

Gospel Doctrine Lesson 3: "The Vision of the Tree of Life"

(1 Nephi 8–11; 12:16–18; 15)

LESSON GOAL: To help class members understand the symbols in the vision of the tree of life and the application of these symbols in their lives.

Boyd K. Packer: "You may think that Lehi's dream or vision has no special meaning for you, but it does. **You are in it; all of us are in it**" ("Lehi's Dream and You," BYU Devotional, January 6, 2007, 3).

2 Nephi 32:3-5: "Wherefore, now after I have spoken these words, **if ye cannot understand them it will be because ye ask not, neither do ye knock**; wherefore ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark. For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things that ye should do."

President Ezra Taft Benson: "There is a power in the book that will begin to flow into your life the moment you begin a **serious study** of the book. You will find **greater power to resist temptation**. You will find the **power to avoid deception**. You will find the **power to stay on the strait and narrow path**" (*Ensign*, November 1986, 7).

Joseph Smith wrote from Liberty Jail: "The things of God are of deep import and **time**, and **experience**, and **careful and ponderous** and **solemn thoughts** can only find them out" (TPJS, 137).

Spencer W. Kimball: "It is not the book's dramatic crises, its history, its narrative that are so important, **but its power to transform men into Christlike beings worthy of exaltation**." (Conference Report, April 1963, 67).

Alma 32:41: If you plant the word or seed in your heart and nurture it with **great diligence and patience**, "**it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up into everlasting life**."

1. The symbols in the vision of the tree of life

The tree of life and its fruit

Jeffrey R. Holland: "The images of Christ and the tree are inextricably linked. ... At the very outset of the Book of Mormon, ... **Christ is portrayed as the source of eternal life and joy**, the **living evidence of divine love**, and the means whereby God will fulfill his covenant with the house of Israel and indeed the entire family of man, returning them all to their eternal promises" (*Christ and the New Covenant* [1997], 160, 162).

David A. Bednar: "The fruit on the tree is a symbol for the blessings of the Atonement. Partaking of the fruit of the tree represents the receiving of ordinances and covenants whereby the Atonement can become fully efficacious in our lives. The fruit is described as "desirable to make one happy" (1 Ne 8:10) and produces great joy and the desire to share that joy with others" (*Ensign*, Oct. 2011, 34).

Neal A. Maxwell: "The strait and narrow path, though clearly marked, is a **path, not a freeway nor an escalator**. Indeed, there are times when the only way the strait and narrow path can be followed is on **one's knees! And we are to help each other along the path**." (*Ensign*, May 1982, 38).

Nephi describes the tree of life and its fruit:

- a. "Most sweet, above all" (1 Nephi 8:11)
- b. "White, to exceed all whiteness" (1 Nephi 8:11)
- c. "Desirable above all other fruit" (1 Nephi 8:12)
- d. Having "beauty ... exceeding of all beauty" (1 Nephi 11:8)
- e. "Precious above all"; "most precious" (1 Nephi 11:9)
- f. "Most joyous to the soul" (1 Nephi 11:23)
- g. "The greatest of all the gifts of God" (1 Nephi 15:36)

1 Ne 8 -- The symbolism in Lehi's dream

SYMBOL (What Lehi Saw)

1. Large and spacious field.....(v.9)
2. Tree.....(v.10)
3. Fruit.....(v.10)
4. River of water.....(v.13)
5. Rod of iron.....(v.19)
6. Strait and narrow path.....(v.20)
7. Mist of Darkness.....(v.23)
8. Great and spacious building..(1Ne 12:18)

MEANING

- the world(v. 20)
- the love of God.....(1 Ne 11:22)
- the love of God or eternal life.....(1 Ne 15:36)
- depths of the river=depths of hell.....(1 Ne 12:16)
- the word of God.....(1 Ne 11:25)
- the way to eternal life.....(2 Ne 31:18)
- the temptations of the devil.....(1 Ne 12:17)
- the vain imaginations and pride of the world...(1 Ne 11:36)

SYMBOL (What Nephi Saw)

9. Fountain of living waters.....(1 Ne 11:25)
10. Terrible gulf.....(1 Ne 12:18)

MEANING

- the love of God.....(1 Ne 11:25)
- the justice of the Eternal God.....(1 Ne 12:18)

The rod of iron

Bruce R. McConkie: "The course leading to eternal life is both **strait and straight**. It is **straight** because it has an invariable direction -- always it is the same. There are no diversions, crooked paths, or tangents leading to the kingdom of God. It is **strait** because it is narrow and restricted, a course where full obedience to the full law is required. **Straightness has reference to direction, straitness to width**. The gate is strait; the path is both strait and straight. Thus by entering in at the strait gate (which is repentance and baptism) a person gets on the 'straight and narrow path which leads to eternal life.'" (*Mormon Doctrine*, 769).

