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The Allegory of the Olive Tree in Jacob

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The Allegory of the Olive Tree in Jacob

Paul Y. Hoskisson

In language that rivals the best literature has to offer, the allegory of the olive tree is the most beautiful prose expression of God's aspirations for the house of Israel during its history here on the earth. In addition to both generalizing about historical periods and presenting in some detail specific events in the history of the house of Israel, the allegory discusses God's loving care for and tender devotion to Israel and his desire to help Israel reach its righteous potential.¹ The allegory is also, as any well-written allegory is, at once simple and complex, obscure and obvious. Therefore, in this study I do not pretend to plumb the depths of this allegory.² I will, however, touch on four aspects of the allegory suggesting meanings to which I, as a late-twentieth-century Latter-day Saint, am drawn.³ First, what do the symbols of the allegory represent? Second, why did Jacob include the allegory in his book of scripture? Third, to what historical events does the allegory allude in outlining God's dealings with the house of Israel? And fourth, what does the allegory have to say to us today?

WHAT DO THE SYMBOLS OF THE ALLEGORY REPRESENT?

Most of the symbols and metaphors of the allegory have

been identified previously and do not require lengthy explanations here.⁴ The tame olive tree, the dominant metaphor in the allegory, symbolizes the house of Israel (Jacob 5:3). The wild olive trees therefore refer to non-Israelites. The vineyard in which the olive trees, both wild and tame, have been planted is interpreted by Jacob as the world (Jacob 6:3). The pruning, digging, and nourishing of the trees symbolize God's merciful care of the house of Israel (Jacob 6:4). The decay in the tame tree, in my view, represents apostasy from the gospel of Jesus Christ; and the fruit of the tree represents the souls of men as they have become good or bitter through their works.

Several of the metaphors in the allegory—the Lord of the vineyard, the servant, the roots, the grafting and pruning, and the branches—require more discussion. The Lord, the servant, and the goodness of the roots remain constant throughout the allegory.⁵ They therefore, like the vineyard, also probably represent constants. On the other hand the branches, while present throughout the allegory, are variable in that they can change from bearing good fruit to bearing bad fruit and vice versa. The grafting and pruning are also variable because these activities are mentioned in only two segments of the allegory (the second and the fifth, which make up almost half of the allegory).

Most treatments of the allegory see Christ as the lord of the vineyard and the servant as various prophets.⁶ The reason for seeing Christ and the prophets in these roles is twofold. First, the belief that rarely if ever does God the Father involve himself directly in the work here on the earth, but rather, performs all work through Christ and his prophets,⁷ would tend to eliminate God as the hands-on Lord of the vineyard. And second, the untenable belief that *Lord* is used elsewhere in scripture almost exclusively for

Christ also works against seeing God the Father as the Lord of the vineyard. Without arguing the validity of the beliefs on which it is assumed God the Father is not the Lord of the vineyard, I think there is reason to propose that the Lord of the vineyard represents our Heavenly Father and that the servant is Christ. For example, like the Lord of the vineyard, the servant throughout the allegory seems to be a single person and therefore cannot easily be made over into multiple prophets. Moreover, the servant in Jacob 5 can be associated with the “righteous servant” of Isaiah 53, whom Abinadi explicitly identifies as Christ (Mosiah 15:5–7). In addition, the working relationship between the Lord of the vineyard and the servant in the allegory accurately reflects the relationship between the Father and the Son, in that Christ does not act alone, but in all things follows the instructions and example of the Father.⁸ (Perhaps, when the unity of the Godhead and of God’s servants is considered, the question of the identity of the Lord and his servant is moot.⁹) Certainly, whatever interpretation is given the servant, the additional servants that the Lord of the vineyard instructs the servant to call in the latter days (Jacob 5:61, 70) represent the prophetically called righteous workers of the Restoration.

The roots of the main natural tree, I believe, represent the scriptural heritage revealed by the God of Israel.¹⁰ (By scriptural heritage I mean not just canonized scripture, but also all other truths that this particular heritage might have received and does receive through inspiration; see D&C 68:4 and Alma 29:8.) If roots are conceived of as providing the nourishment of the word of God to the tree, Jacob 6:7 suggests this correlation of the roots with scripture. If this correlation of roots with scriptural heritage is accurate, it would explain why the roots remain good throughout the

allegory, that is, throughout the history of the house of Israel. The branches on the other hand can alternate between good and bad, tame and wild. Perhaps the branches then represent the various cultures that draw on the scriptural heritage of Israel.¹¹

If the roots represent the scriptural heritage that provides us with the direction and grace to produce good gospel works, then grafting describes the process whereby cultures become attached to the healing influence of the word of God and thus “come to a knowledge of the true Messiah” (1 Nephi 10:14).

The pruning would then be the opposite, namely, being cut off from the healing influence of the word of God. It is through the pruning process and nourishment of the trees of the vineyard that eventually the earth will be cleansed of all evil. The pruning would, therefore, not necessarily be equated with individual excommunication, but rather with being cut off from the scriptural heritage of Israel for refusal to accept the healing influence of the word of God. Destruction soon follows. This process is not dissimilar to individual excommunication, which is simply the formality whereby the Church removes from the record the names of those who have by their actions already cut themselves off from spiritual direction and enlightenment.

WHY DID JACOB INCLUDE THE ALLEGORY IN HIS BOOK OF SCRIPTURE?

The allegory of Zenos forms the center piece of a farewell speech given by Jacob to the Nephites late in Jacob’s life (Jacob 6:13). In this speech Jacob explained that because “the Spirit speaketh . . . of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be” (Jacob 4:13), therefore, he, Jacob, and all the prophets who had gone before, “knew

of Christ and . . . had a hope of his glory" (Jacob 4:4). Indeed, Jacob and the prophets knew about the "great and marvelous . . . works of the Lord" (Jacob 4:8), and they were acquainted with the "atonement of Christ" (Jacob 4:12). With these remarks Jacob sought to convince his "beloved brethren" to "be reconciled" to God (Jacob 4:11), and to "repent . . . and enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until [they] obtain eternal life" (Jacob 6:11) by "cleaving unto God as he cleaveth" to them (Jacob 6:5). In short, Jacob taught the Nephites of historical faith in the great and marvelous works of Christ, of their need for repentance, and of the necessity for baptism and the reception of the Holy Ghost.

