

Introduction

Zenos's allegory of the olive trees reveals God's personal involvement in the history and destiny of the house of Israel (see Jacob 6:4). President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) encouraged us to ponder the depth of Jacob 5: "The parable of Zenos, recorded by Jacob in chapter five of his book, is one of the greatest parables ever recorded. This parable in and of itself stamps the Book of Mormon with convincing truth. No mortal man, without the inspiration of the Lord, could have written such a parable. It is a pity that too many of those who read the Book of Mormon pass over and slight the truths which it conveys in relation to the history, scattering, and final gathering of Israel" (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. [1957–66], 4:141).

After recording the allegory, Jacob concluded his writings by relating Sherem's attempts to lead the people away from Jesus Christ. Learning how Jacob exposed Sherem's arguments as deceptions from the devil can help you fortify yourself against anti-Christis in our day (see Jacob 7:2–22).

Commentary

Jacob 5. The Allegory of the Olive Trees

- An allegory uses symbolic representations to convey moral or spiritual ideas. These symbols provide additional meaning to the story when studied. The value of the allegory lies in understanding what it represents. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles presented the principal theme of Zenos's allegory:

"This allegory as recounted by Jacob is from the outset intended to be about Christ. . . .

"Even as the Lord of the vineyard and his workers strive to bolster, prune, purify, and otherwise make productive their trees in what amounts to a one-chapter historical sketch of the scattering and gathering of Israel, the deeper meaning of the Atonement undergirds and overarches their labors. In spite of cuttings and graftings and nourishings that mix and mingle trees in virtually all parts of the vineyard, it is bringing them back to their source that

is the principal theme of this allegory. Returning, repenting, reuniting—at-one-ment—this is the message throughout.

". . . At least fifteen times the Lord of the vineyard expresses a desire to bring the vineyard and its harvest to his 'own self,' and he laments no less than eight times, 'It grieveth me that I should lose this tree.' One student of the allegory says it should take its place beside the parable of the prodigal son, inasmuch as both stories 'make the Lord's mercy so movingly memorable.'

"Clearly this at-one-ment is hard, demanding, and, at times, deeply painful work, as the work of redemption always is. There is digging and dunging. There is watering and nourishing and pruning. And there is always the endless approaches to grafting—all to one saving end, that the trees of the vineyard would 'thrive exceedingly' and become 'one body; . . . the fruits [being] equal,' with the Lord of the vineyard having 'preserved unto himself the . . . fruit.' From all the distant places of sin and alienation in which the children of the Father find themselves, it has always been the work of Christ (and his disciples) in every dispensation to gather them, heal them, and unite them with their Master" (*Christ and the New Covenant* [1997], 165–66).

- For more information on the scattering of Israel, refer to "Brief History of the Scattering of Israel" in the appendix (p. 415). For more information on the gathering of Israel, refer to "The Gathering of Israel" in the appendix (p. 416).

Jacob 5:1. Who Was Zenos?

- Zenos was a Hebrew prophet whose writings appeared on the brass plates but who is not mentioned in the Old Testament. He lived sometime after the prophet Abraham and before the prophet Isaiah (see Helaman 8:19–20). We know he testified concerning the death and redemption of the Son of God (see 1 Nephi 19:10; Alma 8:19). Zenos is most particularly known because of his famous allegory of the olive tree. From this allegory it is clear that he was a prophet and a seer (see Jacob 5).

Jacob 5:3. “I Will Liken Thee, O House of Israel, Like unto a Tame Olive-Tree”

• Cultivating and growing olive trees was common to those who lived in ancient Israel. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland explained why Zenos’s use of the olive tree was a powerful symbol of God’s love for the house of Israel:

“One writer has said of this extended symbolic portrayal, ‘One Jewish legend identifies the tree of life as the olive tree, and with good reason. The olive tree is an evergreen, not a deciduous tree. Its leaves do not seasonally fade nor fall. Through scorching heat and winter cold they are continually rejuvenated. Without cultivation the olive is a wild, unruly, easily corrupted tree. Only after long, patient cultivating, usually eight to ten years, does it begin to yield fruit. Long after that, new shoots often come forth from apparently dead roots. [The appearance of gnarled trunks gives] the impression of travail—of ancient life and renewing life.’ [Truman Madsen, “The Olive Press: A Symbol of Christ,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (1994), 2.]

“As Lehi himself taught, no symbol could serve more powerfully and profoundly of God’s expansive, constant, redeeming love—including especially the love represented in the gift of his Only Begotten Son—than does the olive tree” (*Christ and the New Covenant*, 163–64).



