



Fiery Flying Serpents

There is something very cool happening this fall at the temple at Chichén Itzá, in the Yucatan. And it should be of particular interest to the folks in the remnant movement. Believe it or not, the best place to start the discussion is to review an argument that Nephi had with Laman and Lemuel.

In NC 1st Nephi 5, Laman and Lemuel are again acting badly. Nephi has been commanded to build a boat to cross the great deep to get to the Promised Land and the older brothers aren't having it.

And when my brethren saw that I was about to build a ship, they began to murmur against me, saying, Our brother is a fool, for he thinketh that he can build a ship; yea, and he also thinketh that he can cross these great waters. And thus my brethren did complain against me and were desirous that they might not labor, for they did not believe that I could build a ship, neither would they believe that I were instructed of the Lord. (vs 16)

Naturally, the carping and the delay annoy Nephi, who's on the clock with a divine commission to fulfill. So, in an effort to get the brothers on board (literally) he *launches* into a retelling of the story of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. It is quite obvious that in Nephi's account he is drawing a comparison between Laman and Lemuel and the hard-hearted Israelites. Left unsaid, but nearly as obvious, is the message that Nephi is comparing himself to Moses. They *were*, after all, both called to shepherd members of the house of Israel to a promised land.

Now here's the interesting bit. As part of the telling of the Israelites' story, Nephi rehearses the account of the brazen serpent – but with a twist.

And he did straiten them in the wilderness with his rod, for they hardened their hearts, even as ye have; and the Lord straitened them because of their iniquity. He sent flying fiery serpents among them; and after they were bitten, he prepared a way that they might be healed... (vs 20)

In our oldest version of this story, OC Numbers 10:7, there is no mention of *flying* fiery serpents. The serpents are described merely as “fiery serpents,” without any reference to flying. So, what’s going on? Why does Nephi add “flying” to their description?

The Hebrew term for “fiery serpents” is *nehashim seraphim* or simply *seraphim*, by itself. Seraphim is of course a term we know from Isaiah.

I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple...Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings.¹ (OC Isaiah 2:1)

So, these angels are seraphim, and they have wings (six wings, one apparently for each of the rungs of Jacob’s ladder they have ascended). Symbolically, at least, they can fly. Which makes them “*flying* fiery serpents.” Nephi was obviously familiar with Isaiah’s writings; he would have known Isaiah’s description of seraphim. As Nephi preached to Laman and Lemuel, did he modify the description of the serpents found in Numbers (by adding “flying”) in order to make a subtle claim? Namely, that he, Nephi, was a seraph, that he was sent to guide his family to a promised land in just the same way that Moses, also a seraph, was sent. Was Nephi saying that his role among in the family was to “sting” Laman and Lemuel into repentance, to get them to look to the Savior for healing?

Nephi apparently added a single word to Number’s description of what were, no doubt, real serpents – literally biting the Israelites, and his message took on a second, and more profound, meaning. It’s a pretty good rhetorical trick. And apparently the Lord approved of Nephi’s sermon, because He added a powerful “amen!”

And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me, Stretch forth thine hand again unto thy brethren and they shall not wither before thee, but I will shake them, saith the Lord, and this will I do that they may know that I am the Lord their God. And it came to pass that I stretched forth my hand unto my brethren, and they did not wither before me, but the Lord did shake them, even according to the word which he had spoken. And now they said, We know of a surety that the Lord is with thee... (vs 23)

Nephi was indeed a *fiery flying serpent*, and Laman and Lemuel were “*bitten*.”

Our cultural aversion to snakes makes it unnatural for us to associate holy men with serpents. But it wasn’t odd, historically, for people of Nephi’s region to think of serpents in this way. The image below (on the left) shows a golden collar depicting the winged serpent goddess Wadjet. The collar was found in King Tutankhamun’s tomb. Was this vestment meant to communicate that after death pharaoh would “rise up” like a “fiery flying serpent?” Were serpents chosen as a symbol for those trying to conquer death because serpents shed their old skin and are “reborn” with a shiny, new body?



