

GLYPH

Notes

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Peoples of Mesoamerica

O A Brief Overview By Lyle L. Smith

Over the years, many requests for information have been made about the civilizations that once lived in the Americas. Many believers want to know how those civilizations relate to people in The Book of Mormon. Numerous diverse groups of native Americans live and have lived in the Americas.

Reviewed here are only a few of the major groups from Mesoamerica, the area I believe to be where the major events of The Book of Mormon occurred. Keep in mind that present-day site names are not original names.

Mesoamerica includes the southern two-thirds of Mexico (not the north areas that border on the U.S.), Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and the western edge of Honduras. Archaeologists coined the term Mesoamerica to designate the pre-Hispanic civilizations in this area which shared a number of traits that were more or less absent or rare elsewhere in the New World. (See map on page 5.)

Pre-Olmec and Olmec

The Olmec built the first civilization in Mesoamerica, but archaeologists identify people being here earlier, whom they call pre-Olmec. Evidence for the pre-Olmec—domestication of plants and the earliest appearance of pottery—appears circa 3000 B.C. or before. I believe or suggest that the pre-Olmec equate with the first thousand years of Jaredite history. The Jaredite civilization being recognized as the Olmec civilization correlates to the timeframe after the great dearth and famine (Ether 4:35-78 [9:31-10:28 LDS]) when the Jaredites rebuilt their nation and became extremely prosperous.

Major Olmec cities began sometime around 1800 B.C. The ruins of San Lorenzo, Tres Zapotes, and La Venta have been recognized as some of these great Olmec cities with populations of tens of thousands, not just sparsely settled ceremonial centers. They are located in what is called the Olmec heartland,

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Sherrie Kline Smith

A hallmark of the Olmec, each of the 17 colossal stone heads found to date depicts individual rulers. This one was discovered at La Venta and now is displayed at La Venta Park in Villahermosa, Mexico.

The facial features of this Tres Zapotes woman astonishingly resemble the colossal stone heads.



Lyle Smith

Considerable evidence from the archaeology of Mesoamerica equates some of these civilizations with the peoples of Jared, Lehi, and Mulek in The Book of Mormon, providing a frame of reference into which the history of The Book of Mormon makes sense.

Peoples of Mesoamerica *(Cont. from Page 1)*

which is the Gulf Coast north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Some archaeologists say, though, that the earliest evidence for the Olmec is not in the Olmec heartland but in the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca in west Mexico, the area where most likely the Jaredites first settled.

The Olmec proficiently worked metals and carved jade. They had a system of writing and numbers. Their cities contained networks of aqueducts. They carved colossal stone heads and other large stone monuments. The magnificent remnants of these people eloquently bear witness of their advanced cultural achievements.

When The Book of Mormon was printed in 1830, the Olmec culture was unknown. Even after its discovery, no explorer, archaeologist, or scholar dated the Olmec before the time of Christ. Only in the 1960s with the advent of radiocarbon dating did the dates shift to match Jaredite history, thus confirming the existence of a great nation in Mesoamerica much earlier than the time of Christ, as described in The Book of Mormon. The Lord had promised the Brother of Jared, and those who went with him, that

he would lead them to the Land of Promise where he would, through their seed,

raise up a great nation (Ether 1:19-20 [1:43 LDS]).

The civilization archaeologists term the pre-Olmec and Olmec covered almost 3,000 years, until its decline two or three centuries before Christ. Even though direct descendants of the Olmec may still live along the Gulf Coast today, it seems reasonable that during the 3,000 years some of the people spread to other areas on both continents. Many native Americans, who left before the last genocidal Jaredite battles, may be descendants of this Olmec/Jaredite group. On the other hand, the Lord could have led another group from the great tower to the Land of Promise which could be the early civilization in South America. The

archaeological record of the Olmec and the Jaredite history found in The Book of Mormon relates only to what happened in Mesoamerica.