© Richard Cleave

Jacob 5:3–77. Symbolic Elements in the Allegory of Zenos

• An allegory or a parable should not be stretched too far in an attempt to correlate every item precisely with some symbolic meaning. Certain major elements, however, need to be defined if the parable is to be understood. An overriding principle throughout Zenos’s allegory is the Lord’s loving care for His people. Additionally, the following items will help you understand the allegory’s meaning (see also “Brief History of the Scattering of Israel” in the appendix on p. 415 and “The Gathering of Israel” in the appendix on p. 416).

Symbol	Meaning
The vineyard	The world
Tame olive tree	The house of Israel, the Lord’s covenant people
Wild olive tree	Gentiles, or non-Israel (later in the parable, wild branches represent apostate Israel)
Branches	Groups of people
The roots of the tame olive tree	The gospel covenants and promises the Lord makes with His children, a constant source of strength and life to the faithful
Fruit of the tree	The lives or works of men
Digging, pruning, fertilizing	The Lord’s work with His children, which seeks to persuade them to be obedient and produce good fruit
Transplanting the branches	Scattering of groups throughout the world, or restoring them to their original position
Grafting	The process of spiritual rebirth through which one is joined to the covenant
Decaying branches	Wickedness and apostasy
Casting the branches into the fire	The judgment of God

The Olive Tree Allegory: Jacob 5

The Scattering of Israel

Before the Time of Christ (vv. 3–14)



Tame olive tree (Israel) is dying (vv. 3–4).



The master prunes and fertilizes; a few new branches grow but the top is still dying (vv. 4–6).



Main branches are removed and wild branches are grafted in; tender branches are hidden (vv. 7–14).



Withered branches are burned (vv. 7, 9).



Wild olive tree (Gentiles; vv. 7, 9)

Natural branches are hidden in the nethermost part of the vineyard.



Poor ground; good fruit (vv. 20–22)

Poorer ground; good fruit (v. 23)

Fruit (this branch is not mentioned again; v. 24)

Good ground; good and bad fruit (v. 25)

God saw the apostasy of ancient Israel. He sent prophets to cry repentance, but few people listened. He allowed the wicked to be destroyed and brought in the Gentiles. A few righteous branches of Israel were scattered around the world.

The Time of Christ

(vv. 15–28)



Good fruit (vv. 15–18)

God saw that Israel (the old root tree) was saved and produced good fruit. The scattered branches of Israel also produced good fruit, except for the Nephites and Lamanites, whose fruit was partly good and partly bad.

The Great Apostasy

(vv. 29–49)



Evil fruit
(vv. 29–37)



Evil fruit
(vv. 39, 46)



Evil fruit
(vv. 39, 46)



Evil fruit only
(vv. 39, 46)

God found that Christianity (the old root tree made up of both Israelites and Gentiles) had become corrupt, but the roots were still good. The natural branches that were scattered were also corrupt.

The Gathering of Israel

The Gospel Goes to All the World
(vv. 50–76)

The Millennium (vv. 76–77)



All trees become as one and bear natural fruit (vv. 74–76).



As the natural branches grow, the wild branches are burned (vv. 57–58, 65–73).

Branches of the scattered trees are grafted back into the original tree (vv. 52–53).



Branches of the original tree are grafted into the scattered trees (vv. 54–56).



When the bad fruit comes again, the good fruit will be gathered out and the vineyard will be burned (v. 77).

God and His servants restore the gospel in its purity. They begin to gather scattered Israel and take the gospel to all the world. As righteousness increases, the wicked are destroyed until no wickedness remains (the Second Coming of Jesus Christ). Righteousness prevails for a long time (the Millennium). When evil again enters the world, God will separate the righteous from the wicked and cleanse the earth by fire.

Jacob 5:8–10. What Does It Mean to Graft Branches?

- In the process of grafting, healthy, living branches are cut from a tree and inserted into the trunk of another tree to grow. The branches in this allegory represent groups of people whom the Lord takes from one place and plants in another. Ultimately, the regrafting in of Israel will include their coming to “the knowledge of the true Messiah” (1 Nephi 10:14).



Jacob 5:23–25. “I Have Planted Another Branch”

- Zenos’s allegory helps us understand that the scattering of Israel all over the world was a blessing to Israel and to the rest of Heavenly Father’s children. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught: “In that parable the olive tree is the House of Israel. . . . In its native land it began to die. So the Lord took branches like the Nephites, like the lost tribes, and like others that the Lord led off that we do not know anything about, to other parts of the earth. He planted them all over his vineyard, which is the world” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 4:204).

