

## Book of Mormon Lesson #3

### “THE VISION OF THE TREE OF LIFE”

1 NEPHI 8-11; 12:16-18; 15

By Ted L. Gibbons

#### QUOTE OF THE WEEK:

. . . 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. (Spencer W. Kimball, Conference Report, April 1963, p.67)

**INTRODUCTION:** The Lord has often taught his servants by means of inspired dreams. Some of the most remarkable revelations in the scriptures have come in the form of dreams. Consider the following accounts and try to identify the person who had the dream from which each is taken. Then try to identify the meaning of the symbols in each dream.

A rolling stone that filled the earth (Daniel 2:34)

A ladder (stairway) ascending into heaven (Genesis 28:12)

Seven fat cows & seven skinny cows (Genesis 41:2)

Unclean animals lowered from heaven in a great sheet (Acts 10:11-15)

Eleven bowing sheaves of corn (Genesis 37:7)

An iron rod (1 Nephi 8:19)

In 1 Nephi 8, the prophet Lehi had a remarkable dream filled with symbols that are easily applied to our own lives. If you have one available, look at a picture of Lehi's dream and identify the symbols

contained therein. Can you name the symbols and their meanings.

- i A dark and dreary waste
- i a large and spacious field
- i a tree
- i the fruit of the tree
- i a path
- i an iron rod
- i a river
- i a great and spacious building

Each of these symbols will apply to the life a disciple. Learning what they mean is worth a great effort!

**1. THE FRUIT OF THE TREE OF LIFE IS THE LOVE OF GOD AND IS THE MOST DESIRABLE OF ALL THINGS.** 1Nephi 8:4-18;

11:8,9,22,23; 15:36; Alma 32:42; Alma 36:24.

How does Lehi introduce the dream to his family? What is Lehi's major concern as he begins to recount his dream? (1 Nephi 8:1-4) It is as though Lehi had had an experience something like this: *I had a dream and saw four doors in heaven, one of gold, one of silver, one of brass, and one that appeared to be a black hole. It was making a sucking sound. The whole family went through the gold door, except you son. You went through the black hole. I'm concerned about your spiritual welfare.*

Where is Lehi when his dream begins? (8:4-8) What does this "dark and dreary waste" suggest to you? (Could it be life without the fruit of the tree or the love of God?) What does Lehi see in 1 Nephi 8:10? This seems

to be desert imagery. Lehi, who was certainly a desert traveler is describing a wilderness in which he finds an oasis, with water and a fruit tree—a date palm, perhaps. The fruit of the tree represents the love of God (see 1 Nephi 11:22-25) What is the greatest manifestation of the love of God? (John 3:16)

The fruit of the tree of life is described in the scriptures with eight different phrases. Find and mark these descriptive phrases in your own scriptures. The phrases follow:

- A. **Sweet** above all (8:11)
- B. **White** to exceed all whiteness (8:11)
- C. **Desirable** above all other fruit (8:12)
- D. **Beauty** . . . far beyond . . . exceeding of all beauty (11:8)
- E. **Precious** above all (11:9)
- F. Most **joyous** to the soul (11:23)
- g. **Pure** above all that is pure (Alma 32:42)
- H. **greatest** of all the gifts of god (1 Nephi 15:36)

Notice what all these phrases have in common. They are all superlatives. They refer to something that is better than anything else like it. They teach us that this is the best fruit we could possibly eat. What will happen to us as we partake of this fruit which is the love of God? (1 Nephi 8:10,12) Can you remember an experience when you have experienced this in your own life?

\*Once we have partaken of the fruit, what is the natural response? (1 Nephi 8:13-17; see also Alma's attitude in Alma 36:24--to share; to invite others to partake also.) The most beautiful sunset I have ever seen I saw while driving alone on the Mogollon Rim in northeastern Arizona. I stopped the car and got out and gaped. I remember how desperately I wanted my wife and family to see it. But I was alone . . .

Lehi teaches us that one of a father's responsibilities is to invite family members to partake. Alma shows us that this is true of anyone who has

been to the tree and tasted of the fruit.

**2.THE ROD OF IRON IS THE WORD OF GOD AND LEADS US IN A DIRECT COURSE TO THE TREE OF LIFE. (1 Nephi 8:19-24,30;11:25;15:23,24; Hel.3:29,30)**

What does Lehi see in 1 Nephi 8:19, 20? What does the rod of iron represent? 1 Nephi 11:25; 15:23-24) What are the sources of the word of God? (Scriptures, prophets, the Holy Spirit) Read 1 Nephi 8:19-20 and identify the three things the rod of iron can do for us.