The Uraeus (below) is the stylized, upright form of an Egyptian cobra that was used, among other places, on the headdress of the pharaoh. It was a symbol of royalty, and divine authority.



Egypt's use of the serpent as a symbol of authority explains something important about God's response to Moses when Moses complained that the Egyptians would not believe that God had sent him.

Behold, they will not believe me nor listen unto my voice, for they will say, The Lord has not appeared unto you. And the Lord said unto him, What is that in your hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth your hand and take it by the tail (and he put forth his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob — has appeared unto you. (OC Exodus 2:6)

God could have turned Moses' staff into anything: an elephant, a grand piano, Gal Gadot (in full Wonder Woman costume! That would be my choice), but He chose a serpent. It seems likely that He did this because in the symbolism of Egypt, a serpent best communicated the message that Moses was indeed on an errand from God.

The next bit might seem like we're changing topics, but I promise we're not.

Denver has implied on more than one occasion that in the end-times, there will be eight individuals in a central role.

The appearance of the Lord at that meeting (the first Adam-ondi-Ahman) was an appearance to the eight, who were involved in the ceremony in which Adam's calling and election was made sure. The on-lookers who were present did not see the Lord, although they could sense something important was underway when the Lord "administered comfort" to Adam. Only those who had been initiated into the High Priesthood were permitted to participate and to view the Lord as He appeared and ministered. You can read about this event in D&C Section 107: 53-56.

We assume the great meeting to be held at Adam-ondi-Ahman in the future will involve a great crowd, and it may. However, if it is a repetition of the pattern from the first, there will be a small number, perhaps only seven or eight, who will see the Lord, with the residue merely sensing something of importance is taking place. DS blog February 22, 2010

Denver's description draws a fairly explicit comparison between the eight involved in this end-times ceremony and the antediluvian patriarchs. A latter-day Adam-ondi-Ahman must surely be as significant an event as the original. Perhaps it is more significant in some ways, just as the last chapter of a book is more important than the first. Will those that take part in the latter-day Adam-ondi-Ahman have responsibilities as weighty as those of the original patriarchs?

Since the entire history of the world is a chiasm, we might expect the role of those Denver referenced to mirror the role of the antediluvian patriarchs. At least two of the seven patriarchs under Adam we're involved in shepherding the people of God to a land of promise.

And the children of men were numerous upon all the face of the land. And in these days, Satan had great dominion among men and raged in their hearts. And from that point forward came wars and bloodshed. And a man's hand was against his own brother in administering death because of secret works seeking for power...And Enos and the residue of the people of God came out from the land which was called Shulon and dwelled in a land of promise... (OC Genesis 3:17-19)

Enoch also helped the people of God find a land of promise and safety.

And Enoch continued his preaching in righteousness unto the people of God. And it came to pass in his days that he built a city that was called the city of holiness, even Zion. (OC Genesis 4:14)

We have very little information about the original patriarchs. But was the little we have chosen with care to show us that their role was to help to lead their people out from a world wracked with war and wicked works – a world not unlike our own. And when, in the end-times, scattered Israel is led out from their own troubled lands, and comes to Zion, it seems fitting that they will be greeted by one of the original patriarchs and his folk.

And the Lord said unto Enoch, Then shall you and all your city meet them there, and we will receive them into our bosom. And they shall see us, and we will fall upon their necks, and they shall fall upon our necks, and we will kiss each other; and there shall be my abode...(OC Genesis 4:22)

Is part of the reason for the intensity of their emotion the fact that these groups will have shared similar experiences? Can they relate? On either end of the history of the world we seem to see the people of God escaping a world where they are hated, by being “led out” of that world with the aid of patriarchal figures who guide them to a heavenly refuge.

Denver says that Adam and the seven antediluvian patriarchs were initiated into the High Priesthood. He seems to imply that their latter-day counterparts will also have this priesthood. If so then they will have been before the throne of God. And there is of course another list of seven individuals, from a different scriptural source, who have been before the throne of God, and who have a role to play in the end-times.

