or head of the river (1 Nephi 8:13–14, 20). But, some people drown in the fountain (1 Nephi 8:32), and in the vision and from Nephi's further explanation, we learn water in the river and fountain was filthy and represented wickedness (1 Nephi 12:16, 15:26–29).⁸⁰ As a further analogy of wickedness and another sign of a poor environment, the great and spacious building and the people therein were also near the tree (1 Nephi 8:26–27, 31, 33–34; 11:35). The tree obviously held little value to the people in the building. In a direct correlation with the tree, Jesus Christ lived in a hostile environment. Yet, like the tree, Jesus was able to provide gospel fruit for us. Of course, his life and sacrifice is the focal point of God's love — the meaning of the tree.

Trees that grow in unusual places or poor environments invite special admiration for their tenacity and persistence. Often these may be individual trees. Some trees can germinate and maintain themselves in places that seem impossible to support life — cracks in precipitous crags, beaches of nutrient-poor sand, even deserts that sustain less than 13 centimeters (five inches) of rain each year (Figure 6). Intense heat, cold, and wind that often are found in these places make these trees especially admirable. Other trees high on mountains or on windy plains also must persist against great obstacles. Trees often withstand fierce windstorms, blazing forest fires, and outbreaks of voracious beetles.

Ironically, trees growing in harsh places have outlasted (by hundreds of years) those of the same species who grew in a lush environment. In a survey of several species in North and South America, some interesting observations were made:

80. Two fountains of water may exist, or perhaps water in the fountain quickly became polluted. We learn in Nephi's vision that the rod of iron "led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life," and both the living waters and the tree represented the love of God (1 Nephi 11:25).

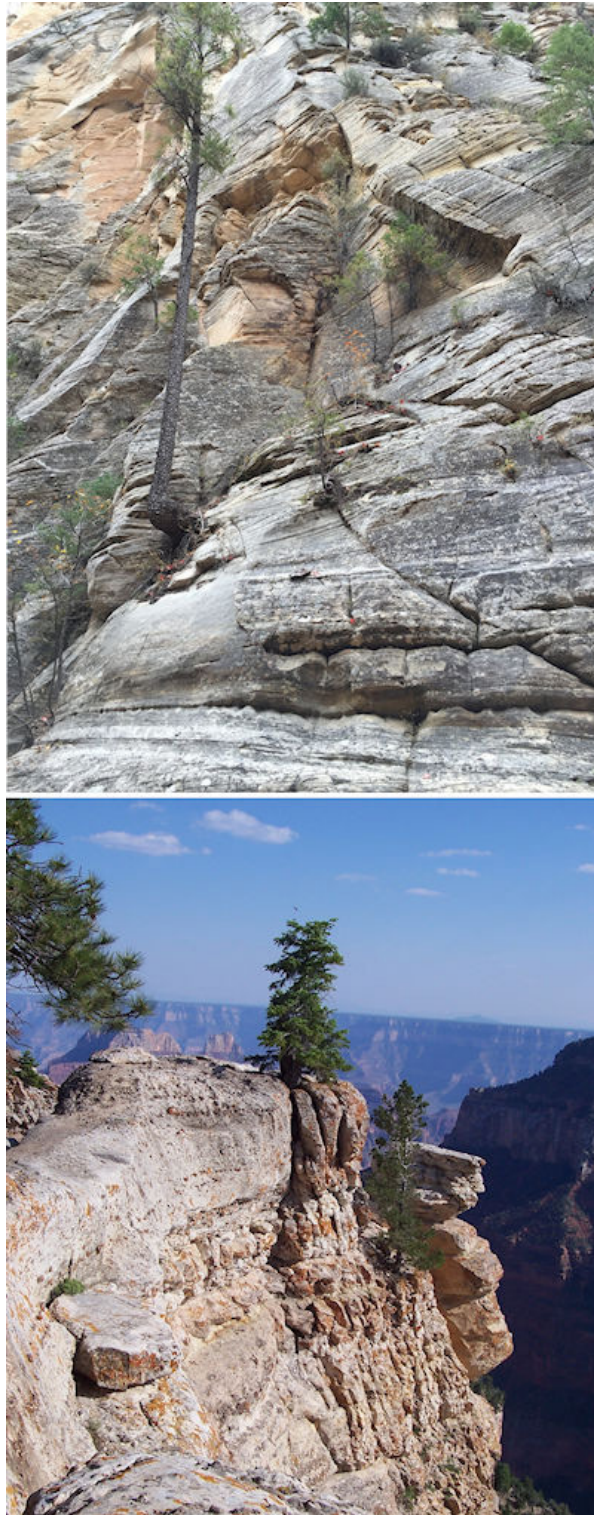


Figure 6. Examples of trees growing on cliffs in the southwestern United States. Top, a relatively large tree growing at a 90-degree angle out from a cliff with several smaller trees also growing in the cliff face. This group of trees is located along the Virgin River in or near Zion National Park, Utah, United States. Bottom, two small trees growing on a cliff and narrow ridge on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, Arizona, United States. Photographs by David Belnap.

