

M#03 "The Vision of the Tree of Life" 1 Ne. 8-11; 12:16-18; 15

- I. Introduction: Why Symbols?
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[**Attention to Reader:** While Lehi's vision is found in 1 Nephi 8, Nephi's additions, the meaning of the symbols and the response of Laman and Lemuel are not centrally located. Instead they are found in a variety of verses in the above listed chapters. I have, therefore, adjusted the presentation accordingly.]

I. Introduction: Why Symbols?

You will recall that the dreams of King Nebuchadnezzar [See Daniel 2:31-45]; the Pharaoh of Egypt (See Genesis 41:17-31); and, the vision of Peter (See Acts 10:9-16; 28, 34-35), were each expressed using symbolic language.

The Lord uses symbols in order to: (a) Help the learner understand and remember by comparing unfamiliar ideas or things to those that are more familiar; (b) Symbols can have different levels of meaning based upon the individual's spiritual level of understanding; and, (c) Symbols can encourage the learner to think more deeply or to inquire about what is being taught. Two examples are: wheat and tares = two groups of people that appear to be similar, but over time become very different; sun, moon and stars = three separate kingdoms, each with a different degree of glory. As one seeks to understand the meaning of the symbols, either through an interpreter as Daniel or Joseph did, or through personal revelation, their understanding of the vision is expanded.

The Book of Mormon Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual states,

"Unlike the many dreams or visions that have application only to specific people or a specific time (like Pharaoh's dream of the cattle and corn, the vision of the tree of life...received by Lehi and Nephi...applies to each of God's children." (*Book of Mormon Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999, 11).

II. Lehi's Vision of the Tree of Life

1 Nephi 8:2-4

2 And it came to pass that while my father tarried in the wilderness he spake unto us, saying: Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision.

3 And behold, because of the thing which I have seen, I have reason to rejoice in the Lord because of Nephi and also of Sam;...

4 But behold, Laman and Lemuel, I fear exceedingly because of you;...

This dream or vision is noted in the scriptures as a simple communication from the Lord to a father concerning the salvation of two of his sons. Its meaning extends, however, to each of God's children.

The vision begins with Lehi being escorted by "a man...dressed in a white robe...[who] spoke to me, and bade me follow him" (1 Nephi 8:5-6). Lehi finds himself "in a dark and dreary waste" where they traveled together "for the space of many hours of darkness" (1 Nephi 8:7-8).

1 Nephi 8:8-10

8 ...I began to pray unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies.

9 And it came to pass after I had prayed unto the Lord I beheld a large and spacious field.

10 And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.

Chart I. Symbol, Meaning, Scripture Reference:

Symbol	Meaning	Reference
1. Man dressed in white robe (8:5)	1. None	1. None
2. Dark and dreary wilderness (8:4)	2. None	2. None
3. Large and spacious field (8:9)	3. The world	3. 1 Nephi 8:20
4. Tree (Of Life) (8:10)	4. World	4. 1 Nephi 8:20

1 Nephi 8:11-12

11 ...I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I had ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.

12 ...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.

Chart I, cont; Symbol, Meaning, Scripture Reference:

5. Fruit of the Tree (8:10-11)	5. Greatest Gift of God (Eternal Life)	5. 1 Nephi 15:36; 14:7
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1 Nephi 8:13

13 ...I cast my eyes round about, that perhaps I might discover my family also, I beheld a river of water; and it ran along, and it was near the tree of which I was partaking the fruit.

Chart I cont. Symbol, Meaning, Scripture Reference:

6. River of Filthy Water (15:27)	6. Depths of Hell	6. 1 Nephi 12:16; 15:27
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1 Nephi 8:14-16

14 And I looked to behold from whence it [source of river] came; and I saw the head thereof a little way off; and at the head thereof I beheld your mother Sariah, and Sam, and Nephi; and they stood as if they knew not whither they should go.

15 ...I beckoned unto them;...did say with a loud voice that they should come unto me, and partake of the fruit, which was desirable above all other fruit.

16 ...they did come unto me and partake of the fruit also.

Lehi, after partaking of the delicious fruit, wanted to share it with his family. He saw his wife, Sariah, and his two sons, Sam and Nephi. He invited them to come and

partake. They accepted his invitation and came and partook of the fruit.

1 Nephi 8:17

17 ...I was desirous that Laman and Lemuel should come and partake of the fruit also; wherefore, I cast mine eyes towards the head of the river, that perhaps I might see them.

18 After it came to pass that I saw them, but they would not come unto me and partake of the fruit.

Lehi now wanted to find his older two sons, Laman and Lemuel. He found them and invited them to also come and partake of the fruit. They did not respond to his invitation.

