

# Cumorah Messenger

## Bennu and Shehkinah

By David B. Brown © 2012

What is the meaning and purpose of the Quetzal feathers we find on the headdresses of the priests in Mesoamerica? Why did the religious priests choose this symbol? And, what about the Celestial Bird images we find at Palenque? Is there evidence that these symbols are related? The use of bird imagery is prolific throughout the Mayan culture. Is it possible to trace these to a common beginning? One of the oldest presentations of the Quetzal plumage is at the highland Maya site of Chinkultic. Here we find stela illustrating priests with the Quetzal headdress. What event occurred at Chinkultic that could become the genesis of this Quetzal feather imagery?

From our research we have come to the sound conclusion that Chinkultic is the Book of Mormon City

of Nephi. This is the city that Nephi established when he moved to escape the threat of death from his brother Laman. But, this took place at approximately 575 BC and we have nothing recorded from this city again until Mosiah is compelled to leave it and travel to Zarahemla at about 200 BC. Shortly after arriving in Zarahemla and Mosiah is appointed King, a group headed by Zeniff decided to return to the City of Nephi and he then became their king. It was during the reign of Zeniff's son Noah that the prophet Abinadi began to preach to the people warning that they were wandering away from the gospel—and much of this was pointed at King Noah and his courtly priests. The words of Abinadi were so pointed that King Noah had Abinadi burned to death, but not before the words of Abinadi

touched the heart of one of the priests named Alma. Alma tried to intervene and stop this death, but King Noah forced Alma to flee the region for fear of losing his life. Alma was so moved by this event that he wrote down all the words of Abinadi and then began to teach, baptize, and organize a church based on the preaching of Abinadi and the impress of the Holy Spirit. The death of Abinadi became the birth of the movement that would eventually become a church, and this church is one of the gifts which the Magi brought to the Christ child.

One of the stela at Chinkultic displays a Quetzal priest surrounded by fire with his open-hand stretched toward the king. This is the stela that we have identified as telling the Abinadi story. If Abinadi is wearing a

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## The Geometric Gospel at Tonina

By Neil Steede © 2012

The term Geometric Gospel is a name we have given to a method of using geometric shapes and indicators to relate a gospel story. The most interesting aspect of this method is that it can only be read by those who possess the esoteric knowledge. But, why write something to an audience that is already aware of the contents of the story being related? Answering this question requires that we review historical examples of geometric gospel and truly understand the intent of the inscription. A classical Old World example would be Sator's Square. The Sator Square is a palindrome and incorporates

many types of crosses and other symbols within its design. So, why keep the gospel hidden?

Sator Squares are found in conjunction with Roman military garrisons. During the time that the Sator Square was being used Christianity was an illegal practice. The Roman soldiers who were used to eradicate Christianity were at times Christians themselves. The Sator Square allowed them an opportunity to communicate to one another without being exposed to other Roman soldiers because a Christian Roman soldier gained nothing by simply proclaiming his Christianity and being killed.

Therefore, the Sator Square allowed two or more Christians to communicate in front of other people who did not understand the meaning of the Sator Square.

The Bountiful Historical Society of the Golden Age Book of Mormon people could communicate to a distant future generation of believers in the same fashion. That distant future gen-

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## Bennu and Shehkinah *continued*

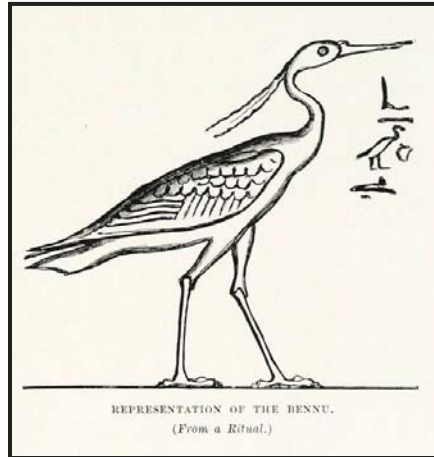
Quetzal headdress at one of the earliest sites for this Quetzal Cult concept, perhaps he is the first one. So, what is it about Abinadi's story that identifies him as one of the first who is worthy to wear the headdress of Quetzal feathers? Why a Quetzal bird for the imagery? Abinadi gave his life for a spiritual cause and by so doing gave birth to a new spiritual movement. From his death came new life. This sounds eerily similar to the Phoenix story. Is it possible that the ancient people of Mesoamerica had knowledge of the Phoenix legend?