- “The trees of great longevity ... are all from environments strongly limited with respect to moisture or temperature or both.”
- The older trees “tend, in general, to be relatively free of center rot at ages that are associated with much rottenness in fast-growing, favorably situated trees of the same species.”
- “Open stands, rocky sites, stunted size, and sparse vegetation seem to inhibit the direct agents of destruction.”
- “Some individual resinous conifers, having suffered severe mechanical injury, were stimulated to excess resin production and, thus, perhaps fought off the agents of decay.”
- Significant parts of some trees died but the trees continued to live with one or two remaining living branchlets.
- In some old trees, not only did significant portions of the tree die, but the remaining branch or branches had only “a single vertical or spiraling thin strip of bark-covered living tissue.” The remaining portion of the trunk or branch had no covering of bark. In these cases, the trees still showed “little or no sign of center rot.”⁸¹

The harsh environment seems to have stimulated these long-living trees to be more resilient. Cliffs are a particularly rough place to grow. Trees growing there are often stunted. On the other hand, crags have protected trees from fire and from being cut down for human use because of their inaccessibility and stunted growth.⁸² Amazingly, on cliffs in the Ardèche Canyon in southeast France, Phoenician juniper trees have even been observed growing upside down, with roots embedded in the cliff face higher than the trunk and crown.⁸³ In the Book of Mormon allegory of the olive trees, trees also “brought forth much fruit” in “poor” places (Jacob 5:21–23).

Trees that grow in difficult conditions can remind us that the storms of life are worth enduring. When we contemplate the many ways that trees survive for their long lives, we can think of the ways we can sustain our faith in God through the hard times that we must endure. Trees growing in hostile places can inspire us to reach for our highest potential

81. Schulman, “Longevity under Adversity,” 396–99.

82. D. W. Larson et al., “Evidence for the Widespread Occurrence of Ancient Forests on Cliffs,” *Journal of Biogeography* 27, no. 2 (March 2000): 319–31.

83. Coralie Mathaux et al., “Ancient Juniper Trees Growing on Cliffs: Toward a Long Mediterranean Tree-Ring Chronology,” *Dendrochronologia* 37 (2016): 79–88.

despite obstacles and forces against us. As the tree in Lehi's dream thrived among many who despised it, we can live the gospel and endure despite many who may ridicule or hinder us or circumstances that thwart us. Hesse wrote: "And every young farmboy knows that the hardest and noblest wood has the narrowest rings, that high on the mountains and in continuing danger the most indestructible, the strongest, the ideal trees grow."⁸⁴

Furthermore, the persistence of trees reminds us that God's love and his teachings withstand fierce "storms." This is a key idea in thinking about trees and faith. The word *tree* has its roots in the Indo-European *deru*, which means firm, solid and steadfast. It is the same base word that produced the Old English *treowe* and *troth*, which mean true, just as God's love is for us and our love and reverence for God should be.

Growth Throughout Life

The slow growth of trees is another reminder to us to be patient and persistent, to "not be weary in well doing."⁸⁵ Like a tree, a testimony of the gospel or sensitivity to spiritual matters usually takes years to develop and starts from a simple seed. Alma promised that from the simple seed our spiritualilty will grow into a beautiful tree with "most precious" fruit if we will nourish our souls with faith, great diligence, and patience.⁸⁶ Like Lehi's and Nephi's tree, the fruit of that tree will be "sweet above all that is sweet" (Alma 32:42), and then other people can get spiritual nourishment from us. Other worthwhile things, like building good character, developing a strong family, or learning a skill or building a career, also take time. Like trees, these things improve and strengthen with time.

The annual rings seen when a tree is cut down show the slow growth of trees. The amount of growth for an individual tree depends on a complex set of factors: the availability of water and nutrients, the proximity of its neighbor, and how much sunlight can reach it. Hesse wrote:

When a tree is cut down and reveals its naked death-wound to the sun, one can read its whole history in the luminous, inscribed disk of its trunk: in the rings of its years, its scars, all

84. Hesse, "Trees," 57.

85. Galatians 6:9, 2 Thessalonians 3:13, Alma 37:34, Doctrine and Covenants 64:33.

86. Alma 32:26–43. See also, David A. Bednar, "The Spirit of Revelation," *Ensign* 41, no. 5 (May 2011): 87–90.

the struggle, all the suffering, all the sickness, all the happiness and prosperity stand truly written, the narrow years and the luxurious years, the attacks withstood, the storms endured.⁸⁷

Like the growth of tree rings in plentiful and non-plentiful seasons, during some periods of our lives each of us grows faster than at other times. For trees that grow in less favorable places, growth can be extremely slow. For example, an alerce tree from Chile grew at a rate of only one quarter of a millimeter (the width of five human hairs) per year!⁸⁸ If trees can endure years of hardship and deprivation of their basic needs, and yet still produce something awe inspiring, then so can we.

But trees and people do not need to be in harsh places to grow more slowly than others. A survey of four North American tree species showed “in all 4 species the longest-lived trees experienced slower growth rates than trees sampled at relatively young ages. Furthermore, long-lived trees with slow growth rates appear to mix with shorter-lived, fast-growing trees in the same forests.”⁸⁹ This reminds each of us to focus on our own individual spiritual growth and not compare ourselves to others.

Nothing about trees is rapid — even cultivating trees for food requires a long investment. A farmer must carefully plan where to plant trees because they cannot be rotated from year-to-year as with annual crops such as wheat or corn. Once planted, a farmer must then wait multiple years before harvesting the tree’s bounteous fruit.

