



Type: Magazine Article

The Vision of Lehi

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 69, No. 6 (June 1966)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 504–506

Abstract: This article enumerates some of the lessons that can be learned from the record of Lehi's vision of the tree of life. Prayer and humility are important to learning the truth by the power of the Holy Ghost. Temptation may come in attractive attire that blurs perception and weakens sensibility.

a fleeting twinge of conscience. The sorrow I refer to has no mental reservation, no feeling that perhaps our sins are not so gross or serious after all.

Paul said: "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation. . . : but the sorrow of the world worketh death." (2 Cor. 7:10.) This kind of sorrow means abandonment of the sin. This means complete cessation from such actions from that point forward.

Another vital step in repentance is confession. The Lord said, ". . . I, the Lord, forgive sins unto those who confess their sins before me and ask forgiveness, who have not sinned unto death." (D&C 64:7.)

The Lord retains unto himself the right to judge the whole man. However, in the ecclesiastical order of his Church, he has appointed what are known as common judges in Israel, more commonly known as bishops.

The bishop receives the confessions of the members of the Church when a serious sin has been committed, such as one involving the moral law. His authority as a judge has to do with the retention of the individual's full fellowship in the Church. He has been given the responsibility to forgive as far as church membership is concerned. The Lord is the only one who can truly forgive.

Each bishop recognizes his special role as a servant of the Lord in assisting him to accomplish his purpose. He said:

"For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." (Moses 1:39.)

The bishop knows that the confession received from a member of his ward is a sacred trust. He does not divulge it to his wife or any other person. A bishop who violates such a sacred confidence is, himself, guilty of an offense before God, the Church, and the individual.

We sit today with several thousands of these wonderful men who have been called and ordained by proper authority to this very special position of bishop. They come from all walks of life. They span many years in age. They are your neighbors and mine. They have grown up with us. Some of them have grown up with our children, and for these reasons and others, we too often fail to recognize them for what they have become. At the time of their ordination to bishop, they were given the authority to act as a common judge within the boundaries of their wards. They were given the blessing of discernment, wisdom, and understanding. They were counseled to be kind and thoughtful in their dealings with the membership.

Each bishop understands fully the following scripture:

"No power or influence can or

ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

"By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—

"Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprov'd, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy. . . ." (D&C 121:41-43.)

As already stated, the bishop is the spiritual counselor to his people. He is the one to whom we should confess our serious transgressions. He is not a harsh judge but rather he constantly asks himself, "What would the Savior's judgment be in this case?" If we are truly repentant, we should be willing

to place our trust in him and follow his guidance, because, after all, his whole purpose is not to condemn us but to help us.

May the Lord bless those who have transgressed, that they may understand his love for them and the blessings that can be theirs through repentance, never forgetting that the Lord himself has said:

"Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more." (D&C 58:42.)

My brothers and sisters, it is my humble witness that God lives. I know it with all the fiber of my being. I know that he loves us, and I know that he has the same love for the sinner as for the Saint. May he bless us, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Vision of Lehi

Delbert L. Stapley

Of the Council of the Twelve

● My brothers and sisters and friends, it is a privilege always to attend the general conferences of the Church.

My message is taken from the Book of Mormon account of the vision God gave to the Prophet Lehi, who, with his family, lived in Jerusalem about 600 years before the birth of Christ. This prophet was warned concerning the destruction of Jerusalem by invading Babylonian armies. God therefore commanded Lehi to take his family and a small select group and to depart from the city. The Lord gave assurance that he would lead them to a promised land—the Americas as we know them today. These families belonged to the house of Israel, and Lehi was a descendant of that Joseph who was sold into Egypt.

After their departure from Jerusalem and while in the Valley of Lemuel, near the border of the Red Sea, God blessed the prophet with an inspiring vision. (2 Ne. 8.) In this vision Lehi beheld a dark and dreary wilderness. He was led by a messenger from God, a man clothed in a white robe. It seemed to Lehi they were moving deeper into the wilderness of darkness, and he therefore earnestly petitioned his God for mercy. Following his supplication the dream unfolded to his vision important and significant events. Lehi beheld a large and spacious field and a tree, the fruit of which was desirable to make one happy. He went forth and partook of the fruit and in

ecstasy declared it to be the most sweet above all that he had before tasted. When Lehi partook of the fruit, he described it as filling his soul with exceeding joy, and he therefore desired that his family should partake of the fruit also, for he knew it was most desirable above all other fruit. As he cast his eyes about to discover his family, he beheld a river of water that ran along near the tree. As he looked toward the source of the stream, he saw his wife, Sariah, and two of his sons, Nephi and Sam. It seemed to Lehi that this part of his family were uncertain as to the way they should go. Being anxious about the welfare of his family, he beckoned unto them to come and partake of the fruit, which invitation they willingly accepted.

Lehi had two other sons, both of whom were wayward. He was desirous that they also should come and partake of the fruit. When he located them, they refused his invitation.