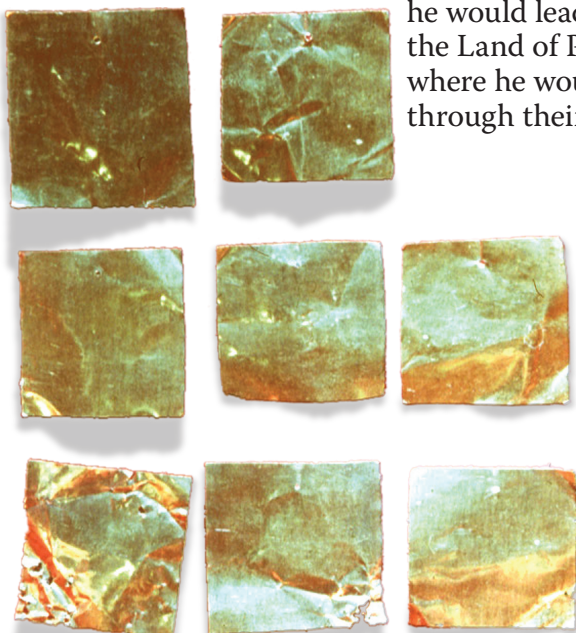
Zapotec and Mixtec

People have been identified in the Oaxaca Valley as early as 1600 B.C., but the population grew slowly for many centuries. Then, about 500-450 B.C., with the founding of the mighty city of Monte Alban as a regional capital of the Zapotec, population increased dramatically. This marks the time when the Zapotec became clearly distinguishable as an ethnic group. They had a writing and numerical system, and they politically controlled the Oaxaca Valley for more



Sherrie Kline Smith

The distinctive design on this Olmec bowl represents a celestial dragon or avian serpent. The carving is characteristic of early Olmec-style ceramics from 1200 to 950 B.C., which are primarily from non-Gulf Coast sites in Central Mexico and the Pacific Coast.



Don Beebe

Displayed among the exhibits recounting the history of the area at the Santo Domingo Cultural Center in Oaxaca City, these small, fine sheets of gold from tombs at Monte Alban call to mind "plates with the appearance of gold."



Aaron Presler

The Zapotec built Monte Alban, their regional capital, on the top of a leveled low mountain range (6400 ft. high) in the Oaxaca Valley. Lasting almost a thousand years, from around 500 B.C. to A.D. 500, Monte Alban has numerous examples of writing. Recent studies suggest the city had from 10,000 to 20,000 inhabitants.

than 1400 years. Zapotec peoples still occupy the Oaxaca Valley. One cannot but wonder if the impetus for Monte Alban came from some of the Mulekite group sometime after their "first landing," as we believe, on the Gulf Coast.

A later group, the Mixtec, invaded the Oaxaca Valley about A.D. 1200 and became the predominant power. With incomparable workmanship, they built Mitla. Finely executed lapidary friezes of geometric patterns in the scroll wing motif adorned their buildings. Their tombs found at Monte Alban revealed treasures of exquisite gold, pearls, shells, and other stones. Today both groups, Zapotec and Mixtec, coexist in the area.

People of Teotihuacan

A third major civilization in Mesoamerica inhabited the central plateau northeast of Mexico City. While the area had been occupied earlier, Teotihuacan, the well-known Mesoamerican city, grew very rapidly during the last century B.C. The city experienced continual growth for the next 200 years. The discovery of crop irrigation systems early in the city's history provided proof of its high population.

The mammoth Sun and Moon pyramids were built the first 200 years after Christ. Shortly



Only a few of the two thousand plus apartment complexes from Teotihuacan have been excavated. The painted motif on the walls of this one at the Atetelco palace compound resembles modern wallpaper.

Don Beebe

thereafter, the Ciudadela, including the Feathered Serpent temple/pyramid, was constructed. War motifs show up in the city about A.D. 300. For a more detailed account of this largest of Mesoamerican cities, see the article "Teotihuacan: A City of Our God?" in *The Witness*, Fall 1992, #78.

It seems possible that major Nephite migrations northward in the years before the time of Christ, as detailed in Helaman 2:3-11 [3:3-12 LDS], contributed to the growth of both the Teotihuacan and Zapotec civilizations. But, The Book of Mormon, a religious history, gives sparse cultural and political details. This makes it difficult to equate or compare these two peoples with those in The Book of Mormon, which says little about the land northward during the era of the Nephites.