Throughout the world, growth of wild trees over these long times is impressive. In North America, the giant trees that take centuries to achieve their grand height are the redwood trees of California, the giant sequoias and the coastal redwoods (Figure 7), which are large and tall, almost beyond belief.⁹⁰ But many other examples of trees of enormous height and girth exist, including the alerce trees of the Andes

87. Hesse, “Trees,” 57.

88. This is the average radial growth over the tree’s 1,600-year life. The radial stem growth rate for this tree’s most recent 130 years was 4.6 mm per century. Schulman, “Longevity under Adversity,” 398–99.

89. Bryan A. Black, Jim J. Colbert, and Neil Pederson, “Relationships between Radial Growth Rates and Lifespan within North American Tree Species,” *Ecoscience* 15, no. 3 (2008): 349–57. See also, Sarah E. Johnson and Marc D. Abrams, “Age Class, Longevity and Growth Rate Relationships: Protracted Growth Increases in Old Trees in the Eastern United States,” *Tree Physiology* 29 (2009): 1317–28.

90. 116 and 96 meters tall for tallest known coastal redwood and giant sequoia, respectively, and aboveground masses of 424 and 582 Mg, respectively, for the largest of these species. Sillett et al., “Growth Potential of California Redwoods,” 181–212.



Figure 7. Two types of redwood trees. Top row, two views of coastal redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) trees in Humboldt Redwoods State Park, California, United States. Bottom row, two views of giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) in Kings Canyon National Park, California, United States. Note the fire scar on the tree (left). Right, giant sequoia cones near the base of a trunk. Note, again, the burnt trunk. Insets, a giant sequoia cone (bottom left) and seeds from that cone (top right). These are from a tree growing in suburban Salt Lake City. Scale is millimeters (smallest increment) and centimeters (numbered bars). Both coastal redwood and giant sequoia often must deal with fire during their lifetimes, and fire scars are a common site on older trees. Photographs by David Belnap.

Mountains,⁹¹ the Himalayan cypress of Tibet,⁹² the Yellow Meranti tree of Borneo,⁹³ and the giant eucalyptus trees of Australia.⁹⁴

Trees grow throughout their lives, and our spiritual growth should too. Trees have “indeterminate growth,” which means that a tree only stops growing when it dies. The gospel is also a “living” entity that helps us grow spiritually throughout our lives. We must continually strive to grow spiritually — even in old age. Trees give us a good example. For coastal redwoods and giant sequoias, annual growth in wood volume and biomass was higher in older trees; trees more than “2000 years old are among the fastest growing individuals of both redwood species.”⁹⁵ A survey of 403 tree species throughout the world showed that for 97% of the species the larger (and presumably older) trees had higher growth rates than smaller, younger trees.⁹⁶

Analogous to mighty trees, our lives can be monumental, enduring, and constantly growing. Like trees, we must endure hardship and good times and grow throughout our lives.

Being Rooted

To grow, trees must be well rooted. Within a single tree, roots are diverse in their form, structure, and function. The largest roots, the coarse roots, are thick and woody, and provide the strong support that a tree needs to hold up the great weight of its aboveground mass. These roots do not take up nutrients or water. Those are the functions that are accomplished by the fine roots, which are less than 2 centimeters

91. Over 60 meters tall and over five meters in diameter. Thomas T. Veblen, Roberto J. Delmastro, and Juan E. Schlatter, “The Conservation of *Fitzroya cupressoides* and Its Environment in Southern Chile,” *Environmental Conservation*, 3, no. 4 (Winter 1976): 291–301.

92. 102.3 meters tall. “Tallest Tree of Asia Found in Tibet,” *China Daily (Xinhua)*, May 27, 2023, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202305/27/WS6471edd1a310b6054fad5690.html>.

93. 100.8 meters tall, trunk above buttress is 2.12 m in diameter, crown is 40 m in diameter. Alexander Shenkin et al., “The World’s Tallest Tropical Tree in Three Dimensions,” *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change* 2 (June 2019): article 32.

94. 89–114 meters tall. D. Y. P. Tng et al., “Giant Eucalypts — Globally Unique Fire-Adapted Rain-Forest Trees?,” *New Phytologist* 196 (2012): 1001–14.

95. Sillett et al., “Growth Potential of California Redwoods,” 206. “Except for recovery periods following temporary reductions in crown size, annual increments of wood volume and biomass growth increase as redwoods enlarge with age until extrinsic forces cause tree death” (p. 181).

96. N. L. Stephenson et al., “Rate of Tree Carbon Accumulation Increases Continuously with Tree Size,” *Nature* 507 (2014): 90–93.

(about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch) in diameter. The fine roots, with microscopic root hairs at their tips, permeate soils and have the capacity to absorb water and dissolved nutrients — such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and calcium from moisture that fills the spaces between soil particles.

The root systems of trees are like the elements of our faith, appearing in different forms — such as prayer, song, service, and tithing — but together providing the support and continuing nourishment of our church. Like trees, the elements that manifest our faith appear in many sizes and shapes, from a single silent prayer thrown heavenward to the 360 mingled voices of the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square.