1 Nephi 8:19-20

19 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.

20 And I also beheld a strait [restricted, rigid] 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 specious field, as if it had been a world.

Chart I. cont; Symbol, Meaning, Scripture Reference:

7. Rod of iron (8:19)	7. Word of God	7. 1 Nephi 11:25; 15:24
8. Strait & narrow path (8:20)	8. To Eternal Life	8. 2 Nephi 31:17-18

1 Nephi 8:21

21 And I saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which I stood.

The "numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, were doing so that they might obtain the path" (1 Nephi 8:21). These make up five groups of people.

Group 1

1 Nephi 8:23

23...there arose a mist of darkness;...insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.

Chart I, cont; Symbol, Meaning, Scripture Reference:

9. Mist of darkness (8:23)	9. Temptations of Devil	9. 1 Nephi 12:17
10. Forbidden paths (8:28)	10. Break commandments	10. 1 Nephi 12:17; Mosiah 2:33

This group was unable to reach the tree, though they were on the path, due to the mist of darkness. As a result, they lost their way, wandered off and became spiritually lost.

Group 2

1 Nephi 8:24-28

24 ...others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron;...did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.

25 ...after...[partaking] of the fruit...did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed.

26 ...[They saw] a great and spacious building;...

27 And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.

28 And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.

Chart I, cont: Symbol, Meaning, Scripture Reference:

11. Great and spacious (8:26) or Strange building (8:33)	11. Pride & Wisdom of The World	11. 1 Nephi 11:35-36; 12:18
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This group were able to reach the tree and to partake of the fruit. However, due to the scoffing of those in the "great and spacious building," they became ashamed. They then fell away to forbidden paths and became lost.

Group 3

1 Nephi 8:30, 33

30 ...behold, he [Lehi] saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree.

33 ...[after] the multitude...did enter into that strange building...they did point the finger of scorn at me and those that were partaking of the fruit also; but we heeded them not.

Group 4

1 Nephi 8:31-32

31 And he [Lehi] also saw other multitudes feeling their way towards that great and spacious building.
32 And it came to pass that many were drowned in the depths of the fountain; and many were lost from his view, wandering in strange roads.

Chart I, cont; Symbol, Meaning, Scripture Reference:

12. Strange roads (8:32)	12. Seek Other Ways of Salvation	12. D&C 76:75
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Reference Chart I. Monte S. Nyman. *I Nephi Wrote The Record: A Teaching Commentary on the First Book of Nephi and the Second Book of Nephi, Vol.1.* Orem, Utah: Granite Publishing and Distribution, LLC, 2003, 117).

This group wanted to be part of those in that "great and spacious building." As the building was on the other side of the fountain, while trying to crossing the water, many drowned. Others were lost from view, wandered in strange roads.

Group 5

1 Nephi 8:33

33 And great was the multitude that did enter into that strange building. And after they did enter...they did point the finger of scorn at me and those that were partaking of the fruit...

This group was able to get across the water and to enter into the "great and spacious building." Once inside, their time was spent in pointing the finger of scorn, or harassing and making fun of those who were partaking of the fruit of the tree.

Chart II. Five Groups of People in Lehi's Vision:

Groups	Results	Scripture
Group 1	On path, but lost way due to midst of darkness. Did not hold on to iron rod	1 Nephi 8:23
Group 2	Tasted fruit, then became ashamed as the result of the mocking of those in world; They became lost	1 Nephi 8:24-28
Group 3	Tasted fruit, held firm to iron rod, and did not give attention to others mocking	1 Nephi 8:30, 33
Group 4	Drowned or lost way in their desire to join those in spacious building	1 Nephi 8:31-32
Group 5	They gained entrance into spacious building; and scorned those who ate fruit	1 Nephi 8:33

Lehi concludes sharing his vision with his family by expressing his concern for his two oldest sons.

1 Nephi 8:37-38

37 And he did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off; yea, my father did preach unto them. 38 And after he had preached unto them, and also prophesied unto them of many things, he bade them to keep the commandments of the Lord; and he did cease speaking unto them.

It is heart-wrenching to a parent when, despite their sincere efforts to rescue their child from what they know

will be certain unhappiness, the child ignores their pleadings and continues on their determined course.

The following, written by an anonymous writer, may provide some insight as to why those who were on the path leading to the tree, but instead ended up in the water, may not be responsive to the words of encouragement from those who care about them. I quote:

"I see the rod and feel the river of filthiness running along side of it. I am in the river within arms' distance of the rod. The river does not seem filthy to me.