*The red circle highlights the area where the Quetzal priest is encircled in fire and holding his hand out at the king on the left side of the stela. We believe this is the story of Abinadi.*

Herodotus is a Greek historian who lived about 460 BC and he provides us with the first early Western Civilization account of the Phoenix story which he came across in Egypt when he was visiting the Temples and learning from the priests who resided there. He records that the people of Heliopolis (Cairo) had a legend of an eagle-size Bennu Bird that lived many miles away. It would make a ball of myrrh equal to the size that he could carry then he would hollow the ball enough to place the bones of his parents

within it and reseal the ball with fresh myrrh. The Bennu Bird would then fly the long distance to the Temple of the Sun in Heliopolis carrying with him the bones of his parents encased in myrrh. There, the Bennu would place his myrrh ball in the



*Above is a representation of the ancient Bennu heron that lived in the United Arab Emirates region of the Arabian Peninsula. This bird is now extinct, but remains of it have been dated to 2,000 BC.*



top of a palm tree after making a nest from aromatic twigs. The Bennu and the nest would then consume in fire and a new bird would rise from the ashes that would then fly away. This story generated from the region of Heliopolis which is the capital city for the land of Goshen where the children of Israel resided in Egypt for hundreds of years prior to the Exodus. The Bennu Bird is specifically mentioned in the Book of the Dead, and other Pyramid Texts record the image of the Bennu as an extinct heron that once lived in a region on the Arabian Peninsula. This heron has a distinguishing feature of two very long feathers flowing back from the top of the head. Therefore, the story of the Bennu/Phoenix is historically old enough that the people of the Middle East region with ties to Egypt would have known the legend.

The Book of Mormon claims to be the story of Joseph Tribe Israelites who come out of Jerusalem at about 600 BC. The historical concept of the Bennu/Phoenix is old enough to have been in the social awareness of the people from that period, and could have been an integral part of the sacred belief system of the Book of Mormon families. If so, how does this relate to what we understand about the Quetzal? To make the connec-

*The Pyramid Text plate to the left shows the Bennu touching the top of a flower that is touching the house/nest in the top of a palm tree. A clear indication that this Bennu is somehow connected to the concept of nesting in palms.*

*The Pyramid Text plate below illustrates Osiris with a green color who is also associated as a god of renewal and regeneration. His blessings were important for the continual fertility of the Nile River Valley.*



## Bennu and Shehkinah *continued*

tion it will be necessary to develop the Bennu and Quetzal imagery.

The concept our Book of Mormon travelers carried may have been something like this; there is a large heron with two long feathers that carries the bones of its parents encased in an aromatic sap to a special place where it nests in the top of a tree and eventually it will be consumed in fire to create a new/regenerated life. The concept of the bird nesting in the tree can have a second layer of meaning in that the Sethian Gnostic concept of life is that the human experience is one that confines the spirit in a temporary fixed “house” of the physical body until the spirit can be refined and prepared for eternity. If the bird represents our spirit and the tree is our body then the nesting of the Phoenix in the tree symbolizes our spirit residing in the body until it is consumed and the spirit is released to fly away to new life. And, the bones of our parents encased in myrrh are the belief systems our parents provide us—they too are a part of the nesting that takes place because they aromatically “guide” the spirit in the proper preparations for the journey. Egyptian language uses the same word for the Bennu Bird and the palm tree. Is this their way of expressing that each person is one entity in a merged form of body and spirit? Two parts forming one thing and being called by one name? Additionally, the Bennu Bird is also associated with Osiris who is often depicted in pyramid texts with a green color as the god of regeneration and renewal.