Trees stay put. They cannot move in response to their environment. They are a constant in their natural community. This reminds us to stay planted in the gospel. The condition of “staying put” also means that a tree — and a follower of our faith — must find ways to endure the challenges that it — or we — encounter. A tree cannot run away from the attack of beetles or a severe drought. Instead, it has features to withstand such challenges. Pine trees exude a sticky sap that can expel a beetle that bores into its bark. A cottonwood tree sends a fast-growing taproot into the soil to seek and find moisture when it faces a lack of water in its desert habitat. Buttresses or buttress roots (above ground at base of the tree) give extra support to keep trees from toppling over, especially in heavy winds. Similarly, we can seek and find ways to renew our faith and the comfort we gain from knowing that God’s love is present, even if our faith seems to have weakened or vanished.

Unlike the well-rooted tree in Lehi’s dream, the great and spacious building had a poor foundation or perhaps no foundation. The building “stood as it were in the air” (1 Nephi 8:26). No wonder then that the building (representing “vain imaginations” and people’s pride) later collapsed in a great fall (1 Nephi 11:36, 12:18).

If our roots are in, or turn to, worldliness, then we will perish spiritually. Lehi noted that some people came and partook of the delicious fruit but then fell away because of the well-dressed people in the large building who mocked them (1 Nephi 8:24–28). Apostle M. Russell Ballard spoke of visiting a small grove of sequoia trees that had been planted on the campus of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Despite flourishing there for over 50 years, one of the great trees unexpectedly died. The campus arborist discovered the tree died from a lack of water. Construction of a new building nearby resulted in the shift of the aquifer that nourished the tree, and the tree died. Elder Ballard compared that to people who “once received their spiritual nourishment from the well

of living water offered by Jesus Christ. But for one reason or another, they have shifted away from the source of spiritual nourishment, and without that nourishment their spirit was dulled, and they eventually died spiritually.” Elder Ballard then encouraged people to develop simple habits that keep us rooted in the gospel:

The Lord outlined simple, personal habits that keep us rooted, grounded, and connected to Him. Such habits, when done with full purpose of heart, real intent, and without hypocrisy and deception, allow us to be unwavering disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These essential habits include the things that seem to easily slip away in the rush of our very busy lives, even when we are engaged in good things like pursuing an education, working to support a family, and involving ourselves in community and Church service.

They include sincere daily prayer, faithful fasting, regular study and pondering of the scriptures and the words of the living prophets, making the Sabbath day a delight, partaking of the sacrament with humility and always remembering the Savior, worshipping in the temple as often as possible, and, finally, reaching out to the poor and lonely — both those close by and those across the world.⁹⁷

If our roots are planted in gospel soil, our spiritual tree will grow and, like Alma said, “be a tree springing up unto everlasting life” and will produce delicious fruit (Alma 32:42–43).

Ability to Perceive the Hidden

Trees provide ways to help us see that which is hidden to the regular ways we perceive the world. For example, trees are how we see the wind, and this is described by Christina Rossetti’s poem “Who Has Seen the Wind” about wind and how trees give the movement of air a voice:

Who has seen the wind?
Neither I nor you:
But when the leaves hang trembling,
The wind is passing through.

97. M. Russell Ballard, “An Epistle from an Apostle,” *Liahona* 43 (September 2019): 28–29.

Who has seen the wind?

Neither you nor I:

But when the trees bow down their heads,

The wind is passing by.⁹⁸

Trees also help us see what is underground. As Elder Ballard noted, the dried up aquifer at Brigham Young University was only noticed when the sequoia tree died.⁹⁹ Tree health can be a marker of the health of an orchard, forest, or other natural community that we otherwise would not perceive.

Seeing trees can remind us to see hidden aspects of the spiritual world, to tend to this important aspect of our lives that we and others will not easily notice. With the press of urgent physical needs, such as work and family obligations, neglecting our spiritual health is easy to do, as Elder Ballard mentioned.¹⁰⁰

Admiration, Love, and Reverence

Trees inspire awe, reverence, and love in us. We stand in amazement in the presence of old, large trees. We are filled with wonder when we see young trees and realize their potential to grow into something magnificent. Groves of trees, especially ones with old and large trees, often inspire a feeling of reverence. Sometimes these groves are called “cathedral forests.” Nearly everyone has a tree that is special and loved: the tree we climbed as a child, the tree with a limb that held a swing, the tree with a hollow where we hid childhood treasures, or a tree outside the temple in which we were married. President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “I love trees.”¹⁰¹ Correlating to Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions, the love we have for trees can remind us of the love God has for us. The inspiration we get from trees can inspire us to seek for Godly, and not worldly, things. Trees often draw our eyes heavenward, reminding us of God and to place the Lord first in our lives.

98. Christina G. Rossetti, “Who Has Seen the Wind?,” in Jane Werner, ed., *The Golden Book of Poetry* (New York: Golden Press, 1949), 46.