As a part of this speech, Jacob illustrates reconciliation to God through Christ with the specific example of the Jews: They will reject Christ, the chief cornerstone "upon which they might build and have safe foundation" (Jacob 4:15), because they "despised the words of plainness" (Jacob 4:14) spoken to them by the "prophets of old" (Jacob 4:13) and "killed [those who were sent to testify of Christ] and sought for things that they could not understand" (Jacob 4:14). How can the Jews after rejecting Christ be reconciled to God through him? As explanation, Jacob offered the Nephites Zenos's allegory of the olive tree. When his audience had heard the allegory, Jacob in good Hebrew style expected them to understand, without further explanation, the need for reconciliation and the process whereby reconciliation can take place. In good non-Hebrew style I will now explain the basic historical outline of the allegory.

A BASIC OUTLINE OF THE ALLEGORY¹²

Because the tame olive tree, the central image or likeness in the allegory of Zenos, represents an historical phe-



“I will liken thee, O house of Israel, like unto a tame olive-tree” (Jacob 5:3).

nomenon, the house of Israel (Jacob 5:3), it is reasonable to conclude that the allegory is meant to explain actual events in the temporal and spiritual history of the house of Israel; therefore, the allegory must itself be understandable in a temporal and spiritual sense.

The assignment of the events in the allegory to approximate historical time periods, a prerequisite to understanding the allegory and making it meaningful for today, must start by determining the earliest and latest dates for the beginning and for the end.¹³ The allegory commences in Jacob 5:3 with the founding of the house of Israel, which I

would equate with its origins in the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel).¹⁴ Because the most likely date for the patriarchs must lie within the Middle Bronze Age, 2100–1600 B.C., I place the historical beginning of the allegory between those years.¹⁵ The allegory ends with Jacob 5:77, when the good and bad fruit are gathered and then fire destroys the vineyard. Therefore, with the vineyard standing for the world, I conclude that the allegory ends with the destruction of the earth by fire, which will happen after the Millennium.¹⁶

The time sequences represented in the allegory from the first cultivation of the tame olive tree to the destruction of the vineyard can be divided into seven periods:¹⁷ (1) verse 3, the founding of the house of Israel (the “taking and nourishing” of the tame olive tree) sometime in the Middle Bronze Age (2100–1600 B.C.) and the aging thereof in the Late Bronze Age (1600–1200 B.C.); (2) verses 4–14, the nurturing (starting approximately with the Iron Age, traditionally dated from about 1200 B.C.) and the scattering of the house of Israel, culminating (as far as the allegory is concerned) more or less shortly after 600 B.C.; (3) verses 15–28, the former-day Saints, approximately the first century of the Christian era; (4) verses 29–49, the Great Apostasy, up to about 1820; (5) verses 50–74, the gathering of Israel beginning in 1820; (6) verses 75–76, the Millennium; and (7) verse 77, the end of the world. I will discuss these periods in this order.

First Period: The Founding and Aging of the House of Israel, Jacob 5:3

The beginning years of the house of Israel, the starting point of the allegory, date to between 2100–1600 B.C. (the Middle Bronze Age), the most likely setting for the

Patriarchal Age. By the end of Jacob 5:3, however, the tree had already “waxed old.” This indicates to me that considerable time had passed, perhaps at least four hundred years, and perhaps six hundred or more years, since the tree was first cultivated.¹⁸ In addition, the tree had begun to decay, that is, apostasy from the gospel of Jesus Christ had begun to set in among the trunk and main parts of the house of Israel. If the Lord of the vineyard would not take appropriate measures, the tree would continue to decay and eventually die. It is at this point long after the planting of the tree that the Lord paid a visit to his vineyard, thus initiating the second period.

Second Period: The Scattering of the House of Israel, Jacob 5:4–14

The Lord of the vineyard, on seeing his now venerable tree and the apostasy therein, outlined a course of action to correct the situation, to rejuvenate the tree, and then to plant offshoots of the tame olive tree in other parts of his vineyard. In the first stage of his efforts he stimulated the aged tree to produce younger branches that could bear good fruit. “And it came to pass that the master of the vineyard went forth, and he saw that his olive-tree began to decay; and he said: I will prune it, and dig about it, and nourish it, that perhaps it may shoot forth young and tender branches, and it perish not” (Jacob 5:4). Beginning with prophets such as Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and Isaiah, the Lord attempted to reclaim the house of Israel from apostasy. Even with this effort and only after a period of “many days,” the Lord met with merely minimal success, because the olive tree “began to put forth somewhat a little, young and tender branches” (Jacob 5:6), while most of the tree continued to deteriorate. As the allegory also makes clear, the

rulers and the ruling class, the “main top” of the tree, were with few exceptions almost beyond recovery (Jacob 5:6).

Two possible examples of this apostasy suffice.¹⁹ First, Jeroboam, the initial king of the Northern Kingdom, introduced calf icons at the cultic sites of Dan and Bethel, thus establishing one of the great political and cultic sins of king and people in the Old Testament.²⁰ And second, Manasseh, a king of the Southern Kingdom, ushered in one of the most condemned reigns in biblical history, summarized in one verse, “But [the Kingdom of Judah] hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel” (2 Kings 21:9).²¹ It was no wonder that the Lord of the vineyard grieved that he “should lose this tree” (Jacob 5:7), that is, that the house of Israel should cease to exist as a cultural entity.

At this juncture the Lord of the vineyard instructed the servant to take three additional measures in addition to the pruning, digging, and nourishing: “Go and pluck the branches from a wild olive-tree, and bring them hither unto me; and we will pluck off those main branches which are beginning to wither away, and we will cast them into the fire that they may be burned. . . . And behold, saith the Lord of the vineyard, I take away many of these young and tender branches, and I will graft them whithersoever I will” (Jacob 5:7–8). These three steps entailed (1) cutting out those parts of Israel in apostasy (mainly the upper classes) and destroying them, (2) grafting into Israel other peoples, and (3) either grafting or planting some of the young and tender natural branches of the house of Israel in other parts of the vineyard. The first step began at the latest when the Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom in a series of wars between 734 and 720 B.C. The Assyrians also carried



"Cast them into the fire that they may be burned" (Jacob 5:7).

away many inhabitants of the Southern Kingdom during campaigns that lasted to about 700 B.C. The Babylonians continued the scattering of the house of Israel by destroying the Southern Kingdom in various battles between 605 and 586 B.C.

In at least two stages after 720 B.C., the Assyrians helped fulfill the second set of instructions by moving other peoples into the territorial vacuum created in Israel when they substantially depopulated the Northern Kingdom.²² These imported peoples, at least to some extent, intermarried with the Israelites left behind by the Assyrians, producing a new cultural melding. The Israelites that were carried into captivity by the Assyrians as well as the Judean captives of the Babylonians probably intermarried with their non-Israelite neighbors and accepted new cultural elements.²³

The third measure the Lord of the vineyard proposed involved transporting young and tender groups of Israelites to other lands away from Palestine. We certainly do not



These will I place in the nethermost part of my vineyard" (Jacob 5:13).

know the full extent of this scattering or all of the means the Lord used to scatter Israel. The deportation of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms was part of this process, as were the Lehites, alluded to in the allegory. Certainly other groups were led away also.