President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency explained the purpose of scattering Israel throughout the world: “The scattering of Israel throughout the world sprinkled the blood that believes, so that many nations may now partake of the gospel plan” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1982, 127; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, 87).

Jacob 5:41, 47, 49. “What Could I Have Done More for My Vineyard?”

- The Lord asked three times, “What could I have done more for my vineyard?” (Jacob 5:41, 47, 49). Elder Jeffrey R. Holland commented on how this question helps us understand the true nature of God and His unceasing efforts on behalf of His children:

“After digging and dunging, watering and weeding, trimming, pruning, transplanting, and grafting, the great Lord of the vineyard throws down his spade and his pruning shears and weeps, crying out to any who would listen, ‘What could I have done more for my vineyard?’

“What an indelible image of God’s engagement in our lives! What anguish in a parent when His children do not choose Him nor ‘the gospel of God’ [Romans 1:1] He sent!” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2003, 74; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 72).

Jacob 5:47–48. Develop Spiritual Roots

- President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) explained why the development of a deep spiritual root system must precede branches and fruit:

“I believe we find a great lesson in this regard in the parable of the vineyard found in the fifth chapter of Jacob in the Book of Mormon. . . .

“ . . . The branches have overcome the roots thereof, *behold they grew faster than the strength of the roots*, taking strength unto themselves. Behold, I say, is not this the cause that the trees of thy vineyard have become corrupted?” (Jacob 5:47–48; italics added).

“It seems that some [Latter-day Saints] among us have this same problem; they want bountiful harvests—both spiritual and temporal—without developing the root system that will yield them. There are far too few who are willing to pay the price, in discipline and work, to cultivate hardy roots. Such cultivation should begin in our youth. Little did I know as a boy that daily chores in the garden, feeding the cattle, carrying the water, chopping the wood, mending fences, and all the labor of a small farm was an important part of sending down roots, before being called on to send out branches. I’m so grateful that my parents understood the relationship between roots and branches. Let us each cultivate deep roots, so that we may secure the desired fruits of our welfare labors” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1978, 113; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 74–75).

Jacob 5:62–75. “Labor with Our Might This Last Time”

- While serving as a member of the Seventy, Elder Dean L. Larsen declared that each of us is part of this final effort to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus Christ:

“[Now] is the period during which the Lord and his servants will make the final great effort to take the message of truth to all the peoples of the earth and to reclaim the descendants of ancient Israel who have lost their true identity.



“The prophet Zenos, whom Jacob quotes in the Book of Mormon, compares this effort to the work of the laborers who prune and nurture a vineyard and gather its fruit for the last time. Zenos likens the Savior to the master of the vineyard, who says to those who are

his helpers, ‘Wherefore, let us go to and labor with our might this last time, for behold the end draweth nigh, and this is the last time that I shall prune my vineyard’ (Jacob 5:62).

“You have come to the earth when the foundation has been laid for this great work. The gospel has been restored for the last time. The Church has been established in almost every part of the world. The stage is set for the final dramatic scenes to be enacted. You will be the principal players. You are among the last laborers in the vineyard. This is the yoke that is set upon your necks. This is the service for which you are chosen” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1983, 47; or *Ensign*, May 1983, 33).

Jacob 6:10. “Lake of Fire and Brimstone”

- The phrase “lake of fire and brimstone” is repeatedly mentioned in the scriptures (Revelation 19:20; 20:10; 2 Nephi 9:16, 19, 26; 28:23; Jacob 3:11; 6:10; Mosiah 3:27; Alma 12:17; 14:14; D&C 76:36). This phrase is generally used to describe either the place that awaits

the unrepentant individual after the Judgment or the mental anguish associated with sin.

In reference to the place that awaits those who are unrepentant, modern revelation states: “[The wicked] shall go away into the lake of fire and brimstone, with the devil and his angels” (D&C 76:36).

In reference to mental anguish, the Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) said: “A man is his own tormentor and his own condemner. Hence the saying, They shall go into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone” (*History of the Church*, 6:314).

JACOB 7:2, 4, 7

What were some of Sherem’s arguments and methods? What are modern-day versions of these same arguments and methods?

Jacob 7:1–23. Sherem, the Anti-Christ

- Jacob 7 introduces the first anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon (see commentary for Alma 30:6 on p. 213). Sherem, like others who followed, used “much power of speech” and flattering words to teach that “there should be no Christ” (Jacob 7:2, 4).

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught that one of the major purposes of the Book of Mormon is to help us discern between truth and error, revealing the motives of individuals like Sherem: “The Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ. It confounds false doctrines and . . . fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. The type of apostates in the Book of Mormon are similar to the type we have today. God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1975, 94–95; or *Ensign*, May 1975, 64).