99. Ballard, “Epistle,” 28–29.

100. Ibid.

101. Gordon B. Hinckley, “To All the World in Testimony,” *Ensign* 30, no. 5 (May 2000): 6.

Connections to Other Faiths

The reverence for trees held by people of faith is universal, and found in the scriptures, rituals, and celebrations of many faiths. For example, Jews celebrate the holiday of “Tub Shvat,” the new year for the trees, in which a special Seder, or ceremonial dinner of tree fruits and nuts are eaten, and people plant trees in their communities and Israel. The originator of the faith of Buddha sat beneath a Bodhi (fig) tree for three days and nights, after which he found enlightenment. Hindus celebrate the “marriage” between one of their deities, named Vishnu, and the Tulsi tree, a tree in the basil family, to represent the deep connection between the world of gods and the world of people.¹⁰² Eastern Orthodox Christianity writings are similar to those of Lehi and Nephi. St. Isaac of Nineveh (or St. Isaac the Syrian) wrote,

Paradise is the love of God, wherein is the enjoyment of all blessedness, and there the blessed Paul partook of supernatural nourishment. When he tasted there of the tree of life, he cried out, saying, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” ... The tree of life is the love of God from which Adam fell away, and thereafter he saw joy no longer, and he toiled and labored in the land of thorns.¹⁰³

Perhaps this universal reverence for trees is one of the ways that God, as the Book of Mormon teaches, has spoken “unto all nations of the earth.”¹⁰⁴

Conclusions

We can learn valuable correlations by studying ancient meanings of the tree of life and other sacred trees, but we also get value from our own culture. In her discussion about the Book of Mormon allegory of the olive tree, M. Catherine Thomas wrote,

The finite mind wants to pin down a one-to-one correspondence between the elements of an allegory and that which they represent, but the divine mind works in multiple layers of

102. See also Nadkarni, *Between Earth and Sky*, 214–42.

103. *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2011), 357–58.

104. 2 Nephi 29:12; see also verse 8.

meanings for symbols. In scripture the meaning often lies in the aggregate of allusions and associations.¹⁰⁵

We can make a similar point about Lehi's, Nephi's, and Alma's trees. Their words are pertinent to us today, not just because trees were sacred to ancient people, but also because of the positive lessons we know about trees from our own values, mores, traditions, and observations (including scientific ones).

Trees are majestic, amazing, living things that are universally cherished by humans everywhere. Trees are valuable to us today in practical and in spiritual ways. Hesse wrote: "Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life."¹⁰⁶

During the Israelite Exodus, bitter, undrinkable water was healed by a tree that was cast into the water after Moses prayed to the Lord for help.¹⁰⁷ In our often bitter, painful world, trees can likewise help us heal in important ways. The righteousness symbolized by trees can heal us from bitterness and heartache. The beauty and majesty of trees can bring peace and solace to our hearts, especially as we look heavenward, where trees lead our eyes.

The trees around us are potent symbols of the love of God and our own spiritual development. Trees and spiritual manifestations are gifts from a higher source. Trees have Godlike characteristics. They supply bounty, give joy, have great strength, and impart spiritual comfort. They provide shelter to people, to numerous animals, and even to other plants. Combined with the teachings of Lehi, Nephi, and Alma, trees are prominent and visible reminders to put God first in our lives, think of eternal values, shun pride, be patient, and have roots in the right place. Trees can remind us of heavenly beauty and that God's message and love are for all people — who are our brothers and sisters. We can treasure trees even more because of the link to the beautiful tree of Lehi's dream,

105. Thomas, "Jacob's Allegory," 13.

106. Hesse, "Trees," 58.

107. "So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet" (Exodus 15:22–25).

Nephi's vision, and Alma's parable. Whenever we see a tree or eat fruit or nuts from a tree, we can be reminded of God's love for us and to choose the Lord's way above all else.

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Appendix

Trees

Hermann Hesse¹⁰⁸

For me, trees have always been the most penetrating preachers. I revere them when they live in tribes and families, in forests and groves. And even more I revere them when they stand alone. They are like lonely

108. Hesse, "Trees," 57–59.

persons. Not like hermits who have stolen away out of some weakness, but like great, solitary men, like Beethoven and Nietzsche. In their highest boughs the world rustles, their roots rest in infinity; but they do not lose themselves there, they struggle with all the force of their lives for one thing only: to fulfill themselves according to their own laws, to build up their own form, to represent themselves. Nothing is holier, nothing is more exemplary than a beautiful, strong tree. When a tree is cut down and reveals its naked death-wound to the sun, one can read its whole history in the luminous, inscribed disk of its trunk: in the rings of its years, its scars, all the struggle, all the suffering, all the sickness, all the happiness and prosperity stand truly written, the narrow years and the luxurious years, the attacks withstood, the storms endured. And every young farmboy knows that the hardest and noblest wood has the narrowest rings, that high on the mountains and in continuing danger the most indestructible, the strongest, the ideal trees grow.

Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life.

A tree says: A kernel is hidden in me, a spark, a thought, I am life from eternal life. The attempt and the risk that the eternal mother took with me is unique, unique the form and veins of my skin, unique the smallest play of leaves in my branches and the smallest scar on my bark. I was made to form and reveal the eternal in my smallest special detail.

A tree says: My strength is trust. I know nothing about my fathers, I know nothing about the thousand children that every year spring out of me. I live out the secret of my seed to the very end, and I care for nothing else. I trust that God is in me. I trust that my labor is holy. Out of this trust I live.

When we are stricken and cannot bear our lives any longer, then a tree has something to say to us: Be still! Be still! Look at me! Life is not easy, life is not difficult. Those are childish thoughts. Let God speak within you, and your thoughts will grow silent. You are anxious because your path leads away from mother and home. But every step and every day lead you back again to the mother. Home is neither here nor there. Home is within you, or home is nowhere at all.