If it is possible from the allegory to make observations about the nature of the scattering of Israel, I would suggest two conclusions. First, the apostate branches of Israel were not scattered but destroyed, "plucked off . . . and cast . . . into the fire" (Jacob 5:7). This does not necessarily refer to apostate individuals, but certainly it applies to cultic, political, and cultural continuity. And second, the branches that were scattered were "young and tender" (Jacob 5:8), that is, they were at the time of their scattering yet formable, new developments, not in the mainstream of apostate Israelite culture, and capable of bearing good fruit.

With parts of the house of Israel scattered over much of

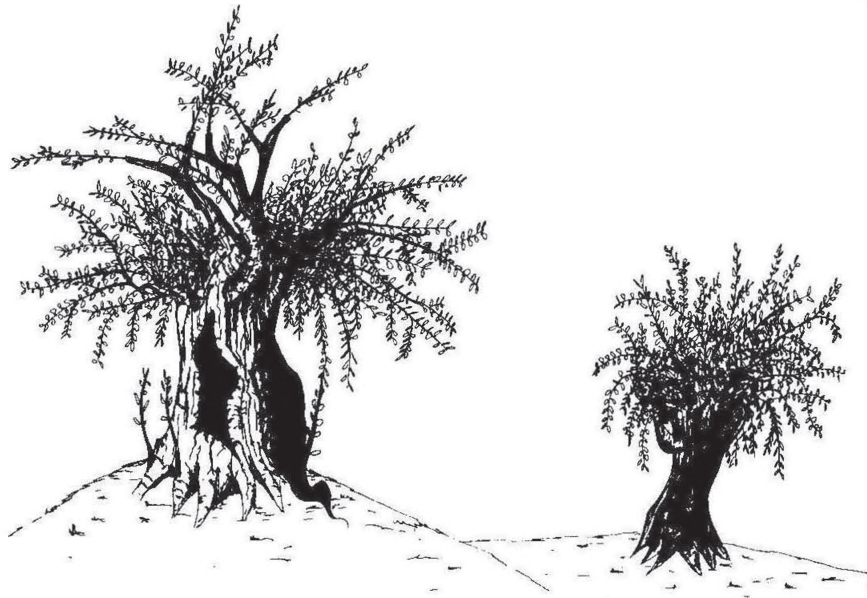
the surface of the earth and with intermarriage between Israelites and non-Israelites, and the subsequent cultural shifts both in and outside of Palestine, perhaps the tree would be saved. For the result we must turn to the next period.

Third Period: The Day of the Former-day Saints, Jacob 5:15–28

The allegory provides three bits of information that add precision to the dating of the period I have termed the day of the former-day Saints. First, after the nurturing of Israel and the scattering of the young and tender branches of Israel, the Lord allowed “a long time” to elapse before coming to inspect the vineyard (Jacob 5:15).²⁴ If the removal of the decayed parts of the house of Israel from Palestine was essentially completed by about 586 B.C. and the scattering of the young and tender branches of Israel well underway by that time, then the day of the former-day Saints must be considerably later than this date. How much later can be determined by the next indication.

Second, when the Lord eventually returned to the vineyard, he discovered that the mother tree with branches from other nations grafted in had produced “tame fruit” (Jacob 5:18). The only apparent historical period when Israel with Gentile grafts produced good fruit came at the time of Christ’s mortal ministry and the following decades. Thus the tentative dates for the third era in the allegory, the day of the former-day Saints, can be placed around the time of Christ, about six hundred years after the closing of the previous period.

This dating is confirmed by the third bit of information in this section. The last²⁵ transplanted tree, placed in “a good spot of ground; yea, even that which was choice unto [the



“Take thou the branches of the wild olive-tree, and graft them in”
(Jacob 5:9).

Lord] above all other parts of the land of [his] vineyard” (Jacob 5:43), produced at this time part good and part evil branches. The choicest spot of land on the whole earth in which the transplanted branch of Israel produced a good and an evil culture, as far as we know, can only refer to the righteous and unrighteous Lehites in the Americas,²⁶ and the historical setting can only have been before the Great Apostasy.²⁷ The date for this part of this section of the allegory must also be the first Christian century.

After seeing that the good fruit of all the trees was gathered and that the last transplant was nurtured so that the evil parts of it might bring forth good fruit, the Lord left his vineyard, not to return for some time. Upon his return the next period, the fourth, receives definition.

Fourth Period: The Great Apostasy, Jacob 5:29–49

When the Lord arrived again after “a long time” (Jacob 5:29) to inspect his vineyard, he found that the mother tree

had “brought forth much fruit, and there is none of it which is good. And behold there are all kinds of bad fruit” (Jacob 5:32). This is precisely the situation of the (Christian) world as described by the Lord to the Prophet Joseph in the Sacred Grove (Joseph Smith–History 1:19). The mother tree in Israel that had borne much good fruit in the early Christian era had become entirely corrupt. As for the first transplanted branches, they also carried nothing but bad fruit. The good section of the last tree, the righteous Lehites, had been entirely destroyed by the evil branch, the apostate Lehites, so that nothing but wild fruit remained on it also. The apostasy had been complete and universal in all the trees representing Israel. Yet the roots remained good (Jacob 5:34).

It is at this point that the Lord proposed a total destruction of the trees in his vineyard: “Let us go to and hew down the trees of the vineyard and cast them into the fire, that they shall not cumber the ground of my vineyard, for I have done all. What could I have done more for my vineyard?” (Jacob 5:49). What need did he have of trees that produced only unprofitable fruit? Better to cut down the trees, burn them, and make something else out of the vineyard.²⁸ After all, the Lord had done everything he could have to save the world from apostasy. Yet the Lord’s servant counseled him to spare the world for a little time, and the Lord accepted the advice.²⁹ This leads into the fifth era of time in the allegory.

Fifth Period: The Gathering of Israel, Jacob 5:50–74

The text states explicitly that between earlier periods, between the scattering of Israel and the day of the former-day Saints and again between the day of the former-day Saints and the Lord’s acknowledgment of the Great Apostasy, “a long time passed away” (Jacob 5:50). Unlike

the long passage of time between these previous periods, the allegory makes clear that no significant time transpired between the acknowledgment of the Great Apostasy (Jacob 5:49) and the beginnings of the gathering of Israel (Jacob 5:50 and following). This is of course how Latter-day Saints read history. On a spring day in 1820 the world changed from total submersion in apostasy to the first significant steps that would begin the gathering. To be sure, the aggregate of the first decade was minuscule, but the gathering had commenced.