Toltec and Aztec

In the same central plateau area of Mexico where Teotihuacan now lies in ruins, the Toltec, under the leadership of the celebrated priest/king Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl (translated feathered serpent in Nahuatl), moved the Toltec capital to Tula sometime around A.D. 900. Do not confuse this king with the early Feathered Serpent god in Mesoamerica, even though the Toltec king was a priest advocate of the Quetzalcoatl god.

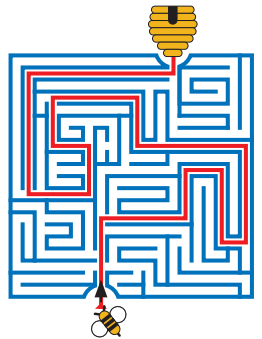
Following the decline of the Toltec, the Aztec people migrated south into the Valley of Mexico

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Sallie Presler

Teotihuacan, a planned city, became one of the largest cities in the world during its time. The massive Pyramid of the Sun and Pyramid of the Moon, from where this photograph is taken, tower over the ceremonial street, named by the Aztecs some 1200 years later as the Avenue of the Dead.



Maze found on Page 7
Answer for Beezrom's

ISRAEL TOUR
 April / May 2015, 11 days
 "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man, shall be accomplished." ~ Luke 18:31
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 Precolumbiansi@gmail.com or 816 838-5192

Peoples of Mesoamerica (Cont. from Page 3)

about A.D.1200. There they established a mighty empire from Veracruz to the Pacific coast, but they did not extend south beyond the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. It still existed when Cortez arrived in 1519. Spanish priests who accompanied some of the early conquerors provided a wealth of information about the Aztec, who also worshipped the great god Quetzalcoatl.

Both the Toltec and Aztec peoples arrived on the scene long after A.D. 385, the end of The Book of Mormon era.

Maya

The Maya area includes Mexico east of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and the western edge of Honduras. Originally, archaeologists thought the Maya developed into a civilization about A.D. 300. They designated A.D. 300-900 as the Classic Period to reflect the high point of Maya civilization. Only lately have they discovered that urban centers began much earlier than previously thought, around 550 B.C. The elements that define the Classic culture were in evidence as early as 300 B.C., **not** A.D. 300. This matches Book of Mormon history much better.

Between 1000 and 500 B.C., sparse population growth occurred in the Maya area, resulting in small farming communities. Beginning around 550 B.C., cities developed. During the next four to five hundred years population increased dramatically.

It was the discovery and exploration of Nakbe and El Mirador in northern Guatemala that moved the beginning of Maya civilization back

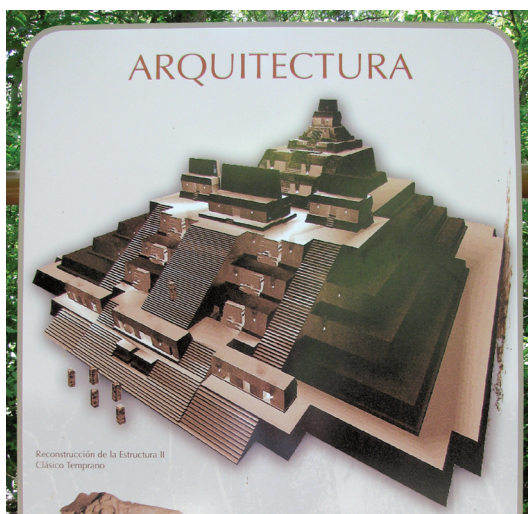
to circa 550 B.C. El Mirador ranks as the largest Maya city discovered to date. Its life span covered

approximately 500 years, from circa 400 B.C. to about A.D. 100. Also, cities such as Tikal, Uaxactun, and Holmul were developing about this same period. The population of the city of Kaminaljuyu in the southern mountains of Guatemala experienced explosive growth between 550-200 B.C. This same pattern is representative of the general area. Although many of these once mighty cities are now silent, today millions of descendants of these early Maya still live in Guatemala, Belize, western Honduras, and parts of Mexico, including the Yucatan Peninsula.