"I sense that I have been in these waters for years and that I have discovered over the years that I could offset the current by steadily swimming upstream. Although I might be only swimming in place, I have always taken pride in the fact that I am not carried downstream by the swiftness of the current.

"In the past, the Spirit has sometimes urged me to reach for the rod, even jump for it, if possible, but being so close I cannot see the urgency to do so.

"Suddenly things change. The Savior is here. He is hurrying the Saints who were prepared along the rod, ushering them into his bridal chamber. They move rapidly. There is an air of excitement and anticipation.

"I have prepared for this moment all of my life. It is time to move. All I have to do is reach, reach for the rod and make my way into the bridal chamber before the door closes.

"I reach, but to do so, I must stop swimming, and the river takes me farther from the rod that I was before. I panic for the first time. I realize that the rod so close was no guarantee that I would be able to grasp it in my hour of need. Why didn't I listen to the promptings of the Spirit? There is not enough time to reach the rod now.

"I see the saints who were prepared passing in front of me, within arms distance of me. What don't they reach out and help me. They seem to be looking at something of great importance just ahead of them. They clutched the rod with both hands, and in this moment of urgency not one of them dares to let go, not even with one hand to help me.

"I see others passing behind me, being carried rapidly downstream by the current. They call to me, they plead for help, but they are quickly gone. I must continue thrashing toward the rod. I must not concern myself with those poor souls, for I cannot help them. I am in danger of being carried away myself.

"Everything is happening so swiftly. The people seem to be keenly aware of the tragedies all around them and of their inability to help at this crucial moment. Yes, all seem aware of their own choices and the need to stand on their own.

"I begin to see things are they really are. I see my own desperate situation, my helplessness, my carelessness. I had thought there would be no difficulty in grasping the rod. I was always so close, so comfortably close, that I never tried." (Author unknown. Copy in possession of writer).

We continue to try and reach those we love with every effort we can expend. In the final analysis, however, the individuals we are trying to rescue, must, as it were, grasp our hand. We pray that they will be like the prodigal son, who finally did come "to himself [and said] I will arise and go to my father" (Luke 15:17-18). If, however, they choose not to return, it will not be because we ever gave up trying. Such was the choice of Lehi regarding Laman and Lemuel. I believe that is also true for Our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, regarding each of us.

III. Nephi's Additions to Understanding Lehi's Vision

1 Nephi 11:1

1 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 exceeding high mountain, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had before set my foot.

While contemplating in his mind, and pondering upon the vision that his father had shared, Nephi sought to also understand the vision. He was transported in the spirit to a high mountain. It is here that the Spirit spoke to him.

1 Nephi 11:2-3

2 And the Spirit said unto me: Behold, what desirest thou?

3 And I said, I desire to behold the things which my father saw.

The Spirit or messenger of the Lord then confirmed Nephi trust in his father and his accompanying belief in the Son of God. He stated, "blessed art thou, Nephi, because thou believest in the Son of the most high God; wherefore, thou shalt behold the things which thou hast desired" (1 Nephi 11:6).

After Nephi was shown the vision, "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" (1 Nephi 11:7).

Nephi was now shown the tree which his father saw. He noted its exceeding beauty and whiteness. Upon the messenger's inquiry, he spoke to him like a man and asked the interpretation of the tree.

Nephi was shown in vision the great city of Jerusalem and other cities. He beholds the city of Nazareth, where he beheld, "a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white" (1 Nephi 11:15).

The Spirit asked him, "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" (1 Nephi 11:16). Nephi replied, "I know that he loveth his children, nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things" (1 Nephi 11:17).

Initially, Nephi did not understand the connection between the virgin and the condescension of God, but the Spirit is going to enlighten him to an important truth.

1 Nephi 11:18-21

18 And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh.

19 And it came to pass that I behold that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spoke unto me, saying: Look!

20 And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms.

21 And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"...the condescension of God (meaning the Father) consists in the fact that though he is an exalted, perfected, glorified Personage, he became the personal and literal Father of a mortal Offspring born of mortal woman. And the condescension of God (meaning the Son) consists in the fact that though he himself is the Lord Omnipotent, the very Being who created the earth and all things that in it are, yet being born of mortal woman, he submitted to all the trials of mortality, suffering 'temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death' (Mosiah 3:5-8), finally being put to death in a most ignominious manner" (*Mormon Doctrine*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, [Second Edition, 1966], 155).