The gathering described in the allegory is also deliberately slow: "Wherefore, dig about them, and prune them, and dung them once more, for the last time, for the end draweth nigh. And if it be so that these last grafts shall grow, and bring forth the natural fruit, then shall ye prepare the way for them, that they may grow. And as they begin to grow ye shall clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit, according to the strength of the good and the size thereof; and ye shall not clear away the bad thereof all at once, lest the roots thereof should be too strong for the graft, and the graft thereof shall perish, and I lose the trees of my vineyard" (Jacob 5:64–65). From the transplanted tame trees that had become wild, natural branches would be cut and grafted back into the mother tree, and from the mother tree which had also become wild, branches would be grafted into the transplanted tame trees. As these branches gain strength and as the roots can bear it, the branches that continue to produce wild fruit will eventually be pruned out and destroyed.

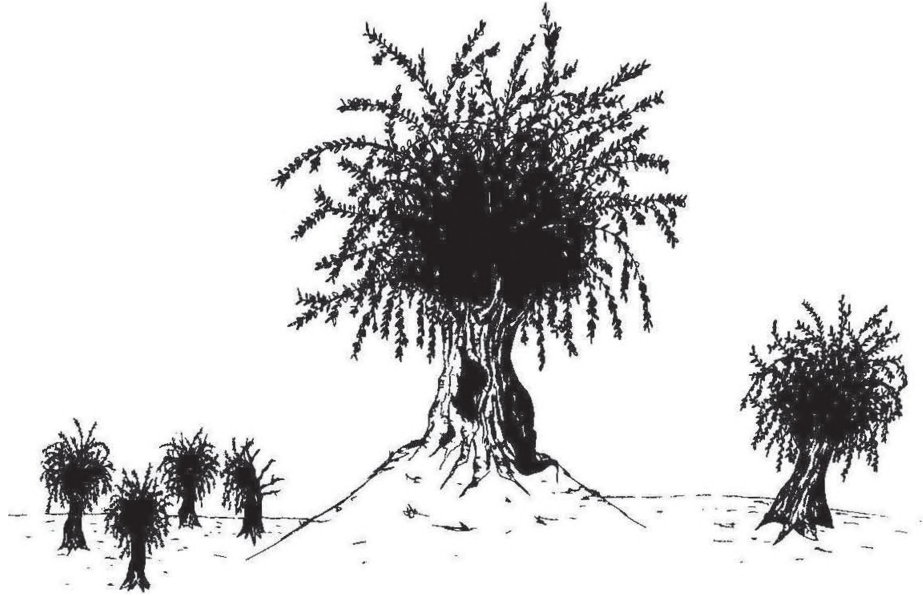
This process is observable not only in the broad strokes of the history of the Restoration as the gospel is brought to the different cultures of the world, but also in the fine strokes of contemporary stakes and missions. Through the missionary program peoples are brought into the Church.

These new peoples are influenced by the gospel for a few years or for many generations, serving the Lord more or less faithfully for a number of years. But as the Church makes progress, some of these new twigs and boughs fail to make progress with the rest of the membership. As was the case during the Great Apostasy, pride prevents them from continuing to change and repent. This process extends down to the individual level as well. Individuals leave the Church, or just fade away, usually taking their posterity with them. In time such unprofitable twigs are pruned out of the tree. At the same time the Lord of the vineyard continues to work with those cultures and individuals that can still be reclaimed or improved.

This is, however, the last time the Lord of the vineyard will, through grafting and pruning, clean and purify the vineyard (Jacob 5:62–63; see also D&C 24:19; 39:17; 43:28; and 95:4). He will continue this process until there is no more degeneracy or corruption anywhere in the vineyard and the whole earth is full of his glory. When the earth no longer produces evil, the sixth or penultimate epoch of the allegory will commence.

Sixth Period: The Millennium, Jacob 5:75–76

Unlike the other periods so far discussed, the benefit of hindsight is not available. However, this does not prevent discussion of the points made in this section of the allegory. Of this thousand-year period (see Revelation 20:2–7; D&C 29:11, 22; 88:110; Moses 7:64–65), the allegory simply states that the Lord will “for a long time . . . lay up of the fruit of [his] vineyard unto [his] own self” (Jacob 5:76). There will be no corruption on the earth during this time. “The Lord of the vineyard saw that his fruit was good, and that his vineyard was no more corrupt, . . . and the bad [was] cast



“The Lord of the vineyard saw that his fruit was good (Jacob 5:75).

away” (Jacob 5:75). When after this “long time” branches of the tree again begin to degenerate and bad fruit appears, the Millennium will have concluded and the final or seventh epoch of the allegory will have begun.

Seventh Period: The End of the World, Jacob 5:77

Again, the benefit of hindsight is not available. During this ultimate stage of the earth’s existence, when after the Millennium the world again will have degenerated, the good and the bad will be separated. The Lord will take the good fruit to himself, and the bad he will destroy by fire along with the world that spawned them.

WHAT DOES THE ALLEGORY HAVE TO SAY TO US?

With this understanding of the basic outline of the events covered by the allegory, it is possible to turn to the

contents and do as Nephi has suggested, to “liken all scriptures unto us” (1 Nephi 19:23). I will discuss below lessons concerning God’s treatment of the vineyard, the fruitfulness of the parts of the vineyard, observations about the latter-day work during the gathering of Israel, and lessons from the Apostasy.

God is not a partial God (Moroni 8:18); he cares for all parts of his vineyard equally (Jacob 5:28). We may not be able to understand from our finite perspective in what way the seeming inequities of this world can be reconciled with God’s statement that he “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). But our omniscient God has assured us that “all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33). This impartiality of God is illustrated in the allegory when the Lord of the vineyard declares that he has not slackened his hand, but has “nourished” the world, “digged about it, and pruned it . . . almost all the day long” (Jacob 5:47). There is no part of the vineyard that his hand has not touched.³⁰ Indeed, no part of the earth and no inhabitants of the earth can ever justifiably make the claim that God has treated them unjustly. If they have not produced good fruit they cannot blame it on the lack of care God gave to their part of the vineyard.

The allegory also makes it clear that the varying qualities of the different parts of the world have no bearing (or, perhaps, an inverse relationship) on whether good gospel fruit is produced. From earthly experience it might seem that given equal care, as was pointed out in the preceding paragraph, fruitfulness might depend on the fecundity of the soil. The allegory mentions specifically that two parts of the vineyard where young and tender olive branches were planted were the worst spots in all the vineyard and that

another was the best spot. And yet when the Lord of the vineyard came to look at the trees, the two planted in the worst spots had produced only good fruit, while the one planted in the best spot had produced both good and bad fruit. In other words, with the equal treatment given by God to all parts of the world, it is not the spot of ground on the earth to which people are attached that makes the difference. All people everywhere on the earth are capable of producing good works and, therefore, of becoming desirable fruit.