The Maya left a legacy of hieroglyphic writing on stone and pottery. The majority of the carved stone monuments were erected during A.D. 500-800, causing archaeologists

and epigraphers to believe the Maya writing system developed after the time of Christ. Ongoing excavations, however, have revealed examples of writing much earlier. Now the origin of Maya writing has been acknowledged to have begun sometime in the fourth or fifth

Around A.D. 300, Maya kings began erecting stelae to commemorate events in their lives and to memorialize themselves. The stelae provide a rich corpus of hieroglyphs. Tikal Stela 31, shown in the photograph, was dedicated in A.D. 445 but includes retrospective history. The earliest date that can be read (two earlier dates are missing glyphs), A.D. 317, documents one of the earliest rulers in the Maya area. The stela is considered the single most important text for studying early Tikal history.



The Maya built hundreds of pyramids. This sign at the site of Calakmul, a ruin just north of the Guatemala border in southern Yucatan, depicts what Structure 2 would have looked like in its latest construction. The tallest part in the back, about 150 feet high, dates between 250 B.C. and A.D. 100 and is earlier than the parts added on the front.



The design of many of the so-called Maya vases includes hieroglyphs, most of which follow a standard sequence of dedication or ownership of the vessel.



Lyle Smith & Aaron Presler




century B.C., but few examples have been found. The writing system has proven to be phonetic and works in many ways like Old World writing systems, such as Egyptian. It's also been well-documented in the last few decades that the inscriptions provide historical information, mostly about the kings and their conquests.

At the end of the Classic Period, A.D. 800-900, almost all Maya cities were abandoned and became ruins in the jungle. In spite of this collapse of civilization, millions of Maya still lived in the area, and some cities in the upper Yucatan like Uxmal, Tulum, and Chichen Itza grew. In fact, the Maya still inhabited some of these cities at the time of the Conquest.

The archaeology of the Maya area supports the belief that the Maya are a combination of the Nephites, Mulekites, and

Lamanites. If this is correct, the living Maya of today are direct descendants of the Lamanites and Mulekites and some Nephites (see the promise to Joseph, son of Lehi, in 2 Nephi 2:4 [3 LDS]). As such, they deserve our attention and prayers that they may come to a knowledge of the covenants made by the Lord with their ancestors as recorded in The Book of Mormon.

This article is only intended to give a brief overview of civilizations in Mesoamerica from about 3000 B.C. to the time of Columbus. I see considerable evidence from the archaeology of Mesoamerica that would equate some of these civilizations with the peoples of Jared, Lehi, and Mulek in The Book of Mormon. My attempt is to provide a frame of reference into which the history of The Book of Mormon makes sense. 

Looking for Maya textiles? Market day in Chichicastenango is one of the best places to purchase both antique and new traditional Maya clothing. These two women, dressed in traditional highland Maya clothing, are leaving the Santo Tomas church— where the Popol Vuh manuscript was discovered—after attending the service.



Lyle Smith

For more about why I believe the setting for most of The Book of Mormon narrative took place in Mesoamerica, see my two articles in *glyph notes*, July/August 2011 and May/June 2012.

GLYPH *Quotes*

By Kevin Anderson

Is God really in charge of his Word? Did he preside over the text that was written in our Scriptures or simply let men write as they wished, paying no attention to context and content? Were men simply journalizing their thoughts, or were they divinely directed and inspired of God? These questions are often raised by saints who are seeking to understand his Word and his plan. The narrative in chapter 10 of third Nephi (verses 33-41 [23:6-13 LDS]) gives us a glimpse into the mind and will of Jesus regarding the record that Nephi was keeping.

In this account, we recall that Jesus had been expounding the Scriptures to the people when he said unto them, "Behold, other scriptures I would that ye should write, that ye have not." Jesus then commanded Nephi to bring forth the record which he had kept. This is an invaluable lesson for the saints of God. It reveals God's nature to direct and deliver specific details and accounts, insomuch as to call one of his servants aside to make sure that certain events were indeed documented.


This account further explains that the intent of the Master was to preserve a marvelous testimony that he desired to share with future generations. How sad it would have been if Jesus had not reminded Nephi to write the prophecy of Samuel, the Lamanite, so that it could be chronicled. Samuel had testified that on the day that the Father should glorify his name in Christ

Jesus commanded that it should be written.... —3 Nephi 10:41 [23:13 LDS]

many saints should arise from the dead, appearing and ministering to many.