Based upon the vision provided by the Spirit, Nephi beheld the event of the birth of the Son of God to a virgin, which had been prophesied by all the prophets of old. (See B/M, Jacob 7:11; Mosiah 13:33.) He also was able to understand the meaning of the condescension of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, and the process that enabled this event to occur. Nephi proclaimed in response to the angels question: "Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?" (1 Nephi 11:21).

1 Nephi 11:22

22 And I [Nephi] answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things.

23 And he spake to me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul.

It is the love of the Father that allowed his Son, though a God himself, to come to earth as a mortal to experience all the vicissitudes of life. Jesus, being without sin, took upon himself the sins of all who would dwell on earth and everyone in his Father's kingdom. He provided for each

individual, through the power of his resurrection, the blessing of life after death.

1 Nephi 11:24

24 And after he had said these words, he said unto me: Look! And I looked, and 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.

In vision, Nephi saw the earthly ministry of Jesus as he went forth teaching and preaching his gospel. Many, feeling the spirit, knew him then as the Son of God and worshipped him.

The vision of his father continues.

1 Nephi 11:25

25 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.

Nephi was now shown in vision further events that would occur during the Lord's earthly ministry. These include: (1) "a prophet who would prepare the way before Christ"; (2) "he was baptized"; (3) "the heavens open, and the Holy Ghost came down...and abide upon him in the form of a dove" (4) "He went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory; (5) "they cast him out from among them"; (6) "twelve others following him"; (7) "saw angels descending upon the children of men; and they did minister unto them; (8) "multitude of people...sick and...afflicted...devils and unclean spirits...and they were healed by the power of the Lamb of God; and the devils and unclean spirits were cast out"; (9) "beheld the Lamb of God;...taken by the people...judged of the Lord"; (10) "he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world"; (11) "I saw...multitudes of the earth...gathered together to fight against the apostles of the Lamb"; and, (12) "the house of Israel...gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles" (1 Nephi 11:27-35).

These future did occur as Nephi saw in vision. These included: Preparing the way for Christ by John the Baptist;

The baptism of Jesus with the witness given of the Father and the Holy Ghost; The calling of his twelve apostles; Jesus going forth and healing all manner of disease and casting out devils; His rejection by the people and his crucifixion; and, The death of his apostles. These familiar events, now part of the New Testament, had previously been witnessed by a prophet in the Book of Mormon.

1 Nephi 11:36

36 And it came to pass that I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the pride of the world; and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great...Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

For approximately seventeen hundred years, it appeared that those who made up the members of the "great and spacious building" representing the pride of the world would be victorious. On April 3, 1830, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was restored upon the earth. This date marked the beginning of the fall of the "great and spacious building."

Monte S. Nyman states,

"The world still fights the Twelve Apostles and their teaching with its own wisdom, but it will eventually fall, and the pride that motivates the fight will be the cause of that fall." ("The Judgment Seat of Christ," in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni From Zion to Destruction*. Edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995, 209).

1 Nephi 12:16-17

16 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the fountain of filthy water which thy father saw; yea, even the river of which he spake; and the depths thereof are the depths of hell.

17 And the mists of darkness are the temptations of the devil, which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men, and leadeth them away into broad roads, that they perish and are lost.

Nephi now shared with his brothers the vision of his father that he experienced. He provided additional insight regarding the meaning of the symbols in his explanation.

1 Nephi 15:27-29

27 And I said unto them that the water which my father saw was filthiness; and so much was his mind swallowed up in other things that he beheld not the filthiness of the water.

28 And I said unto them that it was an awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God.

29 And I said unto them that it was the representation of that awful hell, which the angel said unto me was prepared for the wicked.

IV. Why the Vision of Lehi is Important to Us

As we have sought to better understand the meaning of Lehi's vision and the symbols that are represented, there is much for us to gain.

Lehi's vision represents those elements of life that are most important in each of our lives as we seek to return to our Heavenly Father. In this lesson, we have identified twelve separate symbols and defined their meaning. We now focus our attention on four of them.

1. The Tree of Life and its fruit

We determined the Tree of Life represented the love of God. As the angel taught Nephi, their love was exemplified in the condescension of both the Father and the Son.

Bruce R. McConkie states the meaning for both,

The Father, "a perfect and glorified Personage,...became the personal and literal Father of a mortal offspring born of mortal woman.

The Son, "the Lord Omnipotent, the very Being who created the earth and all things that are in it are, yet being born of mortal woman, he submitted to all the trials of mortality, suffering temptations, and pains of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except unto death" (Mosiah 3:5-8), finally being put to death in a

most ignominious manner." (*Mormon Doctrine*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, [Second Edition], 155).