And I saw the seven angels who stood before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.
NC the Revelation of John 3:1

Are these seven angels (that are called servants in some translations) actually mortal men? Are they the same seven referenced by Denver? Are they angels in the sense that they are messengers delivering God’s word (Greek “*angelos*,” meaning messenger)? Is the mention of trumpets mere imagery that suggests that these seven warn others loudly and boldly?

There are in fact a number of reasons to believe that these seven “angels” are actually mortal men. And it seems that they reprise not only the role of the original patriarchs, but also the role that Moses performed when Israel first became an independent people. The judgements that the seven “angels” announce certainly have a ring of familiarity.

The first angel sounds and there follows “*hail and fire mingled with blood.*” The second angel sounds “*and something like a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea.*” As a result, the waters become like blood. When the third angel sounds, a star falls from heaven and the waters become “wormwood” – undrinkable. Next comes darkness, and then locusts – such as the world has never seen. And then comes death on a massive scale. This list of woes is remarkably similar to the list of plagues announced by Moses, and visited on Egypt.

Jeremiah explicitly compares the time when latter-day Israel is led out of their lands, to the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt.

Therefore, behold, the days come, says the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt — but, The Lord lives who brought up and who led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries to which I had driven them. OC Jeremiah 8:17

Isaiah also compares the latter-day delivery of Israel to the original exodus, and even hints that there will be seven end-times exoduses.

And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people ...And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth...And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea, and with his mighty wind he shall shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over with dry feet. And there shall be a highway for the remnant of his people which shall be left from Assyria, like it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt. (OC Isaiah 5:5)

The Egyptian sea (or Red Sea) was the original barrier that the Israelites had to pass in order to escape from Egypt. The *river* (identified as the Euphrates in some Bible translations) that is smitten into seven streams was the source of water and life for the Assyrian empire, the premiere military force of Isaiah's day. So, the imagery of this verse suggests that in the last days the political and military power of the nations will be smitten, diminishing the barrier that exists for the return of scattered Israel so very much that the "river" can be crossed with relative ease. And if the river is divided into seven streams, it follows that there will have to be seven crossings.

The story of Joshua and the battle of Jericho forecasts this same destruction of the political opponents of latter-day Israel.

And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into your hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valor. And you shall circle the city, all you men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shall you do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns. And the seventh day, you shall circle the city seven times and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout. And the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up, every man straight before him. (OC Joshua 2:1)

Jericho is the oldest walled city ever excavated by archaeologists, and so it is a fitting symbol for the world's political and military might. But It stood in the way of the Israelites' possession of the Promised Land, so the Lord sent seven priests with trumpets to bring about its fall. Do these

seven prefigure the seven angels with trumpets described in the Revelation of John? Do they prefigure the seven initiates into the High Priesthood that Denver tells us will be at the latter-day Adam-oni-Ahman?

If we assume that, currently, Israel is scattered throughout the Earth, and if we further assume that Israel needs to be gathered home to the New Jerusalem, at least for a time, then is it likely that the various scattered branches of Israel will have “shepherds” to help secure their liberty, and to guide them to a land of safety and promise? The brother of Jared, Nephi, Alma the Elder, Ammon, and of course Moses, show the pattern. When was there ever a people of God in search of sanctuary that *did not have* a mortal man, called of God, to act as servant and shepherd?

In his “Civilization” talk, Denver implies that true temple rites predate the flood. And then hints that these rites and a patriarchal order will return. He says, “*it is possible, if the temple had been completed (in Joseph’s day, that) the people might have been organized in a new and different order, resembling the order in the age of the patriarchs.*” He suggests that in the last days sealings will not be done along biological lines, and that “adoption will need to be restored as a rite with an accompanying authoritative ordinance and sealing...” The message seems to be that once again there will be patriarchs on the Earth who will seal families to themselves, and not necessarily biological families. Will these latter-day patriarch’s families be gathered from the scattered tribes of Israel? Will the number of their order be seven?