When Jesus had finished recalling this prophecy, he spoke to the people and asked, "Were it not so?" And his disciples answered and said, "Yea, Lord, Samuel did prophesy according to thy words, and they were all fulfilled." Jesus then asked them why these words had not been written down, and Nephi remembered that the event had not been recorded. The final verse of chapter 10 gives us this powerful witness of the authority and providential care of our Heavenly Father regarding the preservation of his sacred Word: "And it came to pass that **Jesus commanded that it should be written, therefore it was written** according as he had commanded."

One of the great joys of The Book of Mormon is found in the plain and simple language of its message. However, simplicity is not its only treasure. Another treasure is in its hidden jewels of such

potent content that we are found not only spiritually satisfied but also sufficiently grounded in a witness that assures us of its own credibility and truthfulness. Knowing that God cared enough to direct the addition of this valuable testimony into his record is a blessing to us today. It gives us another significant witness of the events surrounding the death and resurrection of his Son that we would otherwise not have, except that "**Jesus commanded that it should be written.**" 



GLYPH *Notes*

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Firm and Steadfast

IN MEMORIAM: Clyde W. Noren

Pre-Columbian Studies Institute (PSI) has lost a tower of strength in the passing of Clyde W. Noren on December 7, 2013. He and his loving companion Margaret were among the first volunteers in 1994 when PSI came into existence. Clyde served as treasurer from 2004 through 2011 and as the primary writer of the column "glyph quotes" from 1997-2011.* He also faithfully assisted in the assembling, labeling, and mailing of *glyph notes*. A frequent traveler with PSI tours to Book of Mormon

They were firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord.

—3 Nephi 3:16 [7:15 LDS]

lands, Clyde was vibrant in his love for The Book of Mormon. He and Margaret attended conferences and seminars in search of archaeological links to The Book of Mormon which could be shared in testimony to help bolster the faith of others.

Clyde exemplified in his daily life the principles of being firm and steadfast, as spoken of in 3 Nephi. Insight into the importance Clyde placed on a firm and steadfast faith permeates the "glyph quotes"

Cont. on Page 8

Glyph Dwellers

Dwellers - to live and have a home in a particular place



Hi guys! Today, we'll learn that when we fall, we should get right back up and keep on going ... and that Jesus is always there to help pick us up and get us going again!

The Adventures of Beezrom

By Mindy Mulheron
Illustrations by Aaron Presler

God has been doing amazing things here! The last time I told you about the day I found out Jesus was born—wow, was that a great day! I still can't believe my friend Jesus is here on earth. The spirit has been working with the people since that day and many people have found the freedom and peace that comes to us when we put our trust in the Lord. This time of revival has been so encouraging after so many trials. Don't get me wrong, life isn't perfect—and it won't be until all the peoples of the earth declare that Jesus is Lord—but this time of preaching and teaching has brought the good news of the gospel to many, and the church is growing.

The prophets have been reminding us lately about what will happen when Jesus's time on earth is done, and I'm really not looking forward to it. They say that there will be darkness over the land and storms that will bring much destruction. That scares me, but I know that God wouldn't let it happen if there wasn't a reason.

Sometimes it's really easy to wonder about God and his plan. We know that he's our Father, and that fathers love their children. And people who love each other don't ever want to hurt each other, but sometimes bad things do happen. When those things happen, it's important to remember that God didn't do that to you. God does not want bad things for your life. He does not want to see you hurt.

However, God knows that sometimes you will get hurt, and he pledges to be there—watching, waiting to pick you back up. Think about riding your bike: if you can ride a bike, it's because someone taught you—probably your mom or dad. Do you remember how hard it was when you were trying to figure out that bike? You probably had training wheels for a while and you felt really good when you were riding around, especially with your mom and dad watching. But then one day, someone took those training wheels off—and it was so hard! You might have even fallen down a couple of times. But your mom or

dad helped you get back up and on your bike, and, eventually, there you were: riding that bike—with no training wheels! You did it! Do you remember how proud your parents were? Do you remember how good it felt to succeed after you had tried so hard?

