

“The Vision of the Tree of Life

Lesson
3

1 Nephi 8–11; 12:16–18, 15

Summary

Scripture Summary:

Lehi sees a vision of the tree of life—He partakes of its fruit and desires his family to do likewise—He sees a rod of iron, a strait and narrow path, and the mists of darkness that enshroud men—Sariah, Nephi, and Sam partake of the fruit, but Laman and Lemuel refuse.

Nephi sees in vision: the land of promise; the righteousness, iniquity, and downfall of its inhabitants; the coming of the Lamb of God among them; how the twelve disciples and the twelve apostles shall judge Israel; the loathsome and filthy state of those who dwindle in unbelief.

Lehi's seed are to receive the gospel from the Gentiles in the latter days—The gathering of Israel is likened unto an olive tree whose natural branches shall be grafted in again—Nephi interprets the vision of the tree of life and speaks of the justice of God in dividing the wicked from the righteous. [Between 600 and 592 B.C.]

Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights:

What's in a Dream? Dreams are one of the means God has of communicating with his children. True prophets have the responsibility of teaching us what those dreams mean. “The Biblical view was that dreams are divine communication --- events transpiring on a supernatural plane. Thus, dreams . . . could be interpreted only by visionaries or prophets, who were in touch with this ‘divine dimension.’ In the Bible, ‘dreamer,’ ‘prophet,’ and ‘magician’ are related terms.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

Irritation or Redemption? The Biblical accounts of Joseph and Daniel have a great basis in dreams. Some irritated family or friends and others brought redemption for people as well as condemnation of people in the lands where they lived. “Joseph . . . explained Pharaoh's dreams of the fat and thin cows as symbolizing seven years of plenty followed by seven years of hunger (Genesis 41). God's promise to Abraham about the inheritance of the land of Israel came in a dream (Genesis 15) and Samuel's first prophecies were stimulated by God's calling to him in a dream (Samuel 1:3).” “Because of his great wisdom and ability to interpret dreams, Daniel rose to positions of responsibility and honor in the court of kings Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

Tree of Life Imagery is Strong in Jewish Culture: I found precious silver plates in the store of a well-known Jewish Scribe in the Old City of Jerusalem showing a “tree” with branches, laden with “fruit” with a stream of “water” flowing by. The words on this small sculpture fashioned as a flat square plate come from the Talmud. They recite part of a parable that a tree watered by “living water,” has precious “fruit” that you would bring your children to partake of. “Adam represents all of mankind; the Garden of Eden, the world; the Tree of Life, the Torah; and the serpent, the evil inclination. Just as Adam is placed in the Garden, in the midst of which stands the Tree of Life, so man is placed in the world in order to observe the commandments of the Torah.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

Strong Imagery of Fruit in the Scriptures: “A part of the first harvest each year of grains and of fruits was to be brought to the Temple in Jerusalem as a thanksgiving offering to God obeying the commandment: ‘The choice first fruits of your soil shall you bring to the house of the Lord’ (Exodus 34:33).” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

White as a Color Is a Combination of All Colors: That may mean a “wholeness” or “completeness.” Garments used by religious Jews are often pure white. “In Ashkenazi tradition it is not just the bride who wears white on her wedding day. The groom, too, stands under the canopy wearing his white *kitel*, or robe, over his wedding finery. The day of their marriage is a solemn one for the bride and groom. They pray that their past sins will be forgiven and they can start their life together afresh. The white of their clothing symbolizes the purity and the forgiveness of sin for which they are hoping. For this reason a similar garment is used to clothe the dead for burial. The *kitel* therefore also serves to remind the wearer of how brief life is, and of the necessity for atonement.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

White Bread Used for the Sabbath: The sweetness of the Sabbath is reflected in the sweet flavor of Sabbath bread, the *Hallah*. “Rabbinic tradition made *hallah* a special mitzvah for women. Today the word is generally used to mean the white Sabbath and festival loaf. And the mitzvah of separating *hallah* is followed by observant Jews in their bakeries and in homes where the art of baking fresh *hallah* is still practiced.” “Loaves of *hallah* appear in forms associated with special occasions and different areas. The most distinct special occasion is Passover, when *hallah* appears as *mazzah*, unleavened bread. Dough was often made into symbolic shapes. One example is the bird shape which represents the phrase ‘As birds hover, so will the Lord protect Jerusalem’ (Isaiah 31:5). The sweet *hallah*, often round in shape, is traditional for Rosh Ha-Shanah, to symbolize the prayer for a sweet and a full year.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

“Rod” Is a Symbol of Authority: For example: Moses prayed to God, then he lifted up his rod and the waters of the Red Sea parted, and the Israelites crossed safely to the opposite shore. “And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs.” (Exodus 4:17) “But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry [ground] through the midst of the sea.” (Exodus 14:16) “Therefore he was constrained to speak more unto them saying: Behold my brethren, have ye not read that God gave power unto one man, even Moses, to smite upon the waters of the Red Sea, and they parted hither and thither, insomuch that the Israelites, who were our fathers, came through upon dry ground, and the waters closed upon the armies of the Egyptians and swallowed them up?” (Helaman 8:11)

Mockery Has No Place in True Religion: “We believe that it is necessary for man to be placed in communication with God; that he should have revelation from him . . . I do not wonder that so many men treat religion with contempt, and regard it as something not worth the attention of intelligent beings, for without revelation religion is a mockery and a farce.” (John Taylor, Gospel Kingdom, Pg.35)

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