A longing to wander tears my heart when I hear trees rustling in the wind at evening. If one listens to them silently for a long time, this longing reveals its kernel, its meaning. It is not so much a matter of escaping from one's suffering, though it may seem to be so. It is a longing

for home, for a memory of the mother, for new metaphors for life. It leads home. Every path leads homeward, every step is birth, every step is death, every grave is mother.

So the tree rustles in the evening, when we stand uneasy before our own childish thoughts. Trees have long thoughts, long-breathing and restful, just as they have longer lives than ours. They are wiser than we are, as long as we do not listen to them. But when we have learned how to listen to trees, then the brevity and the quickness and the childlike hastiness of our thoughts achieve an incomparable joy. Whoever has learned how to listen to trees no longer wants to be a tree. He wants to be nothing except what he is. That is home. That is happiness.

Table 1. Known sacred trees of the ancient Near East.

Tree	Description and Reference
almond	L. Yarden proposed that the almond tree was Israel’s sacred tree and the basis for the Menorah. For example, Yarden notes Aaron’s rod miraculously budded and produced blossoms and almonds (Numbers 17:8). L. Yarden, <i>The Tree of Light: A Study of the Menorah The Seven-Branched Lampstand</i> (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), 35, 40–42.
apple	In Greek mythology, “Heracles descends into Hades, the realm of departed spirits, and acquires golden apples from the sacred grove of the Hesperides. He accomplishes all his tasks but has to give the apples back to the heavenly guardians because it is not proper for mortals to have the sacred fruit.” Griggs, “Tree of Life,” 30.
cedar	see note <i>a</i>
cypress	<p>Speaking of a place where the dead go, “There is to the right a spring, near which is standing a white cypress. There the souls of the dead who descend refresh themselves.” “Greek plates always refer to a cypress tree.” C. Wilfred Griggs, “The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book,” <i>BYU Studies</i> 22, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 266, 273.</p> <p>“Now the color of the tree of life is like the sun. And its branches are beautiful. Its leaves are like those of the cypress. Its fruit is like a bunch of grapes when it is white. Its height goes as far as heaven.” Hans-Gebhard Bethge, Bentley Layton, and Societas Coptica Hierosolymitana, trans., “On the Origin of the World (II,5 and XIII,2),” in <i>The Nag Hammadi Library in English</i>, ed. James M. Robinson, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 178–79, also found at http://gnosis.org/naghamm/origin.html.</p> <p>From Islamic tradition, “the scene takes place in a green and blossoming Garden of Eden, its center accentuated by a single cypress immediately behind the throne on the vertical axis of the composition, probably representing the Tuba tree of Paradise.” Rachel Milstein, “The Stories and Their Illustrations,” in <i>Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of Qisas al-Anbiya</i>, ed. Rachel Milstein, Karin Rührdanz, and Barbara Schmitz (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1999), 107.</p>

Tree	Description and Reference
date palm	Solomon's Temple contained carvings or decorations of palm trees (1 Kings 6:29, 32, 35; 7:36; 2 Chronicles 3:5), and Ezekiel saw in vision a temple containing the same (Ezekiel 40:16, 22, 26, 31, 34, 37; 41:18–20, 25–26).
	1 Enoch 24–25 refers to a tree identified as the tree of life with beautiful fruit: "Among them was a tree such as I had never smelled, and among them was no other like it. It had a fragrance sweeter smelling than all spices. And its leaves and its blossom and the tree never wither. Its fruit is beautiful, like dates of the palm trees. Then I said, 'How beautiful is this tree and fragrant, and its leaves are lovely, and its blossoms are lovely to behold.'" George W. E. Nickelsburg, <i>1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108</i> (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 312.
	Dates, of course, are a sweet fruit. George Potter and Richard Wellington suggest Lehi lived in a wadi that contained palm trees when he had the dream. George Potter and Richard Wellington, <i>Lehi in the Wilderness: 81 New Documented Evidences that the Book of Mormon is a True History</i> (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2003), 42–45.
	see notes <i>a</i> and <i>b</i>
fig	see note <i>b</i>
myrtle	see note <i>c</i>
oak	see note <i>d</i>
olive	"But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God" (Psalm 52:8). Two olive trees were by the lampstand (candlestick) in the temple (Zechariah 4:2–3, 11–14).
	Reviewed by Tvedtnes, for example: "In some early traditions, the olive tree is identified with the tree of life of Genesis 2:9 and 3:22." John A. Tvedtnes, "Olive Oil: Symbol of the Holy Ghost," in <i>The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5</i> , ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 429–30.
	see note <i>b</i>
persea (Ished)	"Ancient Egyptians believed the Ished — a persea tree — grew in the temples at Heliopolis and Abydos. Ancient Egyptian ritual required the names of each pharaoh to be inscribed on the leaves of this tree of life during the coronation ceremony." Griggs, "Tree of Life," 28–29.
pine	see note <i>a</i>
pomegranates	Pomegranates (presumably just the fruit and not the whole tree) decorated Aaron's robe (Exodus 28:34–35; 39:24–26) and Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 7:18, 20, 42; 2 Chronicles 3:16; 4:13; 2 Kings 25:17; Jeremiah 52:22–23).
	see note <i>c</i>
sycamore	The sycamore tree was sacred to the Egyptians. For example, "two sycamore trees are described as being at the door of the Lord of the East." "Egyptian literature consistently mentions a sycamore." Griggs, "Book of Mormon," 272–73.
	see note <i>a</i>
tamarisk	see note <i>a</i>

