

“The Allegory of The Olive Tree”

Lesson

13

Summary

Jacob 5–7

Scripture Summary:

Jacob quotes Zenos relative to the allegory of the tame and wild olive trees—They are a likeness of Israel and the gentiles—The scattering and gathering of Israel are prefigured—Allusions are made to the Nephites and Lamanites and all the house of Israel—Gentiles shall be grafted into Israel—Eventually the vineyard shall be burned.

The Lord shall recover Israel in the last days—Then the world shall be burned with fire—Men must follow Christ to avoid the lake of fire and brimstone.

Sherem denies Christ, contends with Jacob, demands a sign, and is smitten of God—All of the prophets have spoken of Christ and his atonement—The Nephites lived out their days as wanderers, born in tribulation, and hated by the Lamanites. [Between 544 and 421 B.C.]

Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights:

Symbol of Olive Trees Throughout the Scriptures: Olive trees are a wonderful imagery of God’s chosen people, their diversity and their effect on the rest of God’s children. The olive branch has long been a symbol of peace, and the silvery-leaved olive tree has been considered sacred from at least as far back as the 17th century B.C. Native to the Mediterranean area, the olive is a small, oily fruit that contains a pit. All fresh olives are bitter, and the final flavor of the fruit greatly depends on how ripe it is when picked and the processing it receives.

Imagery of Olive and Children of Israel: Like the olives that originate in the Mediterranean area and spread throughout the world, so also did the Children of Israel originate in the Mediterranean and proliferate throughout the world. As olives vary in size and flavor, the Children of Israel grew to include many ethnic backgrounds. The olives must be ripened and processed, the Children of Israel were given time to mature and prove their worthiness to be the covenant people.

Timing: To understand the simplicity of Jacob’s allegory of the olive trees in the Book of Mormon, let me suggest a timing pattern of planting, scattering, gathering and an ultimate harvest. There is also the principle of first and last. “Hearken . . . I am the first, I also am the last.” (*Isaiah 48:12*) “But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.” (*Matthew 19:30; 20:16*) (*1 Nephi 13:42*) (*Ether 13:12*) (*D&C 29:30*) My own forefathers were chosen first to represent God. Now, they are to be the last. How blessed am I to be one of the first of the last to know my God again and represent Him!

Pattern of Scattering/Gathering: The allegory of the olive tree portrays the children of Israel, genetically and spiritually set apart to be a covenant nation in a land of everlasting hills. The lessons of scattering and gathering span millennia yet the principles are the same. “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God . . . the LORD did not . . . choose you, because ye were more in number . . . but because . . . he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers . . . and redeemed you . . . from the hand of Pharaoh . . .” (*Deuteronomy 7:6-8*)

Prophets as Gatherers: Due to lack of faith, followed by disobedience, they began to apostatize. Prophets were sent to teach them. “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets . . . the Lord GOD hath spoken . . . Publish in the palaces . . . Assemble yourselves . . . For they know not to do right, saith the LORD . . . An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall . . . bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled.” (*Amos 3:7-11*)

Chosen to Reflect His Light: Gentiles were brought in and parts of the original “chosen” were cut off. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” (*1 Peter 2:9-10*)

“God’s Army:” At times, young, tender and yet strong members were sent elsewhere to the nethermost part of the world. “Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days? Her own feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn.” (*Isaiah 23:7*) “And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles.” (*Isaiah 66:19*)

Lehi, Nephi Improve the Poorest Spot of Land: These prophets continued teaching the same truths that were given in the original vineyard. What they recorded as their scriptures became an even clearer source of teaching materials for later generations. Even in the distant or “poorest” spot of land, the truths thrived and the righteous created a “genetic imprint” of true dealings with God. As an additional example of poor land producing fruit, let me remind you that returning Jews are making the wilderness “blossom as a rose.” More roses are exported from Israel than any country in the world. They are growing in the desolate Jordan valley where the rainfall has been recorded at one inch or less per year. With the vast flower farms and date groves, the rainfall has increased to six or seven inches per year in the new agricultural areas. Israel’s genetic engineering has taken the genetic structures of date palms which grow well in depleted or poor soil and placed them into other domestic crop structures elsewhere in the world. That means the poor spot of land can also become fruitful.

Prophets Plead so that Roots will Connect to the True Past: Even though, ethnically, Israel looks like a tossed salad of mixed fruit, the roots still bear the genetic imprints of the original House of Israel. Connecting to those roots will trigger a recollection of the covenants made of old. So, when the fruit in the nethermost part of the vineyard becomes apostate, there still is a root connection to the old tree. It is touching to hear the servant of the landlord pleading to preserve the old and the new trees. Our prophets have and still do plead for us. Our Lord pleads for us. Hold on! There is a recollection that will bring our families back together. “. . . the book of life is the record of the acts of men as such record is written in their own bodies. It is the record engraven on the very bones, sinews, and flesh of the mortal body. That is, every thought, word, and deed has an affect on the human body; all these leave their marks, marks which can be read by Him who is Eternal as easily as the words in a book can be read.” (*Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, Pg.97*)

We Have a Perfect Memory: “There is something in man, an essential part of his mind, which recalls the events of the past . . . May I say to you that in reality a man cannot forget anything? He may have a lapse of memory; he may not be able to recall at the moment a thing that he knows, or words that he has spoken; he may not have the power at his will to call up these events and words; but let God Almighty touch the mainspring of the memory, and awaken recollection, and you will find then that you have not even forgotten a single idle word that you have spoken.” (*Joseph F. Smith, Gospel Doctrine, Page 311*)

My Forefathers Have Blessed My Life Today: I know that they were believers and that many were faithful in following the Lord, before his mortal ministry, others during his mortality and now my family follows him in the latter-days. In a very real sense, my family is another example of the allegory of the olive tree. I was born in Israel. At the tender age of five years old, I was plucked out of the old decaying tree and brought to the “nethermost part” of the vineyard. My father and I were introduced to the restoration of God’s ancient covenant. Now, I have returned to my home land and in a very real sense have been grafted back into the old tree. My family and I are committed to bring health and strength . . . connecting with our ancient roots and bringing life back to the old tree, teaching the restored ancient true covenants.

Gathering of Israel Is Happening: To many Jews, their gathering starts even before they know the Lord. On the other hand, our family is truly blessed to be gathered to our ancient home and bring with us the knowledge of the Lord! “And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the LORD, and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God.” (*Zechariah 6:15*)

Allegory concludes with lesson for the future: Prepare for one last millennium - and then Satan will be loosed for a little season. “And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.” (*Revelation 20:2-3*)

Daniel Rona, born in Israel and living in Jerusalem has authored Old & New Testament and Book of Mormon Supplement Study Materials to be used in conjunction with the weekly LDS Gospel Doctrine Lesson study. NOTE: Three versions of the supplemental study materials are available **FREE** at www.HolyLandsRevealed.com. (Just click “LDS SUPPLEMENTS”)

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