The allegory comments on the purification process the earth and the house of Israel will undergo before the Second Coming and explains how the gathering of Israel consists of pruning out the branches bearing bad fruit and grafting the tame olive branches back into the tame trees (note the plural, *trees*, in verses 55–58, 63–66, 74). This process will proceed in these latter days in a set order designed to ensure the survival of the trees until they eventually all bear fruit pleasing to the Lord. First, those peoples who produce the worst, the “most bitter fruit,” will be removed from the tree of the house of Israel, and other natural members of the house of Israel will be brought in. At about the same time the slow process will begin of feeding and caring for, “nourishing,” the members to help them produce good works. While these natural members of the house of Israel begin to produce good works, the pruning out of the worst members will begin, but this process will also move slowly, “according to the strength of the good and the size thereof,” that is, according to the ability of the house of Israel to bear the pruning. This pruning will continue, as mentioned above, until the Millennium, when the process will be complete and there will be no evil anywhere on the earth, because the

“fruit” will be “good” and the “vineyard” will be “no more corrupt” (verse 75).

This grafting and pruning process is evident today in the Restoration. Successful grafting consists of “coming to a knowledge of the true Messiah” (1 Nephi 10:14), Christ, through the word of God. The most obvious mechanism today to graft into the scriptural heritage is through conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed through the process of the Restoration. In 1820, when the Prophet Joseph went into the grove to pray (perhaps it was not coincidence that the Restoration began in a grove of trees), the entire world was devoid of the kind of fruit the Lord desired. When Joseph came out of the woods that spring day, the first convert had been made. From that beginning in nineteenth-century frontier America, peoples and cultures have been exposed to the healing influence of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the renewed scriptural heritage of the house of Israel. The realization of this healing process can be seen in the Restoration. As soon as the people who accept the gospel are able to receive them, God reveals correct principles, doctrines, and eternal ordinances. In this way the scriptural heritage of the house of Israel, the roots, “may take strength” (Jacob 5:59) and bless the peoples and cultures nourished by them. And as the natural branches of the house of Israel in these latter days grow from the nourishment and care of God, he prepares “the way for them that they may grow” even more (Jacob 5:64).

While this grafting of the natural branches of the house of Israel onto the tame trees continues and these grafts take to the gospel of Jesus Christ provided by the scriptural heritage of the house of Israel, the pruning also proceeds. Those people who refuse to accept the restored principles, doctrines, and ordinances of the gospel are creating the con-

ditions that will sooner or later lead to their separation from the house of Israel. Some of these people simply stop producing good works or fail to keep up with the rest of the tree. Other people produce evil works and are cut off sooner.

This process can affect a whole people. For instance, the Lord warned the people of this dispensation that they are under condemnation for taking lightly the scriptural heritage of the Restoration, “the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments” (D&C 84:54–58). This warning was repeated again by President Benson in 1986.³¹ And the process can affect individuals. Consider for instance the prominent early Latter-day Saint who “had been called to preach the gospel but had been known to say that he ‘would rather die than go forth to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.’ “ As a result he “was attacked with the cholera . . . and died.”³² If we fail as a people or as individuals to take strength from our latter-day scriptural roots, particularly the Book of Mormon and the living prophets, we will eventually find ourselves pruned out of the house of Israel and cast “into the fire” (5:58).

The allegory makes it clear that the grafting and pruning process, the gathering of Israel and the trying of the nations of the earth, will continue simultaneously until the Millennium. This means that as the Saints accept and assimilate additional nourishment from their scriptural sources, the Lord will require a higher level of performance. Thus the allegory foresees in the grafting and pruning process a reversal of what President Benson has called the Samuel principle. According to this principle, “within certain bounds [God] grants unto men according to their desires.”³³ The principle received its name from the story in 1 Samuel 8 where the people of Israel demand, contrary to the wishes

of God and his prophet Samuel, that God give them a king. God granted them their desire to their own eventual sorrow.

The reverse of the Samuel principle during the Restoration can be illustrated by the Word of Wisdom. As the Saints assimilated and lived the Word of Wisdom, God saw fit to require a more strict application of it, until today it is often used as a measure of a member's commitment to the kingdom. Other examples of additional nourishment must include the material in sections 137 and 138 of the Doctrine and Covenants. These revelations were just as true when they were received as when they were accepted by the Church as scripture in 1976 and, therefore, as binding on the membership. Perhaps, as the allegory in principle suggests, the members were capable in 1976 of submitting themselves to the additional instruction available in these visions. Both the initial gift of the Word of Wisdom in 1833 and its subsequent development in the Church and the addition of sections 137 and 138 to the canon are modern examples of how our scriptural heritage, our roots, "may take [additional] strength because of their goodness" (Jacob 5:59). In the future, as we are faithful in assimilating the nourishment from the roots, we can look forward to an even greater scriptural heritage, for God "will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (Articles of Faith 9).

As the branches of the house of Israel become able to bear the strong doctrines, principles, and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and as the roots take additional strength, the trees of the house of Israel will continue to be nourished, strengthened, and purified until they have become "like unto one body," and bear nothing but good fruit and the whole earth is "no more corrupt" (Jacob

5:74–75). This process of preparing the house of Israel for the Millennium finds expression in another beautiful and meaning-laden metaphor of the scriptures, the metaphor of the bride and the bridegroom. (For instance, see Matthew 25:1–13.) In the words of Isaiah, “As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee” (Isaiah 62:5).

The allegory leaves no doubt that God attempted everything in his power to prevent the Apostasy. When God came to inspect the world after the Apostasy had taken place and “all creeds [of the Apostasy had become] an abomination in [God’s] sight” (Joseph Smith–History 1:19), God asked the servant in the allegory, “What could I have done more for my vineyard” to have prevented the Apostasy (Jacob 5:41)? The answer to this rhetorical question was that there was nothing he could have done more. He did not slacken his hand in creating the right environment and the necessary conditions for the gospel to flourish and produce fruit (Jacob 5:47). As explained in Jacob 5:28, “The Lord of the vineyard and the servant of the Lord of the vineyard did nourish all the fruit of the vineyard.” But, as Jacob 5:46 explains, “Notwithstanding all the care which we [for example, the Lord and his servant] have taken of my vineyard, the trees thereof have become corrupted, that they bring forth no good fruit.” In short, it was not lack of effort on God’s part that allowed the Apostasy to occur.

