

Lesson Highlights

- *The symbols in the vision of the tree of life.*
- *The people in the vision of the tree of life.*

A study of this lesson will help us understand the symbols in the vision of the tree of life and the application of these symbols in our lives.

Next Week:

Lesson 4:

"The Things Which I Saw While I Was Carried Away in the Spirit",

1 Nephi 12–14

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Introduction

Many symbolic dreams and visions are recorded in the scriptures.

- King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a large image, or statue, of a man. Each part of the man's body was made of a different material. A stone destroyed the image and became a mountain, filling the whole earth. (See Daniel 2:31-45; see also D&C 65:2). The various parts of the image represented kingdoms that have reigned on the earth. The stone represented the kingdom of God, which would consume all other kingdoms in the latter days.
- Pharaoh dreamed of seven lean and ill cattle devouring seven fat and healthy cattle and seven poor ears of corn devouring seven good ears of corn. (See Genesis 41:17-31). The seven healthy cattle and seven good ears of corn represented seven years of prosperity that would come to Egypt. The seven ill cattle and seven poor ears of corn represented seven years of famine that would follow the years of plenty.
- In a vision, the Apostle Peter saw unclean animals lowered from heaven in a great sheet, and he was commanded to kill and eat these animals. (See Acts 10:9-16,28,34-35). The unclean animals represented the Gentiles, who were now to be taught the gospel.

Today's lesson discusses another symbolic dream described in the scriptures: the vision of the tree of life received by Lehi and Nephi. Unlike the many dreams or visions that have application only to specific people or at a specific time (like Pharaoh's dream of the cattle and corn), the vision of the tree of life applies to each of God's children. Seek to understand the symbols in the vision of the tree of life and the application of these symbols in your life.

The symbols in the vision of the tree of life

Lehi received a vision and told his family about it (1 Nephi 8:2). After Nephi heard his father speak about the things in the vision, he also wanted to "see, and hear, and know of [those] things" (1 Nephi 10:17). Because of Nephi's belief in Jesus Christ, his request was granted (1 Nephi 11:6). It is through Nephi's record of his experience that we know the interpretation of the vision.

THE TREE OF LIFE AND ITS FRUIT

Read **1 Nephi 8:2-10**.

Lehi spoke about his dream and his joy and concern because of his sons' roles in the dream.

1 Nephi 11:8-11 When Nephi was shown the tree of life, he asked to know its interpretation.

1 Nephi 11:21-25 He learned that the tree represents the love of God.

1 Nephi 11:13-21,24,1 Nephi 11:26-33. To help him better understand God's love, Nephi saw the birth, ministry, and Atonement of Jesus Christ.

John 3:16 teaches that Heavenly Father showed the depth of His love for us when He "gave his only begotten Son." The Atonement is evidence of Jesus Christ's great love for us.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught that the tree of life is a symbol of Jesus Christ. He said: "*The images of Christ and the tree [are] inextricably linked. At the very outset of the Book of Mormon, Christ is portrayed as the source of eternal life and joy, the living evidence of divine love, and the means whereby God will*



fulfill his covenant with the house of Israel and indeed the entire family of man, returning them all to their eternal promises" (Christ and the New Covenant [1997], 160, 162).

Consider the influence the love of God has in your life and how you can more fully recognize God's love for you.

Mark the following words in your scriptures: *commence* (1 Nephi 8:22), *caught hold* (1 Nephi 8:24), *clinging* (1 Nephi 8:24), and *continually* (1 Nephi 8:30). These words help us understand what we must do to reach the tree of life: we must commence in the strait and narrow path, catch hold of the rod of iron and cling to it, and continue moving toward the tree.

Joseph Smith:
"When you joined this Church you enlisted to serve God. When you did that, you left the neutral ground, and you never can get back on to it." (Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings)

Gospel Doctrine Notebook

Record your thoughts on Lehi's dream.