And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth. (OC Isaiah 5:5)

When the outcasts of Israel are “gathered” geographically, will they also be “gathered” by ordinances performed in the temple, which make them part of God’s family?

In Moses’ record we find a beautiful type that indicates that the Lord has been preparing Israel, from the beginning, for seven latter-day “chapters” to His work. And this type even suggests the length of time between “the harvest” of each of the scattered branches of Israel.

The Lord said to Moses at Mount Sinai, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the Lord. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord... Count off seven sabbath years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbath years amount to a period of forty-nine years. Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you’” (OC Leviticus 13: 1-2).

It is not likely that these agricultural restrictions are merely pointless, byzantine, busy work. It seems, rather, that the Lord is teaching through types and shadows. It appears that the Lord

instituted this custom among the Israelites in order to point their minds forward to His second coming. The intermediate (every-seven-year) ceremonial periods of rest apparently represent end-times visitations of the Lord. Periods when Israel will enter into the Lord's rest, and the harvest of souls will be celebrated. And the 50th year, the jubilee year, represents the time when the Lord finishes His work and all the Earth rests.

The seven installments of God's latter-day work, are not only spoken of in scripture, they are also represented in the stars.



The Pleiades star cluster is visible from almost every part of the globe. It consists of seven bright stars and many others that are less luminous. In some traditions it is known as the seven sisters. And it is often associated with the constellation Orion, the great hunter. The seven stars move slowly, in near unison, under a common gravitational influence.

The Pleiades are among the first stars mentioned in literature, showing up in Chinese records as early as 2300 BC. There are mythologies surrounding the Pleiades that come from the Maori, the Japanese, the Aborigines of Australia, the Hindus, the Greeks, the Egyptians and the Maya, among others.

A Kiowa legend tells that seven maidens pursued by giant bears were protected by the Great Spirit when He transported them to the top of Devils Tower² in Eastern Wyoming. The bears then attempted to climb the tower (hence the gouges on its sides), and so the Great Spirit set the seven maidens beyond reach in the heavens.

² "Devils Tower" is probably a mistranslation of the Lakota name *Mato Tiplia*, meaning Bear Lodge.



There are two, or possibly more, references to the Pleiades in the Bible. The first is found in OC Job 12:7. God asks Job a series of rhetorical questions highlighting the difference between God's knowledge and power and Job's. Then He asks Job this question.

"Can you bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loosen the bands of Orion?"

Once again, we have the combination of seven and one. And the language of "binding" and "loosening" brings to mind the sealing power. As in NC Matthew 9:1.

"And I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you shall set loose on earth shall be set loose in Heaven."

If the supposition is correct that the seven "angels" of OC Revelation 3 are mortal men who have been before the throne of God, then they have been sealed to God as part of His family. And if these seven announce God's judgements in order to free Israel, as did Moses, then they will hold sealing power.

Amos also refers to the seven and the one.

"You who turn judgment to wormwood and leave off righteousness in the earth, seek him that makes the seven stars and Orion (OC Amos 1:14)."

Although Amos is speaking to the Israel of his day, he is also speaking to latter day Israel. It is interesting to note that "wormwood" is specifically mentioned as one of the calamities listed in the Revelation of John that befalls the unrighteous in the end times. Escape from this judgement, and no doubt the other judgements, is accomplished by seeking Him that made the seven stars and Orion.

And speaking of destructions.

Twice a year, starting in June and October, there is a meteor shower as the Earth passes through the remnant of two massive exploded comets.³ Although it is an optical illusion, the meteor swarm appears to originate from the Pleiades, which are found in the zodiac on the shoulder of Taurus the Bull.

If “the Gods organized the lights in the expanse of the heaven... to be for signs, and for seasons...” (T&C 145:7:5) then what is the Taurid meteor shower a sign of? The shoulder is of course the symbolic site of power and authority, as in OC Isaiah 4:1.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder...

And the Egyptians, at least, believed that the constellation of Taurus was a sacred bull whose sacrifice each spring brought new life. This seems pretty clearly to be an allusion to Christ. So, taken together, do these astronomical goings-on suggest that there are seven that will transmit light and power to Earth, with authority from the one who renews life?