The Father loves us so much that as a glorified and exalted being, He was willing to father a child with a mortal woman. The purpose was to bring about the birth of Jesus Christ. He was born with the attributes of a God, combined with mortals.

In turn, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was willing to leave his glory in order to come to earth and experience birth as a mortal. Only as the Son of God and a mortal woman could He then remove all barriers that prevented us from returning to our Father in heaven after our mortal probation. One barrier had occurred as the result of Adam and Eve's transgression. It was necessary for them to leave the Garden of Eden. Without their exit, they would have not been able to have children and we would not have been born on earth. The consequences of their transgression involved both the introduction of physical death and spiritual separation from God. The demands of justice could only be satisfied by an individual who was subject to death, but had the power to overcome death for both himself and others. It required a God for no mortal had the requisite qualities. Because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the debt of the physical death was paid for all who would be born upon the earth. Man would live again after death. He also made it possible for the spiritual death--man's separation from God--to be overcome, but it required obedience on our part.

We noted the fruit represents the greatest gift that God has to offer his children which is eternal life. We may partake of this most desirable fruit by being obedient to the commandments that we have been given by the Lord through his prophets and do all that we can do. We will then receive the grace of the Father, as a result of the sacrifice of the Son.

Doctrine and Covenants 45:3-5

**3 Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father,
who is pleading your cause before him--
4 Saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of
him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased;
behold the blood of thy Son, which was shed, the blood
of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be
glorified;**

5 Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life.

These are the words of Jesus Christ who is our advocate with the Father. They are spoken on behalf of those who previously had entered into a covenant with Him to be obedient to his commandments.

To those, the Father will then grant the words of eternal life.

Doctrine and Covenants 14:7

7 And if you keep the commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which is the greatest of all the gifts of God.

In the words of Lehi,

1 Nephi 8:11-12

11...I beheld that it [fruit] was the most sweet, above all that I had ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all whiteness that I had ever seen.

12 And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy;...

To be united with the Father and His Son and to live with those whom we love forever will bring to us the greatest joy we could ever experience.

2. The Rod of Iron

The rod of iron is the word of God as noted by Nephi in his vision (1 Nephi 11:25). While it is clear that the word of God specifically refers to the revealed scriptures as recorded in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, it is not, however, limited to those recordings. The word of God may also have reference to those scriptures that will yet be revealed; as well as the words of the modern Prophets and Apostles as recorded in the church magazines. It may also include those promptings by the Holy Ghost given to individuals as they seek to learn the truth as well as those who have entered in the waters of baptism and are striving each day to be

steadfast and unmovable in their individual testimony. The Book of Mormon records that as the individuals travelled the path they "caught hold of the end of the rod of iron: and they did press forward through the midst of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree" (1 Nephi 8:24).

It is important to note that when those in Group 1 were on the path that led to the Tree of Life, as a result of the midst of darkness, they did not reach the tree, but were lost. Did they loosen their grip on the rod when the midst of darkness arose or did they never grab hold?

Group 2 did hold on to the rod of iron, but once they had reached the tree and partaken of the fruit, it appears while casting their eyes around, they let go of their grip on the rod of iron and became conscious of those who were mocking them from the great and spacious building.

In response to Laman and Lemuels inquiry regarding the meaning of the rod of iron, Nephi said.

1 Nephi 15:24

24 And I said unto them that it was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction.

The key words for us are, "would hold fast unto it" (1 Nephi 15:24). "Hold fast to the word of God" means that we never stop reading or listening and then applying the revelations that God has provided through his appointed servants. This is true, not only before we partake of the fruit, but especially after. When we are tempted or doubts arise, it is important that we filter them through the promptings of the Spirit that we have received. If we are sincerely striving to keep our covenants, and seek the Lord's guidance, we will never be misled. Nephi's promise to his brothers, and to us, is "they would never perish, nor [will] the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness...[and] to destruction" (1 Nephi 15:24). The importance of the rod of iron is invaluable as a means to assist us in returning to Our Heavenly Father, but we must hold on to the word of God as we receive it and never let go.

Joseph F. Smith states,

"The greatest achievement mankind can make in this world is to familiarize themselves with divine truth, so thoroughly, so perfectly, that the example or conduct of no creature living in the world can ever turn them away from the knowledge that they have obtained...From my boyhood I have desired to learn the principles of the gospel in such a way...that it would matter not to me who might fall from the truth...My foundation would be certain in the truths...I have learned." (*Gospel Doctrine*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1919, [Eighth Edition, 1949], 3-4).