The Book of Mormon people journeyed to a land half a world away where nothing is as brown as it was in the Middle East; everything in the New World is green. They begin noticing the fauna and because of their cultural baggage they begin attaching symbolic concepts of their beliefs to the elements of the environment that carry some of the same characteristics. Quetzals make their nests in the trunks of trees about thirty-feet above the ground. The color of the bird is a vibrant green with a bright red breast and white shorter tail feather. One of the more striking characteristics of Quetzal bird is their long tail feathers, usually grouped in twos. Perhaps these birds became the New World version of the Bennu Bird/Phoenix. If so, then the use of the Quetzal feathers certainly make for

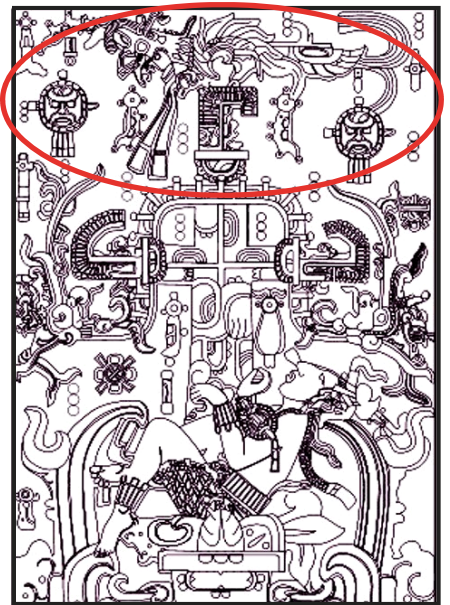


a good choice to be placed on the head of Abinadi whose tree (body) was literally consumed by fire. The feathers of the Resplendent Quetzal tell the story of Abinadi; he died by fire (red breast) and because of his purity (short white tail feathers) he became like the Bennu Bird (two long green feathers) and found life anew through a promise of resurrection and the rebirth of the church (vibrant green feathers). Therefore, Abinadi and all those who follow him are displayed wearing the Quetzal feather headdress to illustrate their belief through their garb. By wearing the Quetzal feathers they are stating that they have accepted the challenge to hope for a successful transition into eternity based on the belief that they must be selfless and self-sacrificing. They must be willing to forego the life of the body in order for the spirit to fly free.

There is yet another layer to the story of the bird nesting in the tree. The ancient Hebrew language used the noun

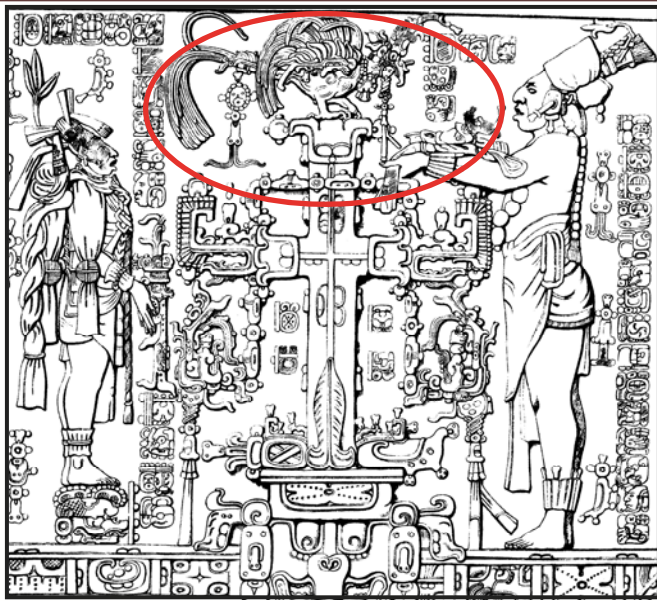
Shehkinah to refer to the nesting of birds. The Hebrews use this same word as a verb to describe the manifestation of God’s spirit in the temporal world; God’s spirit (bird) nesting in the tree (physical frame). The Shehkinah is understood to be the temporal expression of God such as the pillar of fire above the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, or the cloud that covered King Solomon’s Temple when it was dedicated, or the brilliant presence of the Spirit of God upon the mercy seat between the wings of the Cherubim in the Holy of Holies. These are illustrations of manifestations of God in the physical realm. Further development of that symbolism is the description of Christ when he was baptized and those who witnessed it reported that the Spirit of God rested upon Him in the form of a dove; like a bird nesting? The outpouring of God’s Spirit (bird) as it rests upon the physical body (tree). So, is this the context for the depiction of the Celestial Bird at Palenque?