As the vision continued, Lehi beheld a rod of iron that extended along the bank of the river and led to the tree by which he stood. He also beheld a straight and narrow path that paralleled close to the rod of iron and also led to the tree and continued on to the head of the fountain unto a large and spacious field, as if it were a world. Lehi saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward that they might obtain the path that led to the tree laden with

desirable fruit. Some commenced in the path, but there arose a mist of darkness of exceeding intensity inasmuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way and wandered off and were lost.

In the vision Lehi beheld others pressing forward, and they caught hold of the rod of iron and continued through the mists of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, and moved along the straight and narrow path until they reached the tree and partook of its fruit. After partaking of the fruit they cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed. This caused Lehi to wonder, so he cast his eyes round about also and beheld on the other side of the river a great and spacious building. It was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female, who were well dressed, and they were in the attitude of mocking and were pointing fingers of scorn toward those who had partaken of the fruit. These wavering souls had made considerable progress toward their goal, but they could not withstand the scoffing of the multitudes and therefore they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.

Lehi saw another concourse of people, and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron until they reached the tree and partook of its fruit. He saw other multitudes feeling their way toward that great and spacious building. Many strayed and were drowned in the depths of the fountain, and others were lost from his view, wandering into strange roads. Great were the multitudes that entered the strange building, and after doing so they pointed the finger of scorn and did scoff at Lehi and the others who were partaking of the fruit. “. . . but,” said Lehi, “we heeded them not.” (1 Ne. 8:33.) So closed the vision of Lehi.

Now, having the details of the vision in mind, let us consider the teachings and the lessons of this unusual vision. We learn that people must pray for light and truth to know the way to eternal life and happiness. Only by humility and prayer, with a heart open to truth, can one escape the dominant influence that Satan is exerting so strongly and effectively today in all areas of the world to destroy the souls of men.

Nephi, the son of Lehi, although fully believing the words of his father regarding his vision, was nevertheless desirous that he might see and hear and know for himself of those things witnessed by his father. He had faith that the vision of his father could be shown him by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost. Nephi was granted his wish after he, too, had humbly and diligently supplicated the Lord in prayer for this privilege.

An angel of God appeared before Nephi and asked if he knew the meaning of the tree which his father saw. Nephi answered in the affirmative, stating, “. . . 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.” And the angel added, “Yea, and the most joyous to the soul.” (1 Ne. 11:22-23.)

The tree of life was not unknown to the descendants of Lehi, part of whom are the Indian tribes of the Americas, for it is found in the pictorial hieroglyphics that were carved upon rocks in regions of the past civilizations of Lehi's posterity. The tree of life is not something new taught in our day, for there are many references to it in the scriptures. The significance of this representation may not be understood fully, except by few, yet it has real and important spiritual value. In the book of Revelation (2:7) we learn that “the tree of life . . . is in the midst of the paradise of God.” In Genesis 2:9 we are informed that a tree of life was placed by God in the midst of the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were privileged to partake of the fruit of this tree until they transgressed God's law. Thereafter the fruit of the tree was denied them; if they had partaken, they would have lived forever in their fallen state. Death was in the great plan of God, and the hope of man became centered in Jesus Christ, who gave his life on Calvary to redeem and save man from the effects of the fall.

Alma, a Nephite prophet, quotes the Christ as saying, “Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life. . . .” (Al. 5:34.)

John the Revelator, speaking of the tree of life in the New Jerusalem that is to come down from heaven, said: “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” (Rev. 22:14.)

Lehi taught there must be an opposition in all things. “. . . even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the

other bitter.” (2 Ne. 2:15.)

Nephi advises, “Wherefore, the wicked are rejected from the righteous, and also from that tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it is the greatest of all the gifts of God.” (1 Ne. 15:36.)

Nephi learned from the angel that the rod of iron seen by his father was the word of God, which word, if accepted and lived, will lead mankind to the tree of life and to the fountain of living waters, which waters are a representation of the love of God. Nephi beheld also that the tree of life is a representation of the love of God.

Man's duty, therefore, is to seek earnestly for the word of the Lord; and when he finds it, if he is sincere in his desires, he will enter into that straight and narrow path that will take him to the tree of life where he can partake of the fruit thereof. Remaining true, he will not fall into the byways of wickedness and sin but continue on to the eternal mansions prepared of God for the faithful and worthy of his children.

The river of water spoken of in the vision represents filthiness. The mists of darkness are the temptations of the devil, which blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men and lead them away into broad roads, where they perish and become lost. The great and spacious building was the pride of the world which fell and, said the angel, “Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” (1 Ne. 11:36.) The building was filled with human beings—fools and scoffers—who, with their ribaldry, succeeded in making apostates and transgressors of some of those who had tasted of the fruit of the tree of life. The inmates of the building delighted in mocking and scoffing at those who desired to do right.