- A. "It extended along the bank of the river." It serves as a protection to keep us out of the river of filthy water.
- B. "It led to the tree." It directs us to the love of God.
- C. "I beheld a strait and narrow path which came along by the rod of iron." The rod keeps us on the strait and narrow path while we journey to the tree.

Notice that the strait and narrow path is very close to the river of filthy water. In our own day, how great a distance must you travel to move from an spiritual experience to an evil one? How far is it to the television when you have finished your Family Home Evening?

How does the word of God (the rod) keep us on the strait and narrow path as we journey to the tree? (See Helaman 3:29)

If someone chooses to leave the rod and the path, what other roads does the dream indicate that they might then walk?

- A. "Forbidden" 1 Nephi 8:28
- B. "Strange" 1 Nephi 8:32
- C. "Broad" 1 Nephi 12:17

How we might recognize that we are following "forbidden," "strange," or

“broad” roads. What are the consequences of choosing to follow other paths than the “strait and narrow”?

**3.THE MISTS OF DARKNESS ARE THE TEMPTATIONS OF SATAN AND ARE DESIGNED TO BLIND OUR EYES AND HARDEN OUR HEARTS. (1 Nephi 8:23,31;12:17)**

What does Lehi see in 1 Nephi 8:23? What do the mists of darkness represent? What is the effect of the mists of darkness on the children of men? (1 Nephi 12:17) What does John 12:35 suggest about the danger of these mists?

Why would Satan want our eyes to be blinded? What are the things in the dream he does not want us to see?

A. **The tree.** Why would Satan not want us to see the tree and the fruit? What experiences in people’s lives may cause them to be blinded to the love of God? Why would failure to perceive the love of God cause us to harden our hearts?

B. **The rod of iron.** Why would Satan not want us to see the rod of iron? When you cannot see the tree, what must you do to make sure you are still moving toward it? What are the mists of darkness of today that cause people not to heed the word of God, the Spirit, the prophets or the scriptures?

C. **The river of filthy water.** Why would Satan not want us to see the river of filthy water? How does Satan today blind people to the consequences of letting go of the rod and leaving the strait and narrow path? How is Lucifer able to get people to ignore the obvious consequences of straying from the path and breaking the Lord’s commandments?

Compare the words that describe those who hold to the rod and those

who let go. Those who let go of the rod “wandered” (1 Nephi 8:23,32). They also went forward “feeling their way” (1 Nephi 8:31). Those who held to the rod, meanwhile, were “pressing forward” (1 Nephi 24,30). We are taught that they “caught hold” and went forward “clinging” (1 Nephi 8:24,30).

The gospel gives us direction and something firm to hold on to. What evidence is there that many people wander aimlessly in their lives without anything firm to hold on to? Elder Featherstone spoke of this “firmness” in his talk in October Conference. He said:

Doesn't it make you deeply grateful to belong to a church with apostles and prophets at the head--knowing that one link will always hold, one light will never go out? As the world moves deeper and deeper into sin, this wonderful Church stands like a giant granite boulder.

Aren't you proud that the Church teaches us the truth? We don't have to wonder about earrings for boys and men, tattoos, spiked hair, the four-letter words, and obscene gestures. We have prophets who model the standards. They teach that the Ten Commandments are not outdated. The word of the Lord has thundered down through the generations: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain" (Ex. 20:7). Profaning God's name is a great offense to the Spirit, and to do so is Satan's great ploy to mock our God. . . .

Beloved . . . aren't you thankful to God that the apostles and prophets never waver on sin? No matter how strong the winds of public opinion may blow, the Church is immovable. "God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife." (Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone, Conf. Report, October 1999)

#### **4. THE GREAT AND SPACIOUS BUILDING REPRESENTS PRIDE AND THE VAIN THINGS OF THE WORLD THAT ARE DESIGNED TO DRAW US AWAY FROM THE PATH (1 Nephi 8:25-34; 12:18)**

What does Lehi see in 1 Nephi 8:26? What does the great and spacious building represent? (1 Nephi 11:36; 12:18) If the tree, the rod and the river are obscured, what are people left to seek in the dream?

Mists, of course, cling to the ground. Perhaps this is the reason for the building being “in the air, high above the earth.” (1 Nephi 8:26) Those who cannot see horizontally through the mists can always see the building. (1 Nephi 8:26,27,33) Perhaps the following verse offers some additional understanding about the building being “in the air.”