Palenque has three prominent depictions of the Celestial Bird; Pakal’s Tomb Lid, the Tablet of the Cross, and the Tablet of the Foliated Cross. All of these illustrate the Celestial Bird on top of, or nesting on, what epigraphers call “The World Tree.” So, if the bird is the presence of a spiritual manifestation in a temporal world as indicated by the Shehkinah, and each of these representations is placed on top of a tree, then is this combi-

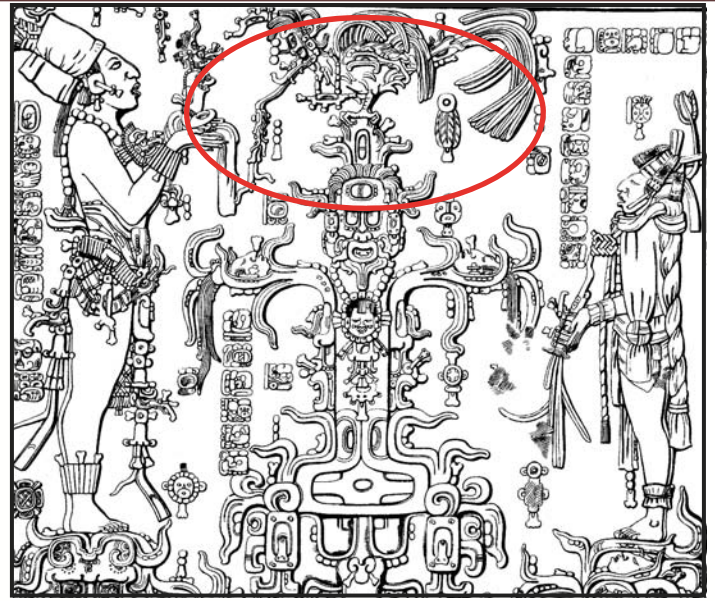


*Pakal's Tomb Lid with the Celestial Bird.*

## Bennu and Shehkinah *Continued*



*The Tablet of the Cross is carved with a Celestial Bird perched atop a “World Tree.” This bird stands on top of a nest that holds two eggs, as do two other nests. This is an illustration of “expectation.” These are the Magi priests visiting the young Christ as implied by the Celestial Bird being nested in the tree. The Shehkinah nesting of the bird in the tree is symbolic of a spirit housing the physical frame. The Celestial Bird faces to the right indicating that he is looking forward to the future. His life work is being initiated.*



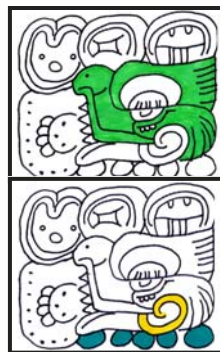
*The Tablet of the Foliated Cross is carved with a Celestial Bird perched atop a “World Tree” but this time the tree is in full foliage as is everything around it. And, as Mayan texts read from left to right, the Celestial Bird is not facing forward to the future, but instead backward to the past. His physical life work is completed and this is his new life as a regenerated being because everything around him has reversed. The positioning of the priests have reversed, the potentials in the nests have now changed to blossoms, and the larger priest is now fully adorned.*

nation of the Celestial Bird upon a tree a symbol for Christ in the flesh? Why not just carve an image of a man with these trappings? Because the Mosaic Law strictly forbids creating a graven image of their God; He is so much more than what carving can capture. However, through symbolism and connotative association the artist can demonstrate on the Tablet of the Cross that the Magi traveled to give gifts to their God who took the form of flesh and blood as a child. In the Tablet of the Foliated Cross they can demonstrate that Christ (Celestial Bird atop the World Tree) regenerated and brought about new life, and visited these people as a risen Lord. And, the artists can utilize this same imagery on Pakal’s Tomb Lid to testify that Pakal was visited by the Risen Christ. In each place it is implying that Christ is present as a flesh and blood entity, one pre-resurrection as indicated by the symbolism of expectation of nests with two eggs and abundant seeds, and the other two post-resurrection as indicated by foliage, blossoms, and reversals.