Jacob 7:2–4. How to Avoid Being Deceived

- President Ezra Taft Benson shared the following three questions we can ask ourselves to avoid being deceived:

“1. What do the standard works have to say about it? . . .

“The Book of Mormon, Brigham Young said, was written on the tablets of his heart and no doubt helped save him from being deceived. . . .

“2. The second guide is: what do the latter-day Presidents of the Church have to say on the subject—particularly the living President? . . .

“3. The third and final test is the Holy Ghost—the test of the Spirit. . . . This test can only be fully effective if one’s channels of communication with God are clean and virtuous and uncluttered with sin. Said Brigham Young:

“You may know whether you are led right or wrong . . . for every principle God has revealed carries its own convictions of its truth to the human mind. . . .

“What a pity it would be if we were led by one man to utter destruction!” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1963, 16–17).

Jacob 7:13. “Show Me a Sign”

- The Lord has said that “an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign” (Matthew 12:39). Those who desire a sign without first exercising faith reveal their spiritual condition.

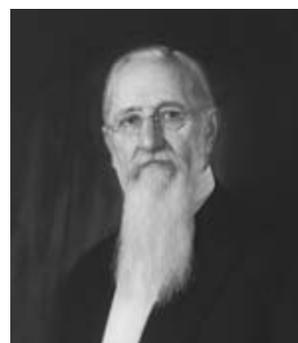


The Prophet Joseph Smith gave a modern example of this principle: “When I was preaching in Philadelphia, a Quaker called out for a sign. I told him to be still. After the sermon, he again asked for a sign. I told the congregation the man was an adulterer; that a wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and that the Lord had said to

me in a revelation, that any man who wanted a sign was an adulterous person. ‘It is true,’ cried one, ‘for I caught him in the very act,’ which the man afterwards confessed, when he was baptized” (*History of the Church*, 5:268).

President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) explained the weakness of requiring a sign to uphold faith: “Show me Latter-day Saints who have to feed upon miracles, signs and visions in order to keep them steadfast in the Church, and I will show you members of the Church who are not in good standing before God, and who are walking in slippery paths.

It is not by marvelous manifestations unto us that we shall be established in the truth, but it is by humility and faithful obedience to the commandments and laws of God” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1900, 40).



Jacob 7:13–20. Signs Follow Those Who Believe

- The Lord declared, “Faith cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that believe” (D&C 63:9; see also vv. 10–12). Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) explained that the righteous will have signs in their lives as a result of their faith:

“Signs flow from faith. They may incidentally have the effect of strengthening the faith of those who are already spiritually inclined, but their chief purpose is not to convert people to the truth, but to reward and bless those already converted. . . .

“Signs are sacred grants of divine favor reserved for the faithful and concerning which the recipients are commanded not to boast” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. [1966], 713–14).

Jacob 7:27. Adieu

- Some have questioned the use of the French word *adieu* in Jacob 7:27. One author explained:

“The choice of words came through the manner of the language of Joseph Smith, so that we might have

understanding. This is why words not known in Book of Mormon times are found in the translated text.

“The word *adieu* is defined in a dictionary of Joseph Smith’s day as ‘a farewell; an expression of kind wishes at the parting of friends’ [meaning that I commend you to God]. (Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828). While the word is of French origin, it had found common usage in early nineteenth century New England” (Edward J. Brandt, “I Have a Question,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1985, 17).

Points to Ponder

- What does Zenos’s allegory teach concerning God’s efforts on behalf of His children?
- President Joseph Fielding Smith said, “Today Latter-day Saints are going to all parts of the world as servants in the vineyard to gather this fruit and lay it in store for the time of the coming of the Master” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 4:142). In addition to missionary work, how can you assist the Lord in gathering fruit?
- Why are the tactics Sherem used so successful in today’s world? How can you fortify yourself against them?

Suggested Assignments

- Record in your journal gospel principles you have identified in Zenos’s allegory (see Jacob 5). Compare them to the gospel principles Jacob emphasized in Jacob 6:3–13.
- Read Alma 30:12–18 and the accompanying commentary for those verses (see p. 214). Compare Korihor’s arguments to Sherem’s arguments in Jacob 7:2–13. Teach a friend or family member how we can protect ourselves from the deceptions of anti-Christ.
- Review the story under Jacob 7:13 regarding the preacher who demanded a sign from the Prophet Joseph Smith. Read Jacob 7:13–20 and Alma 30:49–59 and compare what Sherem and Korihor experienced for demanding a sign. Read Doctrine and Covenants 63:7–12 and outline why faith does not result from signs.