



5. The Tree of Life: Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Interpretive Vision 1 Ne 8–11

" . . . I beheld the Son of God going forth among the children of men; and I saw many fall down at his feet and worship him. And it came to pass that I beheld that the rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God. And the angel said unto me again: Look and behold the condescension of God!" (1 Nephi 11:24–26)

“The Iron Rod” (Hymn 274)

To Nephi, seer of olden time,
A vision came from God,
Wherein the holy word sublime
Was shown an iron rod.

While on our journey here below,
Beneath temptation's pow'r,
Through mists of darkness we must go,
In peril ev'ry hour.

And when temptation's pow'r is nigh,
Our pathway clouded o'er,
Upon the rod we can rely,
And heaven's aid implore.

Chorus

Hold to the rod, the iron rod;
Tis strong, and bright, and true.
The iron rod is the word of God;
'Twill safely guide us through.

Looking forward to Quiz 1

- Study guide
 - Sources, names, terms, events, possible topics for short answers
- Notable Passage list
 - You do not need to know chapter and verse!
 - Review through 1 Nephi 1–14
 - Example of 1 Nephi 1:14
 - **Historical:** Having heard the preaching of prophets regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, Lehi went out to pray and received a vision followed by a dream where he was called as a prophet. In vision he read about the destruction of Jerusalem but also many other marvelous things, which caused him to praise God.
 - **Literary:** Lehi's praise of God takes the form of a poem or psalm of praise whereby he expressed his feelings about God's goodness with specially chosen words that took the form of Hebrew poetry.
 - **Theological:** Even though much of what Lehi read regarded the destruction of the wicked, Lehi felt to praise God, whose is all powerful and whose ways and judgments are always just. He understood that justice is balanced by mercy, and that we always have the ability to repent.

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The Importance of the Tree of Life Vision

- "After the people of Lehi left Jerusalem, Lehi had a vision of the Tree of Life. His son Nephi prayed to know its meaning. In answer, he was given **a remarkable vision of Christ**. **That vision is the central message of the Book of Mormon**. The Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ." (Elder Boyd K. Packer, *Conference Report*, April 1986, p. 76; packet, 58)
- The Dream of Lehi and Nephi's vision interpreting it are central to the message of the Book of Mormon and appear in the chiasmic middle of 1 Nephi
 - Lehi's Jerusalem Ministry (1:4–20)
 - Journey Into the Wilderness (2:1–7:22)
 - Lehi's Dream and Prophecy (8:1–10:22)
 - The Apocalypse of Nephi (11:1–15:19)
 - The Journey Resumed (16:1–19:21)
 - Nephi Quotes and Interprets Isaiah (19:22–22:18)

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Outline of 1 Nephi 8–10

- **Lehi's Dream and Prophecy** (8:1–10:22)
 - **The Tree of Life** (8:2–20, **vision report**)
 - **The World and the Tree** (8:21–35, vision continued as a **parable** or **comparative story**)
 - Lehi pleads with his family (8:36–38, **fatherly admonition**)
- **Nephi's Two Sets of Plates** (9:1–6, Nephi's **third editorial digression** for his readers explaining his record keeping practices)
- **Lehi Prophecies of the Messiah and the House of Israel** (10:1–16, **sermon** containing elements of Lehi's prophecy)

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The Tree of Life

(8:2–20, **Vision/Dream Report**)

- Bridge: "And it came to pass that we gathered together **all manner of seeds of every kind . . .**" (8:1)
 - Sets up "**horticulture motif**" for the following vision
- **Dark and Dreary Waste** (8:2–8)
- **The Tree and Its Fruit** (8:9–12)
 - "And it came to pass that **I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy**. And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that **the fruit thereof was white**, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen. And **as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy**; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit." (1 Ne 8:10–12)
- **The River** (8:13)
- Reactions of Lehi's Family (8:14–18)
- **The Rod and the Path** (8:19–20)
 - "And **I beheld a rod of iron**, and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood. And **I also beheld a strait and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron . . .**" (1 Ne 8:19–20a)

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The World and the Tree (8:21–33)

Parable or Comparative story

- The dream continues, but the application broadens
- Compare the different reactions of people in the dream to **Christ's Parable of the Sower** (Matt 13; see Parker chart, packet, 59)
 - Iron Rod
 - Seed (Matt 13:19; word of God)
 - Mists of Darkness (8:21–23)
 - Seed by the wayside (Matt 13: 4, 19; temptations)
 - Shame (8:24–25)
 - Seed fallen on stony ground (Matt 13:20-21; superficial testimonies)
 - Great and Spacious Building (8:26–28)
 - Seed among thorns (Matt 13:22; pride, honors of men)
 - **Pride, the prime Book of Mormon sin, root of most other sins**
 - The Persistent Partake (8:29–30)
 - Seed on good ground (Matt 13:23; understanding and endurance)
 - Many Lost (8:31–35)
- *Nevertheless, at this point the meaning of Lehi's dream is not yet explicit . . .*

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Poetry, Parallelism, and Levels of Communication (literary *and* spiritual!)