Tree	Description and Reference
terebinth	see notes <i>a</i> and <i>d</i>
walnut	see note <i>c</i>
willow	see note <i>c</i>

Table 1 Notes

- a From a review: “Throughout Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Levant, several species appear as sacred in images and texts, including the date palm, sycamore, terebinth, tamarisk, cedar, and pine.” Charles L. Echols, “The Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Literature” in Estes, *Tree of Life*, 5.
- b Reviewed by Ricks, “Section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants was designated by Joseph Smith as the ‘olive leaf . . . plucked from the Tree of Paradise.’ While there is no canonical writing that explicitly associates the olive with the tree of life (which is what I understand by the tree of paradise) or any other tree in paradise (by which I understand the Garden of Eden), this connection is frequently made in the literature of the Second Temple period. . . . Later Jewish tradition occasionally debated the specific botanical species of the tree of life, some asserting that it was a fig tree, while others held it to be an olive tree or a date palm.” Stephen D. Ricks, “Olive Culture in the Second Temple Era and Early Rabbinic Period,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 464–66.
- c In a review, Daniel Peterson wrote, “The rabbinic authors of the Jewish Mishnah (compiled around 200 A.D.) explain the asherah as a tree that was worshiped.” He added, “The rabbis do not point to any particular type of tree but include grapevines as well as pomegranate, walnut, myrtle, and willow trees and argue that the wood and fruit of such trees must not be used.” Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah” (1998), 205, 235n79.
- d Referring to Joshua 24:26, Levenson stated, “Joshua records the terms of the covenant in a scroll which he appears to deposit by a boulder at the foot of the sacred tree growing in the (now YHWHistic) Temple at Shechem.” Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 34, 36. The King James and New International Versions identify the tree as an oak tree, and the English Standard Version as a terebinth tree.

Table 2. Trees as geographical markers, sacred markers, or both in the Bible.^a

Reference	English Standard ^b	New International ^c	King James ^d
Genesis 12:6–7, dwelling, altar, and vision site for Abram	Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak [terebinth] of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.	Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.	And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.
Genesis 13:18 dwelling and altar site for Abram	So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks [terebinths] of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.	So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the Lord.	Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of [by the terebinth(s) of] Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.
Genesis 14:13, home of Abram	Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks [terebinths] of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner. These were allies of Abram.	A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshkol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram.	And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre [by the terebinth(s) of Mamre] the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.
Genesis 18:1, vision site for Abraham	And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks [or terebinths] of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.	The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.	And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day.
Genesis 21:33, prayer site for Abraham	Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.	Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Eternal God.	And Abraham planted a grove [or tamarisk] in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. ^e

Reference	English Standard ^b	New International ^c	King James ^d
Genesis 23:17–18, burial site for Sarah	So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city.	So Ephron’s field in Machpelah near Mamre — both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field — was deeded to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city.	And the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city.
Genesis 35:8, burial site for Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse	And Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth [Allon-bacuth means oak of weeping].	Now Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died and was buried under the oak outside Bethel. So it was named Allon Bakuth [Allon Bakuth means oak of weeping].	But Deborah Rebekah’s nurse died, and she was buried beneath Beth-el under an oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth [Oak of weeping].
Exodus 15:27, campsite for Israel	Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.	Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.	And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.
Numbers 33:9, campsite for Israel	And they set out from Marah and came to Elim; at Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there.	They left Marah and went to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there.	And they removed from Marah, and came unto Elim: and in Elim were twelve fountains of water, and threescore and ten palm trees; and they pitched there.
Deuteronomy 8:8, description of promised land	a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey.	a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey.	A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive [i.e. olive trees], and honey.

Reference	English Standard ^b	New International ^c	King James ^d
Deuteronomy 11:30, prominent feature of Moreh	Are they not beyond the Jordan, west of the road, toward the going down of the sun, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the oak [oaks, or terebinths] of Moreh?	As you know, these mountains are across the Jordan, westward, toward the setting sun, near the great trees of Moreh, in the territory of those Canaanites living in the Arabah in the vicinity of Gilgal.	Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land of the Canaanites, which dwell in the champaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains [oaks] of Moreh?
Joshua 19:33, boundary marker for tribe of Naphtali	And their boundary ran from Heleph, from the oak in Zaanannim, and Adami-nekeb, and Jabneel, as far as Lakkum, and it ended at the Jordan.	Their boundary went from Heleph and the large tree in Zaanannim, passing Adami Nekeb and Jabneel to Lakkum and ending at the Jordan.	And their coast was from Heleph, from Allon to Zaanannim, and Adami, Nekeb, and Jabneel, unto Lakum; and the outgoings thereof were at Jordan.
Joshua 24:26, adjacent to the sanctuary of the Lord	And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.	And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord.	And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.
Judges 4:11, prominent feature near Kedesh	Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh.	Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim near Kedesh.	Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh.
Judges 9:6, prominent feature in Shechem	And all the leaders of Shechem came together, and all Beth-millo, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar at Shechem.	Then all the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo gathered beside the great tree at the pillar in Shechem to crown Abimelek king.	And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain [terebinth tree] of the pillar that was in Shechem.

