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A New Testament Parallel to Lehi's Tree of Life Vision

Author(s): John A. Tvedtnes

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Chapter 14

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And it came to pass that while my father tarried in the wilderness he spake unto us, saying: Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision. And behold, because of the thing which I have seen, I have reason to rejoice in the Lord. (1 Nephi 8:2-3)

During his sojourn in the wilderness, the prophet Lehi reported a dream or vision in which he had seen the tree of life. A strait and narrow path led to the tree, alongside which was a rod of iron (1 Nephi 8:19-20). Many people pressed forward to obtain the path (1 Nephi 8:21), but not all were successful.

A river separated the tree of life from a large a spacious building (1 Nephi 8:26). Multitudes of people felt their way toward the building, where they were attired in fine clothing. Though a great number of them entered the building, many were drowned in the river or wandered away (1 Nephi 8:31-33).

Others managed to find the path leading to the tree but became lost when a mist of darkness arose and they wandered away (1 Nephi 8:22-23). Still others managed to stay on the path by catching hold of the rod. Arriving at the tree, they were able to partake of its fruit. But some of them became ashamed when people in the large building began mocking them, and they wandered off (1 Nephi 8:24-28). Many, however, were fortunate enough to remain on the path and to find happiness in the fruit of the tree (1 Nephi 8:30).

After hearing his father's account, Nephi sought to

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experience the same vision and to gain a personal testimony of the truths found therein (1 Nephi 10:17; 11:1-3). He learned that the rod of iron represented the word of God, which can bring us to eternal life (1 Nephi 11:25; 15:23-24). The large building symbolized humanity's vain imaginations and pride (1 Nephi 11:36; 12:18), while the deep river which separated it from the tree was hell (1 Nephi 12:16; 15:26-30).

The mists of darkness, Nephi learned, were the temptations of the devil, designed to thwart man's quest to find God (1 Nephi 12:17). But by holding to the rod, he declared, one could not be tempted or blinded by "the fiery darts of the adversary" (1 Nephi 15:24).

From the Book of Mormon account, we learn, then, of four things that can happen to human beings during their earthly sojourn:

1. Unwilling to seek the kingdom of God, some are deceived into thinking that worldly pleasure is the reason for their existence. Some succeed in attaining the riches represented by the large building, while others lose their way and some fall into the gulf.
2. Some start on the path to eternal life but fall prey to temptation and lose their way.
3. Others follow the path and partake of God's blessings, but become ashamed during times of persecution and fall away.
4. The truly valiant, who "hold fast" to the word of the Lord (1 Nephi 15:24), are able to withstand temptation and deceit and are blessed to attain the celestial kingdom.

The same message is found in the parable of the sower, recorded in the New Testament (Matthew 13:3-8; Mark 4:3-8; Luke 8:5-8). (Jesus' explanation of the parable is found in Matthew 13:18-23; Mark 4:14-20; Luke 8:11-15.) Some of the seed fell by the wayside and was eaten by birds. Jesus explained that this represented those who did not understand God's word and who were taken away by the devil. They are the ones Lehi saw go

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into the large building.

The seed that fell among thorns began to grow but was choked by the thorns. Jesus told his disciples that these were people deceived by riches, pleasures and lusts. To Lehi, they are the ones whose way was lost when the mist of darkness arose.

The seed that fell on stony ground began to sprout, but had no root whereby it could store up nourishment and water, so it withered in the sun. Jesus noted that such people had received the word of God with joy, but that they were offended and fell during time of persecution. They are clearly the ones seen by Lehi to partake of the fruit of the tree, then wander away when the mockery of the world shamed them.

Finally, we have the seed that fell into good ground and that produced well. These, Jesus said, were those who kept the word. In Lehi's vision, they held fast to the iron rod, the word of God, and were rewarded accordingly.

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The same message was given in two different forms to different people living in different time periods. But whether delivered in parable form, in symbolic vision, or in straightforward discourse by modern prophets, its meaning is clear: We must hold to the word of God, resisting all temptation and enduring whatever persecution may come our way.