What then caused the Apostasy? The Lord of the vineyard himself asked that question at the end of Jacob 5:47, “Who is it that has corrupted my vineyard,” that is, who has caused the Apostasy? In Jacob 5:48 the servant answered his Lord, “Is it not the loftiness of thy vineyard,” pride, that caused the Apostasy? The servant further noted,

in explaining the process of the Apostasy, "Have not the branches overcome the roots thereof, behold they grew faster than the strength of the roots, taking strength unto themselves." The Israelite and Gentile branches on the tame olive trees, through pride and haughtiness, took strength unto themselves. That is, rather than relying on their scriptural heritage for strength and nourishment, they relied on their own strength and abilities, thus nullifying the influence of the scriptural heritage from which they could have received direction and guidance. And by acting on their own in their pride they deemed themselves strong and grew in directions that were not appropriate, ending in apostasy.³⁴

Clearly, the Apostasy was not caused by a set of haphazard physical circumstances that God might have prevented. Prideful self-will brought about the Great Apostasy and brings about any other apostasy. Apostasy is an act of choosing self over direction and nourishment from the appropriate and righteous channels God has instituted. And because it is an act of agency, God does not prevent it.

The cause of the Apostasy as explained in the allegory should serve as a warning to those called to serve in the vineyard in these latter days. We as individuals can bring about our own apostasy through our own prideful self-will, and there is little if anything God can do to prevent it. If we abandon the nourishment of the scriptural heritage of our day—the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, the Bible, and the constant direction of the living prophets—and rely on our own strength, wisdom, and understanding, we also will soon fall victim to an apostasy that will spiritually destroy us. The antidote then and now against apostasy, against prideful self-will, was explained by King Benjamin: "Men drink damnation to

their own souls except they humble themselves and become . . . as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:18–19).

While we should be concerned about our own possible individual apostasy, the next section (Jacob 5:50–73, the gathering of the house of Israel) explains that we need not worry about the Church falling into apostasy in these latter days. When the Lord of the vineyard came to look at the earth near the end of the Apostasy, he found that none of the various trees of the house of Israel, with or without Gentiles grafted in, were bearing good fruit. Jacob 5:31–32 describes this condition of apostasy, "The Lord of the vineyard did taste of the fruit, every sort according to its number. And the Lord of the vineyard said: Behold, this long time have we nourished this tree, and I have laid up unto myself against the season much fruit. But behold, this time it hath brought forth much fruit, and there is none of it which is good. And behold, there are all kinds of bad fruit; and it profiteth me nothing." (What an apt description of the Apostasy.) This was the condition of the world in 1820.

Rather than raze the unprofitable, apostate earth, God decided to try one more time to establish the gospel on the earth to see if the trees of the vineyard would produce good fruit. He began by having the branches from the mother tree "grafted into the natural trees" and branches from the natural trees "grafted into their mother tree" (Jacob 5:55 and 56). He instructed the servant to "dig about them, and prune them, and dung them once more, for the last time" (Jacob 5:64). From the beginning of the gathering of the house of Israel until the Millennium, from the Restoration until the Second Coming, there is an unbroken effort by the



“Dig about them, and prune them, and dung them once more, for the last time” (Jacob 5:64).

main servant and “other servants” (Jacob 5:70) to “labor in the vineyard” with all their might for “the last time” (Jacob 5:71). The servant and his co-workers “did obey the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard in all things” (Jacob 5:72).

The leaders of the Restoration, from the Prophet Joseph Smith through contemporary General Authorities, have been called to work in the world now for the last time (see D&C 24:19; 39:17; 43:28; and 95:4). And they shall continue to work, carrying out “the commandments of the Lord . . . in all things” (Jacob 5:72). They will not labor after the precepts of the world, but will follow the instructions of the Lord tenaciously. And they will continue laboring “with all diligence, according to the commandments of the Lord” (Jacob 5:74) until they have succeeded in “casting” out of the world all of the bad elements (Jacob 5:74) and the world

is “no more corrupt” (Jacob 5:75). The work of the Restoration, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the kingdom of God on earth, will continue to grow and spread until it has left no room on the earth for evil. Indeed, Daniel the prophet “foresaw and foretold the establishment of the kingdom of God in the latter days, never again to be destroyed nor given to other people” (D&C 138:44). We need have no fear in this dispensation that the Church, the kingdom of God, might be lost again to apostasy. Individuals may apostatize, perhaps even some of the leaders, but as the allegory makes clear, the vineyard will grow, becoming more pure, until good fruit fills the earth.

I cannot complete this discussion of the allegory of the olive tree without returning to the beginning, the reason Jacob gave the allegory: How can we be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ? If I were writing in good Hebrew style I would expect the reader at this point to know, from the allegory itself and the above discussion, how reconciliation takes place. But I am not, and I would be untrue to my own heritage if I did not to the best of my ability clearly explain how we can be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. As the allegory suggests, the process is deceptively simple³⁵ and easy: Remain attached long enough to our roots, the scriptural heritage revealed by the God of Israel, that the healing influence of divine direction, of a “knowledge of the true Messiah,” our Lord and Redeemer (1 Nephi 10:14), can change us from a twig bearing bitter fruit to a natural twig bearing good fruit. It does not matter whether our scriptural heritage is planted in a good spot on the earth or a bad one, we can bear fruit under the loving and wise care of the Lord of the vineyard. As Limhi, a man who himself had groped for reconciliation and found it, said, “If [we] will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put

[our] trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind, if [we] do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure" (Mosiah 7:33), succor us, nourish us, and save us from destruction. Only our pride or self-will can prevent us from producing good fruit, thereby precipitating our own pruning from the tree. In language more related to the allegory than a first glance might suggest, Jacob stated the formula both simply and eloquently: "How merciful is our God unto us, for he remembereth the house of Israel, both roots and branches; and he stretches forth his hands unto them all the day long; and they are a stiffnecked and a gainsaying people; but as many as will not harden their hearts shall be saved in the kingdom of God. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you" (Jacob 6:4–5).

Notes

1. Though Jacob delivered the allegory in Jacob 5, the allegory was originally given by Zenos, who apparently was a prophet of Old Testament times whose writings were recorded on the brass plates. Presently no Old World source mentions him. Zenos is of course mentioned elsewhere in the Book of Mormon: 1 Nephi 19:10, 12, 16; Alma 33:3, 13, 15; 34:7; Helaman 8:19; 15:11; and 3 Nephi 10:16. Though Jacob is the first author in the Book of Mormon to connect this allegory to Zenos, Jacob was most likely not the first Book of Mormon prophet to mention the content of this allegory. Nephi said that his father Lehi spoke about an olive tree that represented the house of Israel, and that from that tree "branches would be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth" (1 Nephi 10:12).