That sounds hopeful, and it is. But it’s not all good news.



In 1908 a meteor blew up over Tunguska (Siberia) flattening 80 million trees over an area of 2000 square kilometers. An eyewitness said "the sky was split in two, and high above the forest the whole northern part of the sky appeared covered with fire..." Residents in a town 35 miles away felt the heat of the blast and were “blown off their feet.”⁴

Increasingly, scientists believe that the meteor which caused the devastation at Tunguska was part of the comet debris that twice a year produces the Taurid meteor shower. The best estimates are that this meteor was only about 60 feet across. And we do *not know* the size of the largest comet fragments still lurking in the debris field. It is quite possible there are fragments many, many times larger.

Look once again at the destructions which are announced by the seven angel/servants in OC Revelation chapter 3.

³ You can see an animation of that event here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9So2SfJzE8>

⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20160706-in-siberia-in-1908-a-huge-explosion-came-out-of-nowhere>

2-The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth. And the third part of trees was burned up, and all green grass was burned up. 3-And the second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea. And the third part of the sea became blood, and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed. 4-And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers and upon the fountains of waters. And the name of the star is called Wormwood, and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

Each of those destructions could be explained as meteors hitting the Earth. Large objects hitting the Earth at great speed would throw a huge amount of dust into the atmosphere, blocking the light from the heavens.⁵ And such an event could even fracture the Earth's mantle, provoking volcanic convulsions, which could again darken the light from above.⁶

5-And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars, so that the third part of them was darkened. And the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise... 6-And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth. And to the angel was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

Maybe John's portrayal of these destructions isn't as florid as we thought. We don't need to imagine a supernatural mechanism to produce the devastation that John describes; one exists in the natural world. Does the spectacle in the night sky of the Pleiades casting burning rocks to Earth, year after year for thousands of years, portend something fateful for the season fast approaching?

The sign was put there by God to instruct us. Does the sign forecast the latter-day destructions announced by the seven servants?

⁵ Such an occurrence apparently played a part in the demise of the dinosaurs some 65 million years ago.

⁶ As with Mount Tambora in 1815.⁶ That eruption caused the "Year Without a Summer," also called "Eighteen Hundred and Froze to Death."

Twice a year, on the equinoxes, there is a “light show” at the pyramid of *Chichén Itzá*. The setting sun creates a serpent of light on the balustrade on the north side of the temple.⁷ The shape of the pyramid draws one’s eyes upward in the same fashion as a spire on a temple. So, we look up to the heavens, and we see a serpent descending. A serpent made of light. It is a “fiery flying serpent.” Moreover, the serpent, although it is clearly a single organism, is equally clearly, made of seven segments.

The serpent moves downward toward the Earth, in the inverse shape of the Egyptian cobra which rises up. The Egyptians looked to overcome death by ascending. The Maya looked to the time when the bringer of life would descend to Earth.



The serpent at *Chichén Itzá* has a fearsome head which communicates extreme danger. And on the other end of the serpent there should be a rattle, to warn of that danger. And there is. On the two days each year, when the sun is at its zenith at the latitude of *Chichén Itzá*, directly over the pyramid, one finds not only the sun, but also the Pleiades star cluster.⁸ The name in the Mayan language for the Pleiades is “tzab.” This is exactly the same word as the name for the rattle of a snake. “Tzabcan” is the name, to this day, for the indigenous rattlesnake.

So, the rattle warns of danger. Just as Moses, staff in hand, warned Pharaoh of coming destructions. Just as Joshua’s and John’s seven priestly messengers blow trumpets to warn of the destruction coming upon Jericho and on the whole world.

The Maya appear to have known that seraphim would play a part in the step-wise process of preparing the world for the return of Kukulcan, the plumed serpent, the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ You can see videos of that event here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgFEYqArn1U> and here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zvv9EnBuem4>

⁸ This is found in a book by John Major Jenkins called *Maya Cosmogenesis*, page 98,99.