3. Strait and Narrow Path

Joseph Fielding Smith states,

"Mark you, this word *strait* is spelled s-t-r-a-i-t and not s-t-r-a-i-g-h-t. While no doubt, that path that leads into the presence of God is *straight*, it is also *strait*, which means that those who enter into it will find it restricted; it is narrow; they cannot take with them that which does not apply, or which does not belong to the kingdom of God. All such things must be left behind when we enter into the narrow way which leads into the presence of God, where we can receive life eternal. 'Few there be that find it.'" (*Doctrines of Salvation, Vol. 2*. Compiled by Bruce R. McConkie. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955, [20th Printing, 1978], 13-14).

"Strait and Narrow" are the descriptive words that Lehi used in order to define the path that led to the tree. (See 1 Nephi 8:20). The Savior used similar words when he gave the Sermon on the Mount. He stated,

Matthew 7:13-14

**13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:
14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.**

In a later discourse, Nephi will define the "strait and narrow path" as the path "which leads to eternal life" (2 Nephi 31:18). This may help us to better understand why the

Savior stated, "few there be that find it [path]" (Matthew 7:14).

It is not that the path is not clearly marked and available to all who wish to partake of the "fruit of the Tree" (1 Nephi 8:10-11), but as Nephi stated,

2 Nephi 31:17

17 ...For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.

Entrance to the "strait and narrow path" requires that you leave the worldly baggage you are carrying through the process of repentance and then enter into a new covenant through the waters of baptism. Once you have become clean, "then [comes] a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost" (2 Nephi 31:17). You have entered into a covenant with the Lord to always remember Him and to keep His commandments. In exchange, He promises to forgive you as you repent and that you may always have His Spirit to be with you. Once on the path you may ask, "Is that all I need to do in order to obtain eternal life?" Nephi continues,

2 Nephi 31:19-21

19 And now, my beloved brethren, after you have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.

20 Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

21 And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen.

For some, having to leave their worldly baggage, is too great a sacrifice to make. They do not consider the surcharge they pay in order to bring their baggage with them to be too great. Like the user of tobacco, alcohol or drugs, who cannot quit because it is too difficult, they continue to go through life paying the additional charge. One day, however, they learn that they had not truly considered the potential damage that these chemicals were having upon their health. They are now told they must quit or face an early death. It is now they wish they had tried harder to end their habit. In the end, the price was too high.

Unfortunately, this surcharge applies not only to habits that have an effect upon our physical health, but also to those that affect our spirituality. If we count the cost of getting on the "strait and narrow path" to be too great, we are also putting our eternal happiness in jeopardy. We miss the opportunity to have the Spirit of the Holy Ghost to be our constant companion to guide, comfort, and warn us as we continue our lives. We move away from the joy and happiness that we could experience if had developed a close relationship with Our Savior. He is standing at the door waiting for us to knock that He may come in and bless our lives. We distance ourselves from Our Eternal Heavenly Father who loves us and has blessings without number to bestow upon us. Like Esau of old, we are willing to trade our birthright blessing for a bowl of ordinary mush, in order to satisfy our immediate hunger. (See Genesis 25:29-34). We are in danger if we mortgage our future without first sitting down and considering the cost. If we do so, we might determine that the risk is just too high. Our final decision may in fact to do without what we want right now in order to safeguard our future.

4. Great and Spacious Or Strange Building

We are introduced to the "great and spacious building" and its inhabitants by Lehi. He states,

1 Nephi 8:26-27

26 And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building; and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth.

27 And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was

exceedingly fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.

Webster's New World Dictionary defines "mock" as,

"To hold up to scorn or contempt; ridicule." (*Webster's New World Dictionary Third College Edition*. New York: Prentice - Hall, 1988, [Third Edition 1994], 870).

Nephi was taught by the angel,

1 Nephi 11:35

35 And the multitude of the earth was gathered together; and I beheld that they were in a large and spacious building, like unto the building which my father saw. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: Behold the world and the wisdom thereof; yea, behold the house of Israel hath gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

1 Nephi 12:18

18 And the large and spacious building, which thy father saw, is vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men. And a great and a terrible gulf divideth them; yea, even the word of the justice of the Eternal God, and the Messiah who is the Lamb of God, of whom the Holy Ghost beareth record, from the beginning of the world until this time, and from this time henceforth and forever.

Bryan Richards states,

"This building stands in the air because it has no foundation. Its architect is Satan who would never design a stable foundation for any of the buildings in his kingdom. Rather, the building is precariously perched in anticipation of its imminent fall, 'for the devil will not support his children at the last day' (1 Ne. 11:36; Alma 30:60). It rightfully floats on the other side of the terrible gulf which separates the righteous from the wicked—separated by the word of the justice of the Eternal God. Although the separation is dramatic in the symbolism of the dream, oftentimes the scoffers can be right amongst the righteous.