2. Previous studies include Kent P. Jackson, "Nourished by the Good Word of God (Jacob 4–6)," in Kent P. Jackson, ed., *1 Nephi to Alma 29*, vol. 7 of *Studies in Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 190–94; Monte Nyman, *An Ensign to All People* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 24–34, and the summary table on page 36. See also Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft,

1988), 46–82; Ariel Crowley, *About the Book of Mormon* (Idaho City, ID: n.p., 1961), 150–52; and *Book of Mormon Student Manual: Religion 121 and 122* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 47–48. Richard K. Wilson of Provo, Utah, has prepared an unpublished, 82-page, wide-ranging discussion of the allegory.

3. Here I must issue a note of caution. While I believe that this allegory refers to specific historical periods, places, processes, events, and even individuals, no allegory can be delineated to its smallest details without entering the realm of speculation at best and of absurdity at worst. Therefore, I offer my explanation here in the hopes that it will be helpful to some students and harmful to none.

4. For a convenient summary see Nyman, *An Ensign to All People*, 35, table 1. His reasons for the identifications can be found on pp. 22–24. See also the summary in Jackson, “Nourished by the Good Word of God,” 190; and *Book of Mormon Student Manual*, 47–48.

5. See in particular verses 11, 36, 53, and 59, although the possibility of the root perishing is mentioned in 5:8, and the Lord comes and goes.

6. See footnote 2 for the literature.

7. As Joseph Fielding Smith stated it, “In all of the scriptures, where God is mentioned and where he has appeared, it was [Christ]. . . . The Father has never dealt with man directly and personally since the fall, and he has never appeared except to introduce and bear record of the Son” (*Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, Bruce R. McConkie, compiler [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954], 1:27).

8. See for example John 8:28, “I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me.” Cf. John 5:19 and 28.

9. Note that Crowley, *About the Book of Mormon*, 121, uses the generic “God,” and Jackson, “Nourished by the Good Word of God,” 190, uses “Lord” for the Lord of the vineyard, both thus avoiding the issue.

10. Chauncey C. Riddle of the Brigham Young University Philosophy Department suggested this idea to me privately on September 13, 1989. Since then, I have come to accept this view, partially for the reasons stated above. Several other commentaries equate the roots with progenitors. No doubt this interpretation comes from the belief that if the word *root* means progenitors in Malachi 4:1, then it must mean that in all scriptural contexts. Still others have suggested that the roots represent the covenants associated with the house of Israel; see for instance *The Book of Mormon Student Manual*. This interpretation seems to me to be too narrow.

11. Bruce Wilson of Provo, Utah, expressed this idea (based at least in part on R. Wilson, 30) to me in a private conversation on August 3, 1989.

12. The discussion that follows in this third section is a slightly modified version of my paper "Explicating the Mystery of the Rejected Foundation Stone: The Allegory of the Olive Tree," *BYU Studies* 30 (1991): 77–87.

13. There are two aspects to this single question: When did Zenos compose the original allegory, and what events are covered in this allegorized history of the house of Israel? The answer to the second question, irrespective of the answer to the first question, is necessary if the allegory is to be more than an academic exercise for the modern reader. Therefore, I will only discuss the second question. Treatments of the first question are scattered elsewhere in this volume.

14. For the house of Israel beginning with Abraham and continuing with Isaac and Jacob, see Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 503: "Israelite history begins not with father Jacob, who is Israel, nor with his tribal descendants who adopted his name as theirs, but with Abraham, their father. In the true and spiritual sense of the terms, Abraham was the first Hebrew, the first Israelite, and the first Jew." Reviewers to whom I have given this paper have suggested variously that the planting of the house of Israel at the beginning of the allegory might be understood to occur with Adam or Noah or Moses. It seems to me that the allegory discusses only the house of Israel and that therefore the allegory begins with the founding of the house of Israel. Independent of and previous to my first reading of the above quote from Bruce R. McConkie, based on internal evidence in the allegory itself, I arrived at the conclusion that the founding of the house of Israel can denote only the patriarchs.

15. Though the "Bible Dictionary" of the Latter-day Saint edition of the Holy Bible (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), 636, places the patriarchs in the center of the Middle Bronze Age, this date is not unanimous among scholars. Cyrus Gordon, for instance, dated many of the events of the Patriarchal Narratives to the Late Bronze Age ("Abraham and the Merchants of Ura," *Journal of Near East Studies* 17 [1958]: 31). However, I accept the likelihood that the pharaoh of the Exodus was Ramses II, who reigned in the middle of the thirteenth century B.C. This would place the Exodus at the very beginning of the Late Bronze Age (allowing, with Genesis 15:13 and Exodus 12:40, 400 to 430 years

for the sojourn in Egypt) and would push the patriarchs back into the Middle Bronze Age. See also Nyman, *An Ensign for All People*, 24, for the beginning of the allegory at "about 1800 B.C., when the twelve sons of Jacob were living in Canaan." Others put the planting of the main olive tree in other centuries of early Israelite history.

16. For this same conclusion see Jackson, "Nourished by the Good Word of God," 193–94. The destruction of the earth by fire after the Millennium is mentioned at least once in the standard works, "For the great Millennium, of which I have spoken by the mouth of my servants, shall come. For Satan shall be bound, and when he is loosed again he shall only reign for a little season, and then cometh the end of the earth. And he that liveth in righteousness shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and the earth shall pass away so as by fire. And the wicked shall go away into unquenchable fire, and their end no man knoweth on earth, nor ever shall know, until they come before me in judgment" (D&C 43:30–33). It is probably also the referent in Matthew 3:13. See also the theological underpinnings of the destruction of the earth by fire in Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd. ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 210 (see also p. 251), and the references there to *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:72–89; and Parley P. Pratt, *Voice of Warning* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1957), chapter 5.

If the destruction of the earth by fire, mentioned in verse 77, refers to the destruction by fire before the Millennium (see for example McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 692, 735), then one could argue that the end of the allegory coincides with the beginning of the Millennium. That this is not likely becomes evident from an internal examination of the allegory. As I demonstrate below, verses 75 and 76 refer to the Millennium. Therefore, verse 77 must refer to the period after the Millennium.

17. Nyman also divides the allegory into seven periods, but we agree on only three of the divisions. He separates the allegory into the following time periods: (1) verses 3–14: "From Jacob to the end of the prophets," about 1800–400 B.C.; (2) verse 15: "A long time passed away"; (3) verses 16–28: "The ministry of Jesus Christ," about A.D. 30–34; (4) verse 29: "A long time passed away"; (5) verses 30–75: "The Restoration, about A.D. 1820 to the Millennium"; (6) verse 76: "A long time passed away"; (7) verse 77: "The end of the earth."