The gifts brought by the Magi fit this

concept. The myrrh is the aromatic sap that encased the belief systems of those who had gone before and prepared the way for the Christ to be sacrificed. The frankincense was the aromatic twigs the Bennu would use to build his nest. And the gift of gold alludes to the tip of Ben-Ben stone; the golden top of the obelisk where the risen Bennu is said to reside. With these gifts, the Magi identified Jesus as the Bennu, the Phoenix, the one who would build a nest from aromatic twigs and while holding the ball of myrrh He would allow his body to be consumed in order that he might rise to life anew.

We have yet another Meso-american tie to the Shehkinah nesting concept. In the December 2011 issue of the *Cumora Messenger*, Neil Steede wrote on the identification of the Zion Glyph. The



central figure of that glyph is a bird sitting on eggs. Again, the nesting of the bird indicating a physical manifestation of the Divine. It is the presence of the Risen Christ manifested to the people.

The connection of the Quetzal imagery with that of the Bennu/Phoenix, and of the Celestial Bird with the Shehkinah makes for a uniquely woven system of images that borrow equally from both Hebrew and Egyptian influences which is something we can expect from the tribe of Joseph. Joseph married the daughter of Pharaoh and their offspring carried strong influences from both cultures. Jacob’s (Israel) adoption of Joseph’s two sons Ephraim and Manasseh as equal heirs to his blessings implies that they would have great influence in the events to come. This is something we need to keep in mind as we move forward in our research—we should not be afraid to combine the Egyptian and Hebrew cultural concepts because the people of Mesoamerica seemed to view *both* as equally important heritages that influenced their perception of this life and the life to come.

# Adventures In Scriptures

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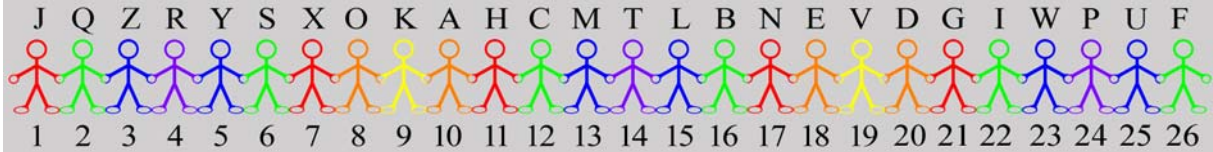
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## ABINADI AND ALMA

Two years later, Abinadi the prophet, was again brought before King Noah and his priests for preaching against sin. They asked Abinadi what the scripture meant that said *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that publisheth salvation, that saith thy God reigneth.”* Abinadi explained that a Messiah would come and teach them to walk a path of right living. Instead of stealing from the people, they should be giving. God wants people that are willing to spread the good news of the gospel.

King Noah and his priests were angry with the truths that Abinadi spoke and cast him into prison. But one of the king’s priests, named Alma, believed Abinadi’s words. Alma pleaded with the King to let Abinadi go in peace. King Noah was angry with Alma and cast him out. Alma fled for his life and hid from the Kings servants. Alma wrote all the words that Abinadi had spoken. He later began to preach Abinadi’s words to some of the people.

After three days, King Noah again brought Abinadi before him. Abinadi once again spoke out against the King’s sins. King Noah decided Abinadi should be put to death by fire for speaking against the King and prophesying of a coming Messiah. Abinadi did not take back the words that he had spoken, even when threatened with death by fire. Because of Abinadi’s sacrifice, Alma believed, and because Alma believe, many others did also.