Reference	English Standard ^b	New International ^c	King James ^d
Judges 9:37, prominent feature	Gaal spoke again and said, "Look, people are coming down from the center of the land, and one company is coming from the direction of the Diviners' Oak."	But Gaal spoke up again: "Look, people are coming down from the central hill, and a company is coming from the direction of the diviners' tree."	And Gaal spake again and said, See there come people down by the middle of the land, and another company come along by the plain of Meonenim [the oak of the diviners].
1 Samuel 10:3, prominent feature of Tabor	Then you shall go on from there farther and come to the oak of Tabor. Three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there, one carrying three young goats, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a skin of wine.	Then you will go on from there until you reach the great tree of Tabor. Three men going up to worship God at Bethel will meet you there. One will be carrying three young goats, another three loaves of bread, and another a skin of wine.	Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Beth-el, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine.
1 Samuel 14:2, feature on outskirts of Gibeah	Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah in the pomegranate cave [or under the pomegranate tree] at Migron. The people who were with him were about six hundred men.	Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree in Migron. With him were about six hundred men.	And Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron: and the people that were with him were about six hundred men.
1 Samuel 22:6, feature of Gibeah	Now Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men who were with him. Saul was sitting at Gibeah under the tamarisk tree on the height with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him.	Now Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. And Saul was seated, spear in hand, under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, with all his officials standing at his side.	When Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men that were with him, (now Saul abode in Gibeah under a tree in Ramah, having his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him).
1 Samuel 31:13, burial site of Saul and sons	And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh and fasted seven days.	Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.	And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

Reference	English Standard ^b	New International ^c	King James ^d
2 Samuel 5:23–24, battle site	And when David inquired of the Lord, he said, “You shall not go up; go around to their rear, and come against them opposite the balsam trees. And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then rouse yourself, for then the Lord has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines.”	so David inquired of the Lord, and he answered, “Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the poplar trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the poplar trees, move quickly, because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army.”	And when David inquired of the Lord, he said, Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the Lord go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines.
1 Kings 13:14, resting place	And he went after the man of God and found him sitting under an oak. And he said to him, “Are you the man of God who came from Judah?” And he said, “I am.”	and rode after the man of God. He found him sitting under an oak tree and asked, “Are you the man of God who came from Judah?” “I am,” he replied.	And went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak: and he said unto him, Art thou the man of God that camest from Judah? And he said, I am.
1 Kings 19:4–5, resting and vision place for Elijah	But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.”	while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.”	But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree [broom-bush (a desert shrub)]: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers. And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat.

Reference	English Standard ^b	New International ^c	King James ^d
1 Chronicles 14:14–15, battle site	And when David again inquired of God, God said to him, “You shall not go up after them; go around and come against them opposite the balsam trees. And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then go out to battle, for God has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines.”	so David inquired of God again, and God answered him, “Do not go directly after them, but circle around them and attack them in front of the poplar trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the poplar trees, move out to battle, because that will mean God has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army.”	Therefore David inquired again of God; and God said unto him, Go not up after them; turn away from them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And it shall be, when thou shalt hear a sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt go out to battle: for God is gone forth before thee to smite the host of the Philistines.
Jeremiah 17:2, site for altars and asherim	while their children remember their altars and their Asherim, beside every green tree and on the high hills	Even their children remember their altars and Asherah poles beside the spreading trees and on the high hills.	Whilst their children remember their altars and their groves [asherim] by the green trees upon the high hills.
Ezekiel 47:7, part of a vision	As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other.	When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river.	Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other.
Ezekiel 47:12, part of a vision	And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.	Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.	And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.

Reference	English Standard ^b	New International ^c	King James ^d
Zechariah 4:2–3, olive trees by the lampstand	And he said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.”	He asked me, “What do you see?” I answered, “I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lamps on it, with seven channels to the lamps. Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.”	And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.
Zechariah 4:11–14, olive trees and anoined ones	Then I said to him, “What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?” And a second time I answered and said to him, “What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?” He said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” Then he said, “These are the two anoined ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”	Then I asked the angel, “What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?” Again I asked him, “What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?” He replied, “Do you not know what these are?” “No, my lord,” I said. So he said, “These are the two who are anoined to serve the Lord of all the earth.”	Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two anoined ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.

Reference	English Standard ^b	New International ^c	King James ^d
Matthew 21:19, Jesus curses a fig tree	And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once.	Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.	And when he saw a fig tree in the way [or by the road], he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.
Mark 11:13–14, Jesus curses a fig tree	And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.	Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.	And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.
Mark 11:20–21, fig tree withered	As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered."	In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"	And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.
Luke 19:4, Zacchaeus climbs a tree to see Jesus	So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.	So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.	And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.
John 1:48, 50, Jesus saw Nathanael under a fig tree	Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."	"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."	Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

Table 2 Notes

- a Because of different tree words that are often used in these verses, three translations are given. If alternative translations were given in the quoted text, the alternative is shown in brackets (for trees only).
- b Copied from online source esv.org.
- c 2011 version, copied from online source biblica.com, which requested the following statement be included: Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®; Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used with permission. All rights reserved worldwide.
- d Copied from online source churchofjesuschrist.org.
- e The Joseph Smith Translation renders this verse differently: “Then Abimelech and Phicol, the chief captain of his hosts, rose up, and they planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the Lord; and they returned unto the land of the Philistines. And Abraham worshiped the everlasting God and sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days” (Joseph Smith Translation Genesis 21:31–32).