- **Poetic use of language**
 - As with each form or genre, we read poetry differently than other writing
 - Even when a passage is not actual poetry, heavily symbolic use of language can still be **poetic**
- **Examples of parallel comparisons and contrasts**
 - 1 Nephi 8:20, "And I also beheld a **strait and narrow** path, which came along by the rod of iron, even to the tree by which I stood; and it also led by the head of the fountain, unto a **large and spacious** field, as if it had been a world.
 - **Strait, archaic** "narrow space or passage; as in a narrow waterway"
 - Poetic epithets and or descriptions (better examples of Hebrew-styled poetry will be forthcoming)
 - 3 Nephi 14:13, "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for **wide is the gate, and broad is the way**, which leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat" (cf. 1 Nephi 12:17)
 - What are the many ways, from heavily symbolic to straightforward, that the Lord speaks to us?

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Nephi's Two Sets of Plates (9:1–6, editorial digression/explanation)

- Nephi's **third** editorial digression for his readers explaining his record keeping practices
- Why does this interrupt Nephi's recounting of his father's dream and his subsequent preaching to his family in chapter 10?
 - "Wherefore, **the Lord hath commanded me** to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not. But **the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning**; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words." (1 Ne 9:5–6)
 - The Tree of Life dream would have been recounted in great detail in the Book of Lehi on the Large Plates
 - The Lord knew that it would be lost, and **this dream is so essential to the purpose of the Book of Mormon that he had Nephi record it again!**
 - **It is a foundation for Nephi's own vision in 1 Nephi 11-15**

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Lehi's Sermon (1 Nephi 10:1–16)

- A **sermon** is a religious discourse (as opposed to a **narrative** telling a story) intended to persuade and encourage
 - Here prophecies are used to warn his children and teach them important principles of the Plan of Salvation
- Chapter 10: Lehi's sermon provides the "**prophetic vocabulary for Nephi's interpretive vision**"
 - **Prophecies of the Destruction of Jerusalem** (10:1–3)
 - **Person and Work of the Messiah (10:4–11)**
 - **The Coming of the Messiah** (10:4–6)
 - The Mission of John the Baptist (10:7–10)
 - The Messiah's death and resurrection (10:11)
 - **The Scattering and Gathering of Israel (10:12–16)**
 - **Allegory of the Olive Tree Summarized:** The Scattering and Gathering of Israel (from the Brass Plates, see 1 Nephi 15:12–20, and, of course, Jacob 5)

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Person and Work of the Messiah (10:4–11)

- **The Coming of the Messiah**
 - “Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews — **even a Messiah**, or, in other words, a Savior of the world.” (10:4)
 - **Messiah**: anointed one, such as Israelite priest or king
 - Jesus is to be the ultimate prophet, priest, and king!
 - *The Book of Mormon does not yet use the name-title **Jesus Christ***
- **Multiple Witnesses**
 - “And he also spake concerning the prophets, how great a number had testified of these things, concerning this Messiah, of whom he had spoken, or this Redeemer of the world.” (10:5)
- **A Savior Absolutely Necessary**
 - “Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer.” (10:6)
- **The Messiah’s Death and Resurrection**
 - “. . . And after they had slain the Messiah, who should come, and after he had been slain he should rise from the dead, and should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles.” (10:11)

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Pondering Opens the Door to Revelation

- “For it came to pass after I had **desired to know the things that my father had seen**, and **believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me**, **as I sat pondering in mine heart I was caught away** in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, **into an exceedingly high mountain . . .**” (11:1)
 - The formula: **Desire**, **believe**, **ponder . . .**
- “Ponder,” from the Latin word for “weight,” means to think heavily, single-mindedly about a subject
 - What are the spiritual implications of pondering, and what is the connection with prayer?
- The role of reflection, spiritual inquiry
 - Cf. Joseph Smith’s First Vision, D&C 76
- **Mountain = nature’s temple**
 - Place “midpoint between heaven and earth”
 - Compare to Moses on Mt. Sinai

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The Apocalypse of Nephi (1 Nephi 11–14)

- 1 Nephi 11–14 has many traits in common with biblical **apocalyptic literature** like the Revelation of John
- “An **apocalypse** is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a **revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient**” and “envisages **eschatological salvation** and involves a supernatural world” (ABD 1.283)
 - **Eschatological (dealing with the last days)**
 - Cf. parts of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah
 - Enoch, Brother of Jared also received great visions of the history of the world
 - A “guided tour” of the heavens and the history of the world
- Revelation in the NT focuses on **the person of Christ and what he will do in history to save his people** . . . Essentially the same here in Nephi’s vision!