Use the figures above to match the letters to the numbers below and find out what the hidden scripture says from John 15:13.

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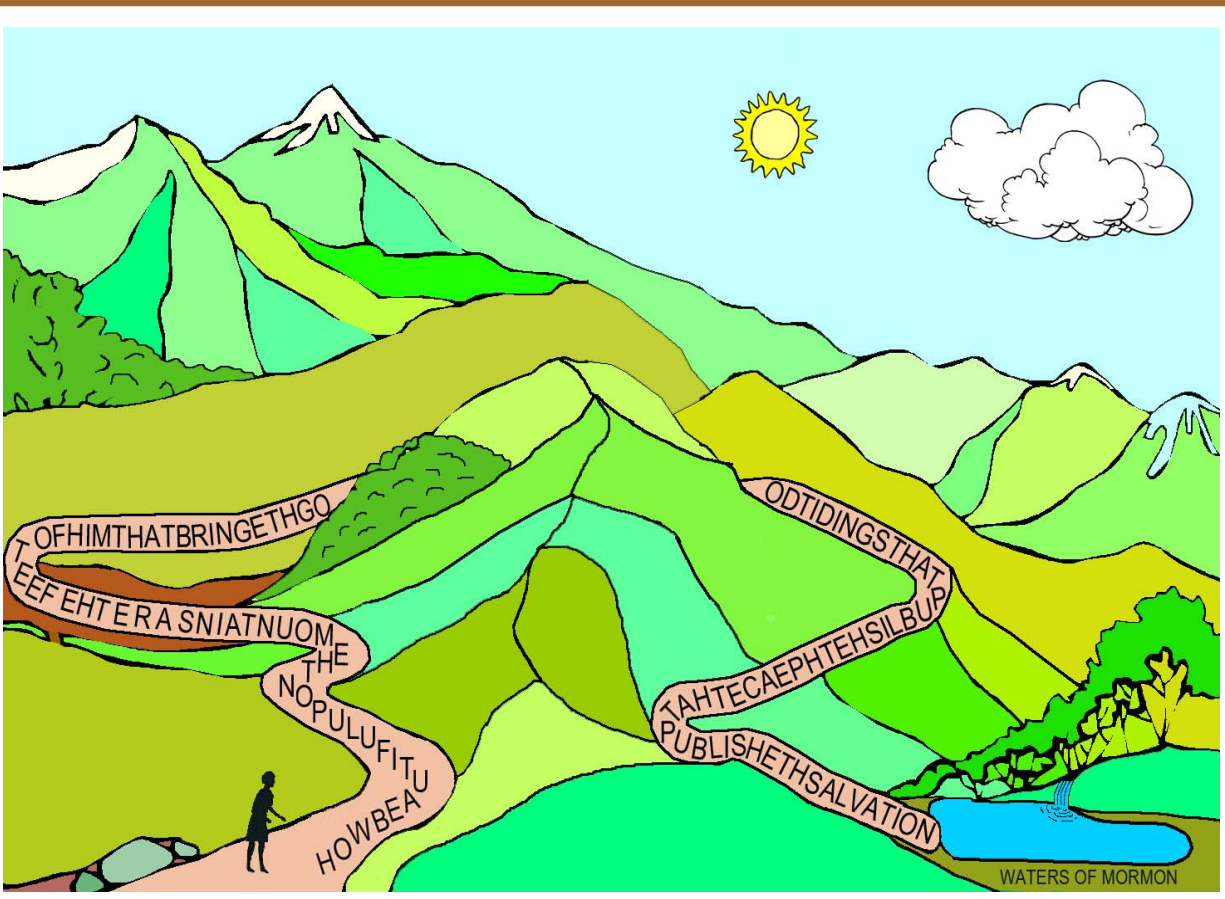
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John 15:13



Follow the path of Alma and write down each letter along the way in the boxes below.

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Mosiah 7:77

## The Geometric Gospel at Tonina *Continued*

eration is us, but for those testimonies to reach us they must be openly hidden. If they were not openly hidden then they would have been destroyed just as surely the Sator Square would have been destroyed if others had understood. So, by telling the gospel in the format of the Geometric Gospel generations of believers in Christianity can communicate to one another without hindrances.