- *What does it mean to you to hold to the iron rod?*
- *What things can you do in your life to make sure that you are holding on to the rod and be sure that you partake of the fruit of the tree of life?*

1 Nephi 15:36; D&C 14:7. The fruit of the tree represented eternal life.

Lehi and Nephi described the tree of life and its fruit in the following passages:

- "Most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted" (**1 Nephi 8:11**)
- "White, to exceed all...whiteness" (**1 Nephi 8:11**; see also **1 Nephi 11:8**)
- "Desirable above all other fruit" (**1 Nephi 8:12**; see also **1 Nephi 15:36**)
- Having "beauty exceeding of all beauty" (**1 Nephi 11:8**)
- "Precious above all"; "most precious" (**1 Nephi 11:9**; **1 Nephi 15:36**)
- "Most joyous to the soul" (**1 Nephi 11:23**; see also **1 Nephi 8:10**)
- "The greatest of all the gifts of God" (**1 Nephi 15:36**). Eternal life is the "most sweet" and "most precious" blessing we can receive. Because of God's love for us, this blessing is available to us through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

1 Nephi 8:12 In the vision, once Lehi had partaken of the fruit of the tree, he wanted his family to partake. We also need to help our loved ones draw nearer to the Savior and receive the promise of eternal life.

THE ROD OF IRON

1 Nephi 8:19-20 describes the rod of iron and a path to the tree.

1 Nephi 11:25; 1 Nephi 15:23-24 The rod of iron represents the word of God. We find the word of God in the scriptures, the teachings of latter-day prophets, and the promptings of the Holy Ghost. The word of God helps us come unto Christ and helps keep us on the path to eternal life.

THE RIVER OF FILTHY WATER, THE MIST OF DARKNESS, and THE GREAT AND SPACIOUS BUILDING

1 Nephi 8:13,23,26-27 describe the river of water, the mist of darkness, and the great and spacious building.

The people in the vision of the tree of life

1 Nephi 8:21 In the vision, Lehi saw "numberless concourses of people". These people can be divided into four categories based on their actions in seeking the tree and the fruit.

- 1 Nephi 8:21-23.** Those who start on the path but then become lost in the mist of darkness.
- 1 Nephi 8:24-28** Those who hold to the rod of iron until they reach the tree and partake of the fruit, but then become ashamed and fall away.
- 1 Nephi 8:30** Those who hold to the rod of iron until they reach the tree and partake of the fruit, and who then remain faithful.
- 1 Nephi 8:31-33** Those who never start on the path but instead go directly toward the great and spacious building.

Think about how these categories are manifested in the world today. For example, people who say

1 Nephi 12:16; 1 Nephi 15:26-29 The river of filthy water represents the depths of hell.

1 Nephi 12:17 The mist of darkness represents the temptations of the devil.

1 Nephi 8:23; 1 Nephi 12:17 The effects of the mist of darkness include blinding of the eyes, hardening of the heart, and causing individuals to be led into evil that will destroy them. Satan wants our eyes to be blinded to the love of God; to the Atonement of Jesus Christ; to the word of God. Satan tries to blind our eyes with various temptations--ones chosen to prey on our individual weaknesses.

1 Nephi 8:19,24,30 The rod of iron "extended along the bank of the river", serving as a protection between the strait and narrow path and the filthy water. It also gave the people in the vision something to cling to when they were in the mist of darkness. This teaches that the word of God can help us by becoming a protection to us as we follow its precepts.

1 Nephi 11:34-36; 1 Nephi 12:18 The great and spacious building represented the vain imaginations and pride of the world.

1 Nephi 8:26 It is significant that the building "stood...in the air". From this we note that the building did not have a solid foundation. Pride can keep a person from receiving eternal life by enticing them to build on a worldly foundation rather than an eternal one.

1 Nephi 8:26-28 Some people in the vision tasted of the fruit but were ashamed because the people in the great and spacious building mocked them. It takes strength, our own and that of the Spirit as our companion, to withstand persecution.

that they want eternal life but are distracted by other things, such as material wealth or worldly pleasures, are like those who start on the path but then become lost.

1 Nephi 8:28; 1 Nephi 8:32; 1 Nephi 12:17 In the vision, people traveled "forbidden," "strange," or "broad" roads when they let go of the iron rod or left the tree of life. Think about what happens to those who follow such roads. If we are moving toward "forbidden," "strange," or "broad" roads, we need to change direction and return to the strait and narrow path by embracing the iron rod, the word of God.

Think about some things you must do to stay on the strait and narrow path. Also consider ways in which you may help others stay on the path or return to it.