The saints must be careful not to sympathize with the scoffers." (www.gospeldoctrine.com/contents/1Nephi8).

The owner of the "great and spacious building" is Satan himself. Its tenants are those who are the prideful and hold firm to the wisdom of man as the only source of truth. Some know who the owner of the building is; others do not. Satan uses the worldly proud and the worldly wise, in his cause, to dissuade as many as possible from following the teachings of Jesus Christ. He knows no limits in his vicious campaign as he seeks to discourage, ridicule, distort the efforts of any and all who have any inclination to investigate or worse, to join the Church of Jesus Christ. Satan knows that the greatest threat to his control among the children of men is found in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the humble testimony of his faithful followers. (See Revelations 12:11.)

Nephi saw in vision the eventual collapse of the pride and wisdom of the world as they, in desperation, sought to destroy the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ, the Prophets and Apostles of His church on the earth, along with its members.

1 Nephi 11:36

36 And it came to pass that I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the pride of the world; and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again saying: Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

In the meantime, the battle continues to rage between the forces of Satan, the worldly proud and the worldly wise, and the humble followers of Jesus Christ. At times, it may seem that the forces of evil will triumph. But do not fear, the word of the Lord is sure, the great and spacious building will fall and great shall be its fall.

Glenn L. Pace offers these words of counsel,

"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 telestial 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 [style]." (*Spiritual Plateaus*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1991, 84).

V. Response of Laman and Lemuel Contrasted with Nephi

In Lehi's vision, his wife, and his two younger sons, Sam and Nephi respond to his invitation to come and partake of the fruit of the tree. When he calls to his two older sons, Laman and Lemuel, they do not respond to his invitation. After sharing his vision with his family, he is greatly concerned about Laman and Lemuel. He then proceeds to counsel with them.

1 Nephi 8:37-38

37 And he [Lehi] did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off; yea, my father did preach unto them.

38 And after he had preached unto them, and also prophesied unto them of many things, he bade them to keep the commandments of the Lord; and he did cease speaking unto them.

One is left with the impression that Lamen and Lemuel listened to the words of their father, but then took no action. They did not begin to keep the commandments as directed. While they may have attended the morning and evening prayers with their family, their participation was minimal. They did not have daily personal prayers for they did not believe that the Lord would hear the desires of their hearts. They did not take time to read their scriptures for they did not understand them. There were times when they did ask for further explanation regarding the ways of the Lord, including the meaning of their father's vision, from Nephi, but their humility was limited. Though he was always willing and tried to answer their questions, they had difficulty understanding his words.

Why did they have such difficulty understanding Nephi's words?

Nephi gives us some insight,

1 Nephi 15:3

3 For he [Lehi] truly spake many great things unto them, which were hard to be understood, save a man should inquire of the Lord; therefore they did not look unto the Lord as they ought.

If we desire to know the workings of the Lord, it is imperative that we ask in faith for his guidance and direction.

When Nephi asked of his brothers, "Have ye inquired of the Lord? (1 Nephi 15:8), they responded, "We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us" (1 Nephi 15:9).

Nephi then provided his brothers with the following directive.

1 Nephi 15:10-11

**10 Behold, I said unto them: How is it that ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord? How is it that ye will perish, because of the hardness of your hearts?
11 Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said?--If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you.**

James B. Martino states,

"[C]onsider Nephi's counsel. Be obedient, remember the times when you have felt the Spirit in the past, and ask in faith. Your answer will come, and you will feel the love and peace of the Savior. It may not come as quickly or in the format you desire, but the answer will come. Do not give up! Never give up! ("Turn to Him and Answers Will Come," in *Ensign*, November 2015, 59).

We begin with prayer. We believe that God loves us. We have faith that he cares about us and wants to give us guidance. Next, we are sincere in our desire to know his will for us. We continue in our effort to be obedient to his commandments. Last, we continue to learn and grow as we wait for confirmation to our prayers. These are the simple

qualities of prayer: Faith, Sincerity, Obedience, and Patience. He will hear our prayer, and in accordance with His will, He will give us an answer.

Nephi then shared the response of his brothers after they had requested to understand the meaning of his father's vision.

1 Nephi 16:1

1 And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had made an end of speaking to my brethren, behold they said unto me; Thou hast declared unto us hard things, more than we are able to bear.