Another example of openly hidden communication is the parable of the three visitations of Christ where He expressed openly hidden prophecy. In a more open format it could have been deleted from scripture and would not be available to Christians today. With all of this said, I now begin some of my observations concerning the Geometric Gospel expressed in two locations at Tonina which we believe to be the Book of Mormon city of Ammonihah.

The story portrayed in the frieze found at this site is a Book of Mormon story. On a lower plaza to the right of the frieze is a curious façade whose story relates to the frieze and is also recognizable with the right information. The Geometric Gospel found within these portrayals will now be examined.

The famous frieze of Tonina is the story of Alma II and Amulek preaching the gospel in that city, their subsequent imprisonment, the burning of the converts with the sacred scriptures and the collapse of the prison resulting in the death of the lawyers while Alma and Amulek walk free. But, what is of particular interest here is the use of Geometric Gospel within the frieze to give additional information concerning the story. This Geometric Gospel is portrayed in a grid that frames the overall frieze. The grid is comprised of two large side-by-side squares with each having two diagonal lines crossing within the square. In the present condition of the frieze the upper left and the upper right corners have eroded away. Never-the-less, there is no mistake that the frieze originally had two side-by-side squares each with a huge "X" running from corner to corner. It should be noted that all of the lines of this geometric figure are made up of feathered strips. This was done to denote the Quetzal serpent body. From images in the San Bartolo Murals we know that symbolism of the serpent is used to denote "church." This symbolism is accurate because the

events portrayed within the grid are church history, but there is much more being depicted in this grid.

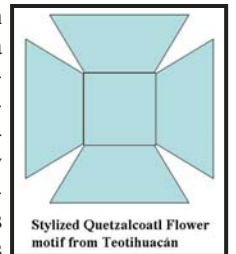
First, the square shapes are used to depict that the message within the grid is temporal as opposed to spiritual historical events. However, it must be understood that the spirit world is involved in these historical events. Note that the main outlines of the squares are four feathers wide while the crossbars that form the "X"s are only three feathers wide. This three-to-four ratio is another way of expressing the square/circle relationship between the spiritual and the temporal, but there is still more.

Note that the bottom edge of the squares is not made from feathered strips. It is an elongated bar with another strip wrapped around it for the entire length. This lower bar expresses Geometric Gospel. To recognize it we must view both negative and positive aspects.

Along the upper edge of this lower strip we notice that a band runs the length of the strip and every so often it has a set of concentric circlets located along it. I believe that each set of circlets were designed in this manner to represent perforated beads. In conjunction with each set of beads we find a small hatched area in the form of a woven mat which is the symbol used for Mayan kings. The two beads represent the two precious tribes that have merged to make the kingdom. That is, the Nephites and the Mulekites. The third geometric aspect along this upper bar is upside-down "J"s; each "J" location indicates the general populous of Tonina (Ammonihah). Note that the upside-down "J" is woven back and forth through the lower strip. This weaving also carries the bead/

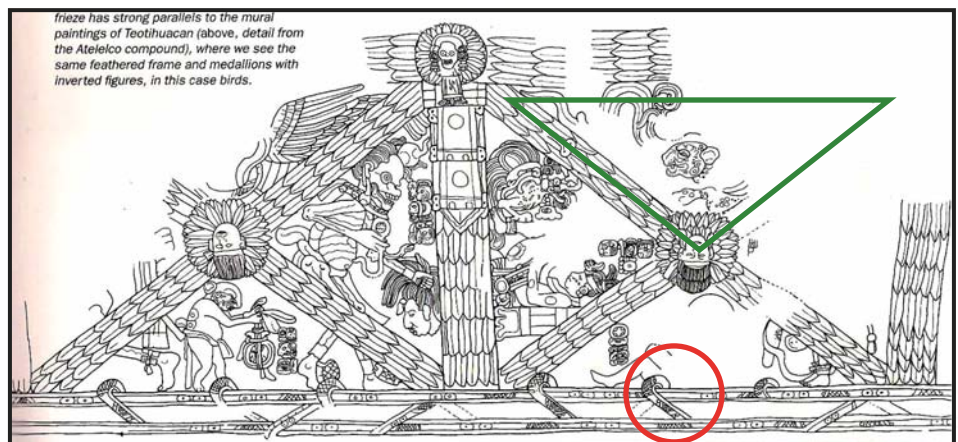
woven-mat design. I believe this lower band is making reference to the binding together of the two kingdoms (Nephite and Mulekite) into a single kingdom which was the endeavor of Alma II on his journey.