18. The figure four hundred to six hundred years may be derived from the difference between the time the olive tree was first cultivated sometime in the Middle Bronze Age and the beginning of the next period in the allegory, the onset of the Iron Age about 1200 B.C.

That four hundred to six hundred years is plausible seems likely from personal observation of olive trees in present-day Palestine. Like contemporary olive trees, it is likely that ancient olive trees, with proper care, not only could live for hundreds of years (not the decades of most domestically cultivated trees), but could also produce valuable crops for the life of the tree. (For the technical aspects of olive tree culture, see the other appropriate articles in this book. In addition see Arthur Wallace, "The Allegory of the Tame and Wild Olive Trees Horticulturally Considered," in Paul R. Cheesman and C. Wilfred Griggs, eds., *Scriptures for the Modern World*, Religious Studies Monograph Series 11 [Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1984], 113–20.) Therefore, if the olive tree had "waxed old," it would not be measured by the decades of contemporary domestic trees, but by centuries.

19. There are far too many examples of the apostasy of Israel in this time period for me to list them here. In addition to the two I discuss in the text, consider the following instances. Moses knew at the time of his calling that apostate Israel would attempt to reject him as Jehovah's prophet (Exodus 3:13–14). Joshua's famous ultimatum, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15), would have been necessary only if the Israelites were vacillating, i.e., flirting with apostasy. Ezekiel in chapter 16 spoke retrospectively in wonderfully earthy terms of the reality of Israel's apostasy. For a wonderful explanation of Ezekiel 16 and how it relates to apostasy in Israel, see Joseph E. Coleson, "Israel's Life Cycle from Birth to Resurrection," in Avraham Gileadi, ed., *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1987), 237–50. And, finally, from the late period see Malachi 3:7, "Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them."

20. 1 Kings 12:25–33 and 15:30, among others. To see how Jeroboam influenced subsequent Israelite history, see 2 Kings 10:29–31.

21. Josiah's reforms at about 620 B.C. certainly must have been a breath of fresh air after the abominations of Manasseh (2 Kings 22–24; see also 2 Chronicles 33), but it was too little, too late.

22. As part of their foreign policy the Assyrians deported rebellious subjects to other areas within their empire that had previously been partially depopulated because those inhabitants had been rebellious (see 2 Kings 17). This replacing of rebellious subjects by other unrelated rebellious subjects supposedly would discourage other insurrections and make further revolt difficult. The Babylonians on

the other hand did not shift rebellious subjects around but rather sent all deported peoples to a central location, the land of Babylon, thus leaving a vacuum in the respective homelands, allowing deportees eventually to return when the Babylonian Empire collapsed. For this and other reasons the Northern Kingdom deportees could not return to their homeland, but the Jews of the Southern Kingdom could return from the Babylonian captivity.

23. For example, the Babylonian calendar is still used today by Jewish people.

24. We can gain some idea of how long a "long time" was by looking at verse 76, where it is said that during the penultimate period of the allegory the Lord of the vineyard would gather good fruit "for a long time." I will argue below that this period is the Millennium. Accepting this interpretation would indicate that "a long time" is to be measured in centuries and not in decades.

25. Some exegetes of this allegory have found only three transplanted branches, taking for their reason verse 39, where the first, second, and the last natural branches are mentioned. This explanation disregards the four branches clearly set off with "behold these" in verse 20, "look hither" in verse 23, "look hither" in verse 24, and "look hither" in verse 25, and ignores the possibility of an extended polar merism in verse 39. The distinct parallelism between 20, 23, 24 and 25 cannot be overlooked because these last three verses are the only verses in the standard works that contain the phrase "look hither." To do away with the parallel in verse 24 and combine it with verse 25 would do violence to the poetic structure of the passage. It is possible as some have suggested that there are four in verses 20 through 25, but only three in verse 39 because two of the transplants, the Lehitites and the Mulekites, were combined by this time. However, whether there are three or four transplanted trees is not relevant to this discussion. Certainly, the question of how many transplants is bound together with the question of whom the transplants represent.

26. *Living Truths from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1970), 122–23.

27. There is a slight discrepancy in the time here, if the allegory is seen as strictly consistent and chronologically exacting. (R. Wilson, 38–39, also noted this apparent inconsistency.) The period in the Old World when the mother tree (with Gentiles grafted in) bore nothing but good fruit must be placed between A.D. 35 and 100. Yet during this period the majority of the Jews rejected Jesus Christ and his message. This same time period in the New World saw *all* the people "converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land" (4 Nephi 1:2).

This discrepancy exists only because, with the advantage of hindsight, we want to impose on the Near Eastern allegory our occidental training that insists on logical, consistent, and chronological interpretations. The telescoping of time and the less-than-sharp depth of field of received versions of prophetic foresight should certainly allow us to view these episodes as accurate, general characterizations of the historical periods discussed. Thus we see in Book of Mormon history from roughly 600 B.C. to A.D. 400 the division of this transplanted branch of the house of Israel into the righteous and the apostate cultures. (For this same interpretation see Jackson, "Nourished by the Good Word of God," 192.) The only exception to this is a short interlude when the Nephites and Lamanites became one people between approximately A.D. 36 and about A.D. 190 (4 Nephi 19–21), about 155 years, not the traditional two hundred years often cited by Latter-day Saints. The New Testament, on the other hand, if we ignore the Jews and Gentiles who rejected Christ and his messengers, presents a fairly unified and righteous community of Israelites and Gentiles, notwithstanding cultural rifts and the early signs of apostasy that gave rise to Paul's polemics.

28. If the allegory is to be taken literally in all respects, it would not be the first time God had threatened to destroy all the inhabitants of the earth (Genesis 6:7) or all of his chosen people (Exodus 32:9–11).

29. The servant's offer of advice here should not be taken as inappropriate. Servants are supposed to offer advice. Yet it would be inappropriate to assume from this section of the allegory that God can be moved out of his purposes by typical Near Eastern market haggling. (This would apply also to Abraham haggling with God over Sodom and Gomorrah.) God allows his servants room within his purposes to think they are haggling, but his designs are already set and their supposed haggling has already been calculated into the design.

30. For a different way of expressing this care God has given to the world, see Alma 29:8.

31. *Ensign* 16 (May 1986): 78.

32. Joseph Smith, Jr., *The History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, B. H. Roberts, ed., 2d rev. ed., 7 vols (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 2:118.

33. Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 84.

34. Spencer W. Kimball expressed this same idea: "The apostasy came not through persecution, but by relinquishment of faith caused by the superimposing of a man-made structure upon and over the

divine program," as quoted in Edward L. Kimball, ed., *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 425.

35. The process is so simple and so easy that many refuse to let its influence heal them. See 1 Nephi 17:41–42.