Remember that when you're going through your days, ok? Sometimes you might fall off your bike—someone or something might hurt you—but you know, deep in your heart, that if you get back up you can go again, just like you did when you were learning to ride your bike. And your heavenly parent, your Father, is there watching—cheering for you, bursting with pride at your efforts. He is so proud of you when you get back up and keep going. Just like Jesus. He's here, preaching and teaching, even though he knows he's going to get hurt. But Jesus knows, just like you do, that our Father will always be there to pick him up—so he keeps on going. You keep going too, ok? No matter how many times you fall.

See you guys next time! ☺

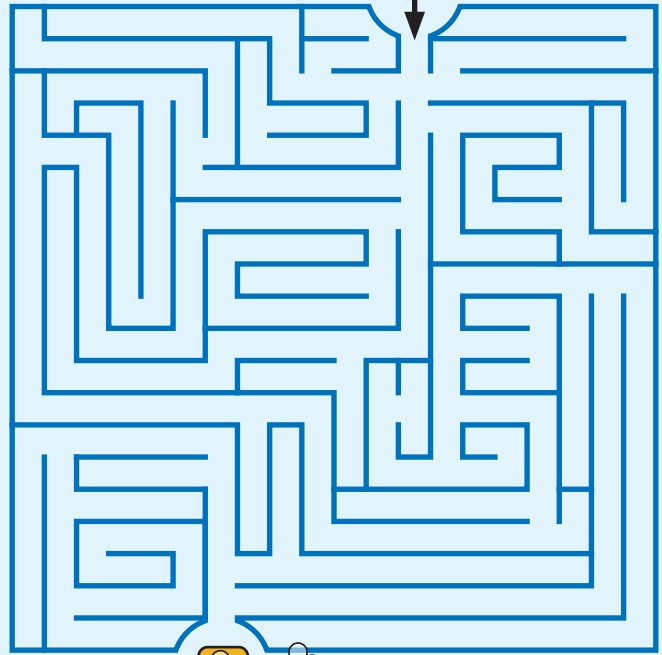
Scriptural reference: 3 Nephi 3 [6 & 7 LDS]

Just Keep On Going! Maze

Help Beezrom "just keep on going" to find his beehive home and his best friends!



START HERE!



Answer on Page 3

Friendly Reminder!

Pre-columbian Studies Institute
has a new email address:
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*Peoples of Mesoamerica:
A Brief Overview*

Glyph Quotes

*IN MEMORIAM:
Clyde W. Noren*

The Adventures of Beezrom

Clyde Noren (*Cont. from Page 6*)

articles written by him. His own words, as quoted below, reveal much about his conviction and commitment to his Lord and to those to whom the gospel must be shared.

- Expressions of humility by Christian believers as shown through meekness, love, sacrifice, and caring for others without self-serving agendas is a sincere and true representation of our belief in the power and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ (“glyph quotes,” July/Aug 1998, p. 8).
- May we as Christians at the end of our life be able to say as Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:7: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (“glyph quotes,” July/Aug 1999, p. 4).
- God manifests His sovereignty yet reveals His love, compassion, and concern for those who praise, worship, and petition Him (“glyph quotes,” Jan/Feb 2001, p. 8).
- Now is the time to direct the channels of our lives to witness that we walk in the light of Jesus by exhibiting love, compassion, understanding



Margaret and Clyde Noren

and forgiveness in that walk (“glyph quotes,” July/Aug 2002, p. 8).

- The final result of a true believer’s hope and faith will be a joyous, peaceful, healthy, and equitable life in the eternal kingdom of God and Christ (“glyph quotes,” March/April 2009, p. 3).

Words from the hymn “With a Steadfast Faith” took root in Clyde’s life and were manifested in his ministry.

With a steadfast faith together let us walk


That the sons of earth may know

The abundant life, the way his Son has taught,

And in Christ-like stature grow.

—#367 in *Hymns of the Restoration*, revised ed., 2007

Clyde fought a good fight, finished his course, and kept the faith. We will miss his physical presence, but he left behind a spiritual legacy that continues to live.

— *By Patricia J. Beebe* 

* Clyde contributed 47 articles for *glyph notes*. Back issues of *glyph notes* (1994-2009) are available on CD at The Restoration Book Store, 915 E 23rd Street, Independence, MO 64055.