Along the length of this lower bar we find a series of triangles created by the zigzag of the binding strip. Though these abstract triangles are only a product of the design they are significant. I believe they are used to represent the three components of the kingdom that Alma is attempting to merge; the Nephites, the Mulekites, and God. Also note that the overall geometry of the frieze is divided into triangles. This provides a consistent theme throughout the frieze however the four triangles created within each square also create a stylized Quetzalcoatl flower as depicted in Teotihuacán. So, one may conclude that Quetzalcoatl (Jesus) is involved in all parts of this triangle.



The prone "E" formed by the four-wide feather bands has a double meaning as well. Not only is the spirit of Jesus descending to Earth in the form of the church (the upside-down "U"), but the Holy Spirit is descending. It should also be noted that while the feathered bands do represent the church, which is generational, that the "X"s within the boxes declare that the historical scenes within the square have been sanctified by the Creator.

So the very geometry of the grid in the frieze expresses what I call the Geo-



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## The Geometric Gospel at Tonina *Continued*

metric Gospel. In fact, there is more Geometric Gospel that can be extracted from this grid however I will save it for another article. At this time I want to examine and compare the terrace façade to the right of the frieze.

The façade of the building to the right of the frieze is a better case for study of Geometric Gospel than the frieze grid because it is exclusively made from geometric figures. The figures are simple and consist of three basic shapes; an "X," a spiral and a rectangle. These three shapes are easily seen as they are expressed in a positive fashion as stones protruding from the surface of the façade. However, the negative areas also need to be observed as will become evident. First, the positive art will be addressed.

The positive geometry consists of two sets of speech scrolls that bracket a large "X" split by a rectangle. The creation of this symmetrical image was not done as ornamentation or just for art's sake; it has implicit meaning that is intended to be understood. However, as stated earlier, Geometric Gospel is written by and for believers.

The "X" symbolizes "sanctify" or



"sacred." Therefore, it is apparent that the large "X" shows that this is a sacred location because of an event that occurred here. The event referenced seems to be a verbal one, thus the quadruple speech scrolls that flank the "X". The flanking speech scrolls are in pairs. Each pair is made up of a speech scroll emanating from above mirrored by one emanating from below which suggests that on this spot words of both a temporal and a spiritual nature were spoken. The lateral positioning of the scrolls suggests that two speakers were involved. I suggest that this geometry implies that this was the spot from which Alma and Amulek preached the gospel. If so, then we must observe the other aspects present. For example, why the big rectangle?

I believe that the rectangle serves

several purposes. First, it binds together that from above and that from below; it binds both the temporal and the spiritual. At the same time it has a narrow crossbar separating the two halves of the "X". This creates a cross or Christian theme. Also note that the lower rectangle seems to have a spherical shape emerging from it. Is this the spiritual developing or emerging from the physical?

The negative spacing creates two trapezoids placed one atop of the other; Christianity is the foundation for both worlds. The double trapezoid is flanked by two triangles indicating that this is the "word" between God and man. And, the negative spacing of the speech scrolls form what I call "T" scrolls which are highly reminiscent of Kirtland Temple Glyphs. These imply that the words being spoken by Alma and Amulek are words of the Master.

All of the geometric items seem to be consistent and work well with the context where they are placed. But, all of this is intended to be openly hidden and only readable by those with esoteric knowledge who believe that it can be read .

*Footnotes: Available upon request*