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Unveiling Christ in History Outline of Nephi’s Apocalypse

- **The Lamb of God, the Tree of Life (11:1–36)**
 - The Coming of Christ in the Old World (11:12–33)
 - The Rejection of the Apostles of the Lamb (11:34–36)
- **History of the Children of Lehi (12:1–23)**
 - The Coming of Christ in the New World
 - Accepted then rejected
- **History of the Gentiles to the Restoration (13:1–42)**
 - The World without Christ
- **History of the Last Days (14:1–17)**
 - Christ Comes Again to the New World
- **The Final Coming of Christ (14:18–30)**
 - The Other Apocalypse: the Mission of John the Revelator

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Jesus Christ, the Tree of Life

- Prologue: The Spirit's dialogue with Nephi (11:1–11: “Believest thou . . . ?”)
 - “**Hosanna** the Lord, the most high God”
 - “[God] **save** us now”
 - “Jesus,” the Greek form of *Yeshua* or Joshua, which means “**One who saves**”
 - “Believest thou that thy father saw **the tree** of which he hath spoken? . . . blessed art thou, Nephi, because **thou believest in the Son of the most high God.**”
- Nephi's apostolic commission as **a witness of Christ**
 - “. . . thou shalt also behold a man descending out of heaven, and him shall ye witness; and **after ye have witnessed him ye shall bear record that it is the Son of God.**” (11:7)
- Further Christ images
 - **Fountain of Living Waters** equated with **the Tree of Life** (11:25)
 - Cf. Exodus 17:5-6; Jeremiah 2:13; John 4:13-14
 - **Iron Rod** = word of God, usually the scriptures and prophetic word that leads to Christ, But compare to John 1:1-3

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Discursus: the Spirit of the Lord

- “. . . I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for I beheld that **he was in the form of a man**; yet nevertheless, I knew that **it was the Spirit of the Lord**; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another” (11:11)
- What or who is the spirit of the Lord?
 - Influence and power of the Holy Ghost; Light of Christ (e.g. D&C 88:4-13)
 - **The Holy Ghost**, a personage and member of the Godhead (D&C 130:22-23)
 - The spirit body of **the premortal Jesus Christ** (Jehovah; cf. Ether 3:6-16)
- There is no definite answer on which member of the godhead appeared to Nephi
 - “If, indeed, here the Holy Ghost was Nephi's guide and teacher, this occasion is of tremendous significance, for **it is the only scriptural occasion wherein the Holy Ghost makes a personal appearance to man**” Millet & McConkie, 77)
 - **In John's apocalypse, the guide was Jesus Christ himself** (Rev. 1) and then an angel representing him (Rev. 19:10)
 - The “spirit of the Lord” begins the tour but then leaves in favor of an angel; does the premortal Jesus need to “get on stage” for his part of the historical drama?

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The Condensation

- From the Latin *condensio* and *condescendere*, literally meaning “to come down” and “dwell with”
 - English definitions include “a voluntary descent from one’s rank or dignity in relations with an inferior”
- **The Condensation of God the Father and the Son (11:12–20)**
 - God’s becoming the father of Jesus Christ (11:12-20)
 - The premortal Jesus Christ, the divine Jehovah, taking upon himself a mortal body of flesh and blood (11:20-25; cf. Mosiah 15:1-4)
- **Interpretive Centerpiece: Christ is the Love of God, the Tree of Life and the Fountain of Living Waters (11:21–25)**
- **The Condensation of God the Son (11:26–33): Christ’s ministry and suffering in the flesh**
 - Submitting to baptism (11:26-27)
 - Rejection (by the multitudes) and acceptance (by the Twelve) during his ministry (11:28-29)
 - Working miracles in behalf of and “dwelling with” the afflicted (11:30-31)
 - **Judged of the world (11:32)**
 - **Crucified and slain for the sins of the world (11:33)**