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to *the prince of the power of the air*, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: (Eph. 2:2, *emphasis added*)

Note that the attraction of the building is so strong that it even draws some of those who have already tasted the fruit of the tree (1 Nephi 8:28) which is the “most desirable above all things.” (1 Nephi 11:22)

What counsel does Lehi give to help us avoid the great attraction of the building? (1 Nephi 8:33,34) *Note: The word heed does not mean to obey, but rather to regard with care, to take notice of, to pay attention to, to consider, or to observe.* What is the great and spacious building today? What things about the great and spacious building make it so attractive even to some who have partaken of the love of God?

I have a feeling that the great and spacious building shines in its most resplendent form in places like the Strip in Las Vegas. I have a friend who told me with a straight face that driving through that area made him feel like a trout. How many have succumbed to the brightness of

Lucifer's lures and been reeled in and placed in the adversary's creel. Movie marquees, music videos, and the glass and steel towers of big buildings sometimes have the attributes of this enormous structure.

**5. THE RIVER OF FILTHY WATER IS “A REPRESENTATION OF THAT AWFUL HELL . . .” THAT IS WAITING TO DROWN THOSE WHO WANDER FROM THE PATH. (1 Nephi 8:25-34; 12:18)**

What does Lehi see in 1 Nephi 8:13? What does Nephi notice about the river that Lehi did not see? (1 Nephi 15:27) What does the river represent? (1 Nephi 15:26-35—the depths of hell) Does the river represent temporal or spiritual realities? (Both. See 1 Nephi 15:31,32) Can you identify some of the ways in which people “drown in the depths of the fountain” or river in mortality. In this context, note the following from Henry B. Eyring::

Let's talk for moment about the way in which filth is presented . . . . I am talking about the advertizing . . . as you watched the beer commercials, did you notice the people drinking? I have never seen such clean-cut, hard-working, patriotic, good folk in a long time . . . I use that only as one example, If you turn on your television and watch some of the videos that go with the rock music, you will see how evil is presented by Satan. It is presented incessantly and attractively. It doesn't even look like a sea of filth to the young people who are swimming in it. In fact, they may not even be swimming, because the presentation is so incessant and so attractive that they may not notice that there is a need to swim. (Elder Henry B. Eyring, C.E.S. Religious Educators' Symposium Booklet, 1984, p. 9)

**6. THE NUMBERLESS CONCOURSES OF PEOPLE REPRESENT ALL MANKIND AND MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO LOCATE OURSELVES AMIDST THE SYMBOLS. (1 Nephi 8:21-33)**



Take some time to identify the four groups of people mentioned in the dream. Compare the characteristics of each of the groups. You will find an interesting comparison between these groups and the four groups in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13.

Group 1 (1 Nephi 8:21-23) What characteristics define this group?

Group 2: (1 Nephi 8:24-28) What characteristics define this group?

Group 3: (1 Nephi 8:30,33) What characteristics define this group?

Group 4: (1 Nephi 8:31-33) What characteristics define this group?

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?

**Conclusion:** 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).

I testify that this is Lehi’s counsel for those of us who want to experience the Love of God with our families and fellow men. We must accept the ordinances of initiation (baptism, confirmation) and **commence** in the path.

Immediately thereafter, we must **catch hold** of the rod. If we begin in the path but neglect the security of the scriptures and the words of living

prophets, the mists of darkness will certainly conceal our destination and confuse our efforts. But ***catching hold*** will not suffice. We are told in other places about floods (3 Nephi 14:25), about wind and rain (D&C 90:4), and about mighty winds and shafts in the whirlwind (Hel. 5:12).

We must ***cling*** to the rod. I tried out a rope swing once, when I had a broken rib. I had forgotten about the rib. Preceding days of pain had taught me a great deal of unconscious caution. I hardly dared to breath deep. But my Scouts had found a long rope swing in a grand tree near a towering waterfall. I was able to get to appropriate branch of the tree and grab the rope without thinking of what would happen when I hung all my weight on my arms and stretched those intercostal muscles around my rib cage. And so I picked up my feet and swung. The pain was like a lance in my side. I cried out in agony. But I was over the rocks 20 feet below. And so, in spite of terrible pain, I required of myself to cling to the rope until I was safely over the pool at the base of the waterfall. In that same way we must cling to the rod until we are safe.

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.

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