The river of filthy water, the mist of darkness, and the great and spacious building

Jeffrey R. Holland: "Our times are turbulent and difficult. We see wars internationally and distress domestically. Neighbors all around us face personal heartaches and family sorrows. Legions know fear and troubles of a hundred kinds. This reminds us that when those **mists of darkness** enveloped the travelers in Lehi's vision of the tree of life, it enveloped **all** of the participants—the righteous as well as the unrighteous, the young along with the elderly, the new convert and seasoned member alike. In that allegory **all** face opposition and travail, and only the rod of iron—the declared word of God—can bring them safely through. **We all need that rod. We all need that word**. No one is safe without it, for in its absence any can "[fall] away into forbidden paths and [be] lost," ("Prophets in the Land Again," *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 105)

Glenn L. Pace: "Even though a person may have a testimony and want to do what is right, **it is difficult not to be drawn to that great and spacious building**. From all appearances, the people in the building look happy and free and seem to be having a great time. But don't mistake celestial pleasure for celestial happiness and joy. Don't mistake lack of self-control for freedom. **Complete freedom without appropriate restraint makes people slaves to their appetites. Don't envy a lesser and lower life.**" (*Spiritual Plateaus*, 81.)

2. The people in the vision of the tree of life

Vision of the tree of life – 1 Nephi 8

- Group #1: **start on the path** but **become lost** in the mist of darkness (v. 21-23)
- Group #2: **hold** to the rod of iron, reach the tree, partake of the fruit, but **become ashamed** and fall away (v. 24-28)
- Group #3: **hold to the rod of iron**, reach the tree, partake of the fruit who then **remain faithful** (v. 30)
- Group #4: **never start on the path** but go directly toward the great and spacious building (v. 31-33)

Parable of the Soils or the Sower – Matthew 13

- Group #1: seed falls among **thorns**, hear the word, riches and cares of the world choke the word, unfruitful (v. 7)
- Group #2: seed falls in **stony places**, **takes no root**, scorched, persecuted and offended (v. 5-6)
- Group #3: seed in **good ground**, hear the word, understand, and **bear fruit** (v. 8)
- Group #4: seed by the **way side**, **ignores** the word, fowls devour them, wicked one snatches away his heart (v. 4)

Prophet Joseph Smith: (1839) "There are many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, and denominations, who are **blinded** by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it'. In some cases, even those who find the truth are not able to **forsake** the world and its trappings and thus travel unencumbered down the narrow gospel passageway. Indeed, it is not difficult to live the principles of the gospel and thus to hold to the iron rod, **except where one also attempts to maintain a concurrent grasp on the world.**" (McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary the Book of Mormon*, vol. 1, p. 59)

3. Conclusion

Ted Gibbons: "One of the interesting facts about this dream is that everyone can find himself or herself in it. Take the time to find yourself. Where would Lehi have seen you? In the building (heaven forbid!)? On the path? Under the tree? Wandering in the mists or drowning in the river?"

There are **four words** in this dream that give imperative instructions about our relationship with the rod, the path, and the tree. They all begin with the letter "C". The words are:

commence (1 Nephi 8:22)	catch hold (1 Nephi 8:24)	cling (1 Nephi 8:24)	continue (1 Nephi 8:30).
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- We must accept the ordinances of initiation (baptism, confirmation) and **commence** in the path.
- Immediately thereafter, we must **catch hold** of the rod. But **catching hold** will not suffice
- We must **cling** to the rod.
- And then we must **continue**. We must attend our meetings and we must attend to our duties. **We must press forward until we arrive at the tree and partake of the fruit. No amount of effort will be sufficient if we leave the path before we partake of the fruit.**"