There are times when the Lord speaks to us, either directly through the Spirit or by his servants, and tells us things that are difficult for us to hear. However, if we receive his direction in the spirit of his caring about us and that we are in need of a course adjustment, we will receive his counsel with gratitude, rather than resentment.

1 Nephi 16:3-5

3 And now my brethren, if ye were righteous and were willing to hearken to the truth, and give heed unto it, that we might walk uprightly before God then ye would not murmur because of the truth, and say: Thou speakest hard things against us.

4 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did exhort my brethren, with all diligence, to keep the commandments of the Lord.

5 And it came to pass that they did humble themselves before the Lord; insomuch that I had joy and great hopes of them, that they would walk in the paths of righteousness.

Like his father, Nephi did not give up believing that his brothers would make the desired changes in their lives. They would exercise faith, be sincere in their desire to receive answers to their prayers, and be obedient to the commandments. He knew that if they would follow his counsel, in due time, they would receive an answer to their prayers.

I have wondered why the Lord would begin his record with a focus upon the wide differences between two sets of brothers, Laman and Lemuel vs. Sam and Nephi. I have come to

the conclusion that it is because there are qualities in the two sets of brothers in me. As I note the differences and similarities in my life with the brothers, I am able to see more clearly those areas where I, too, need to make changes in my life.

Nephi is an example of an individual who has a close relation with the Lord and is able to face the challenges and adversity of life with complete faith and trust in Him.

In contrast, Laman and Lemuel have veered away from the Lord in many aspects of their lives. They have also chosen to ignore the whisperings of the Spirit. They do not follow the counsel they have received from the Lord. If they continue with their present actions, they are in real danger of losing their opportunity for happiness in this life and joy in the life to come. Their example provides me with a voice of warning if were to choose to move away from the truths I know to be true.

It is important that I do not neglect my daily prayers as I seek the Lord's guidance and direction in my life. I need to read my scriptures daily that I may better understand his ways. Each day, it is important that I keep His commandments, repenting as necessary, that I may always be receptive to the whispering of the Spirit. I need to also always remember the covenants I have made with the Lord and the promises He has for me, if I am faithful. I cannot take my testimony of the truth for granted. If I do, I will find that I am more vulnerable to the temptations of Satan. I cannot let down my guard, even for a moment.

VI. Conclusions

As we have focused upon Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life, we have been enlightened as to the blessings the Lord has prepared for us as well as the pitfalls that we must avoid.

Through the meaning of the symbols we have come to understand the widespread application his vision has for us today. If we are to reach the Tree of Life [The Love of God] and partake of its fruit [Eternal Life], there are some steps we need to take. These include: Finding which path [True Church?] will lead us to the Tree of life; Once on the path, hold tightly to the rod of iron [Word of God], for if we lose our grasp we may end up in the filthy river [Depths of Hell] which goes along side the path. If we will hold

tightly, we will eventually reach the tree and be able to partake of the delicious fruit that awaits us. Once we have enjoyed the fruit, we must not become distracted by those in the great and spacious building [Pride and Wisdom of the World] who are ridiculing both our choices and commitment. This is can be accomplished, only as we maintain our grasp on the rod of iron.

If we fail to find the path, or do not cling to the rod of iron, we are in danger of losing our footing and falling into the river of filthy water. Once we fall in, we will not be able to get out without the help of others who care about us. Our goal is to reach the Tree of Life and partake of the fruit. In order to do so we must cling to the rod of iron throughout our lives. If we do so, we will obtain the blessings of eternal life.

Through the lives of Laman and Lemuel, in contrast with Nephi, we learn the steps that we need to take if we want to return to Our Heavenly Father. These include: personal and family prayer, daily reading our scriptures, keeping the commandments, and repenting, as necessary, so we may continue to have the Spirit of the Holy Ghost to be our constant companion. There is also service to be rendered to others, including those in need, and partaking of the sacrament so that we may renew our covenants. Our commitment must be firm in our testimony for Satan will continue to seek to tempt us to let go of the rod of iron. He will also tempt us not to say our prayers or even to break the commandments. Our promise of eternal life is contingent upon our continued faithfulness and obedience.

Regardless of how well we keep the commandments, however, we will still come short. We cannot obtain salvation by our works alone. We are dependent upon the grace of the Son to plead our case before the Father. Our part is to insure that our lives reflect, to the best of our ability, our sincere desire to be counted worthy to be numbered among His faithful disciples. May we continue to stay on the path.

Our next lesson, BM#04, is entitled, "The Things Which I Saw While I Was Carried Away in the Spirit." We will examine 1 Nephi 12-14.