Inasmuch as Laman and Lemuel did not partake of the fruit of the tree of life, Lehi feared lest they would be cast off from the presence of the Lord forever. As their father, he had great concern for their eternal welfare, and his love was manifest in his exhortation to them with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken unto his words and not be cast off.

The parable of Jesus dealing with the sower who went forth to sow parallels in teaching the lessons given Lehi in the vision that I have described. (Matt. 13:1-9.) The Savior, after applying the parable of the sower to those whom he was teaching, interpreted it to the understanding of his disciples by saying:

“When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and



catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside.

"But he that received the seed into the stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

"Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

"He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

"But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty." (Matt. 13:19-23.)

The Apostle Paul declared that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, because, said he, "it is the power of God unto salvation. . . ." (Rom. 1:16.)

No man, following the example and dedication of the Christ, should become ashamed or afraid of his true Christian status and lack courage and strength, in the face of opposition or the taunting of men, to remain true, firm, and steadfast to his conviction of what is right in the sight of God. This life is a probationary state wherein men and women are tried and proven in the crucible of mortal existence.

The vision of Lehi and the parable of the sower presented by the Christ suggest the weaknesses of men and the many avenues of personal indifference, lack of faith, wickedness, and sin which, if left uncontrolled, will destroy their very souls and lead them down to the depths of hell.

Lehi's love and concern for the eternal welfare and happiness of his family is applicable to all parents. They too, feelingly, kindly, and in love, must give children the opportunity of good moral and spiritual teaching and training with righteous and ethical parental example in order to create the desire and the strength within their children's hearts to love God and to serve him and keep his commandments.

The pitfalls of temptation and evil today are many. These evils are dressed up attractively and cunningly to deceive the very elect. Unless parents and youth are grounded in the basics of good behavior and the fundamental principles and standards of the gospel, which is the true Christian way of life, they can stumble and fall by the wayside and thus never reach the goal of eternal life.

The teachings of Lehi, his son Nephi, the Apostle Paul, and Jesus, to which I have referred, are guidelines

and directions toward the tree of life. The vision of Lehi blesses all of us with its understanding of God's purposes for his children and the responsibility of parents to their families. The Church and its families are synonymous: one does not exist without the other, and both serve each other, and all belong to God the Father.

Now in closing I wish to summarize the vision of Lehi with the following brief comments:

Dreams or visions are often used as a teaching principle, unfolding the secrets of heaven to the prepared mind and prayerful heart.

The love of God suggests the good and wholesome things of life.

The tree of life is indicative of eternal life—or celestial life—life in the full enjoyment of God's love.

The fountain of living waters is representative of the love of God. All spiritual graces and refreshment communicated by the Spirit are compared to a fountain. We learn from Jeremiah, ". . . they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters." (Jer. 17:13.)

God, then, is called the fountain of living waters. The Savior taught that those who drink of it shall never thirst.

The numberless concourses of people seen by Lehi in his vision represent the different races of men on earth.

The river of water, which is representative of the filthiness of sin, wickedness, and contamination, separates the wicked from the tree of life and from the Saints of God and is a prototype of the condition called hell.

Notwithstanding the numerous institutions of secular and theological learning, the human family, by and large, are groping in the mists of moral and spiritual darkness. Sin and vice, prideful exaltation of the human mind, and the pursuit of harmful pleasures blur men's perception, dull their sense

of values, and obscure their vision of the rod of iron, or the word of God, which alone leads to eternal life.

The great and spacious building, in addition to representing the pride and vain imaginations of men, stands for the mockery and ridicule of the world. Our generation should be reminded that scoffers are far from the kingdom of God. Those who allow the ridicule of men to make them embarrassed by the cause, the standards, or the obligations that they have espoused as true followers of Christ, and are turned thereby from the straight and narrow path of truth and righteousness, are those who form the stony ground in which the seed sown soon withers and dies. Those who are drowned in the depths of the fountain refer to those who are engulfed in the quagmire of evil-mindedness, sin, and corruption; therefore, the wicked sink to destruction in the river of filth, and the depths thereof are the depths of hell.

Passing through the mist and clinging steadfastly to the iron rod, the faithful pass triumphantly through the temptations that beset man's mortal pilgrimage to the cherished goal of eternal life with God.

In man's search for happiness and his climb to eternal joy, there can be no relaxation, no deviation from the straight and narrow path; nor can he lose a firm hold upon the iron rod, which is the word of God. He must set aside the things of the world as he travels the path which leads to exaltation and glory in the kingdom of God.

I bear witness to you, my brothers and sisters, to the truthfulness of these things. I know the teachings of this vision are important to us and to all the world. May God bless us that we may so live and set the type of example that will incline the hearts of men and women to the restored Church of our Lord, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.



*Famed Tabernacle
Choir members,
directed by Richard
P. Condie and
accompanied by
Alexander Schreiner,
sound their soul-
stirring tidings
Easter morning.*