



Lehi's Dream

HOLDING FAST TO THE ROD

The overarching theme of the Book of Mormon—inviting all to come unto Christ—is paramount in Lehi's vision.



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I love the Book of Mormon. Some of my earliest gospel memories are of my mother reading to me from *Book of Mormon Stories for Young Latter-day Saints*, by Emma Marr Petersen. In those childhood experiences and during a lifetime of ongoing personal study and prayer, the Holy Ghost repeatedly has borne witness to my soul that the Book of Mormon is the word of God.

I testify that the Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ. I know the Prophet Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon with and by the power of God. And I witness that the Book of Mormon is “the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man [will] get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”¹

Key Symbols in Lehi’s Dream

The importance of reading, studying, searching, and pondering the scriptures in general and the Book of Mormon in particular is highlighted in several elements of Lehi’s vision of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8).

The central feature in Lehi’s dream is the tree of life—a representation of “the love of God” (see 1 Nephi 11:21–22). “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Thus, the birth, life, and atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ are the greatest manifestations of God’s love for His children. As Nephi testified, this love is “most desirable above all things” and, as the angel in his vision declared, “most



A PROPHET TESTIFIES

"I testify to you that the Book of Mormon is truly the Word of God, that communication between earth and heaven has been opened up again, and that the true way of the Lord has been revealed to men on earth, showing the means by which all needful knowledge and blessings may be received by every true believer in Christ."

President David O. McKay (1873–1970), "Marks Pointing to Authenticity of Book of Mormon," *Instructor*, Oct. 1952, 318.

joyous to the soul" (1 Nephi 11:22–23; see also 1 Nephi 8:12, 15). Chapter 11 of 1 Nephi presents a detailed description of the tree of life as a symbol for the life, ministry, and sacrifice of the Savior—"the condescension of God" (1 Nephi 11:16).

The fruit on the tree is a symbol for the blessings of the Atonement. Partaking of the fruit of the tree represents the receiving of ordinances and covenants whereby the Atonement can become fully efficacious in our lives. The fruit is described as "desirable to make one happy" (1 Nephi 8:10) and produces great joy and the desire to share that joy with others.

Significantly, the overarching theme of the Book of Mormon—inviting all to come unto Christ—is paramount in Lehi's vision. Of particular interest is the rod of iron that led to the tree (see 1 Nephi 8:19). The rod of iron is the word of God.

Clinging versus Continually Holding Fast to the Rod

Father Lehi saw four groups of people in his dream. Three of the groups were pressing forward along the strait and narrow path seeking to obtain the tree and its fruit. A fourth group did not seek after the tree, desiring instead the great and spacious building as their ultimate destination (see 1 Nephi 8:31–33).

In 1 Nephi 8:21–23 we learn about the first group of people who pressed forward and commenced in the path that led to the tree of life. However, as the people encountered the mist of darkness, which represents "the temptations of the devil" (1 Nephi 12:17), they lost their way, wandered off, and were lost.

Notice that no mention is made in these verses of the rod of iron. Those who ignore or treat lightly the word of God do not have access to that divine compass which points the way to the Savior. Consider that this group obtained the

HEEDING THEM NOT

Throughout my life, I have gained spiritual strength from the phrase "we heeded them not" (1 Nephi 8:33). In 1 Nephi some who are making their way to the tree of life don't heed the mocking voices. Fingers of scorn are pointed at them, but they don't falter. They don't listen. Likewise, we hear many loud, tempting voices today. Sometimes it can be a real struggle not to heed those voices, but Lehi shows that it is possible.

I have found that I can mute out worldly voices as I attend the temple, read my scriptures, go to church, and follow the prophet. As I do these simple things, I'm able to hear the voice of the Holy Ghost. That's the voice worth listening to. And as I heed the Spirit's voice, I gain more strength to withstand temptation.

When we follow Lehi's example and "heed . . . them not," we can stay on the strait and narrow path and continually partake of the love of God.

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path and pressed forward, exhibiting a measure of faith in Christ and spiritual conviction, but they were diverted by the temptations of the devil and were lost.

In 1 Nephi 8:24–28 we read about a second group of people who obtained the strait and narrow path that led to the tree of life. This group “did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree” (verse 24). However, as the finely dressed occupants of the great and spacious building mocked this second group of people, “they were ashamed” and “fell away into forbidden paths and were lost” (verse 28). Please notice that this group is described as “*clinging to the rod of iron*” (1 Nephi 8:24; emphasis added).

It is significant that the second group pressed forward with faith and commitment. They also had the added blessing of the rod of iron, and they were clinging to it! However, as they were

confronted with persecution and adversity, they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost. Even with faith, commitment, and the word of God, this group eventually was lost—perhaps because they only *periodically* read *or* studied *or* searched the scriptures. Clinging to the rod of iron suggests to me only occasional “bursts” of study or irregular dipping rather than consistent, ongoing immersion in the word of God.

In verse 30 we read about a third group of people who pressed forward “continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree.” The key phrase in this verse is *continually holding fast* to the rod of iron.

The third group also pressed forward with faith and conviction; however, there is no indication that they wandered off, fell into forbidden paths, or were lost. Perhaps this third group of people *consistently* read *and* studied *and* searched the scriptures. Perhaps it was diligence and devotion to a seemingly “small and simple

Even with faith, commitment, and the word of God, the second group pressing forward along the strait and narrow path, clinging to the rod of iron, eventually was lost—perhaps because they only periodically read or studied or searched the scriptures.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW REIER

Holding fast to the iron rod entails, in large measure, the prayerful, consistent, and earnest use of the holy scriptures as a reliable guide for the journey to the tree of life—even to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[thing]” (Alma 37:6) that saved the third group from perishing. Perhaps it was “the knowledge of the Lord” and “the knowledge of the truth” (Alma 23:5, 6) obtained through faithful study of the scriptures that yielded the spiritual gift of humility—such that this group of people “*fell down* and partook of the fruit of the tree” (1 Nephi 8:30; emphasis added). Perhaps it was the spiritual nourishment and strength provided by continually “feasting upon the word of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20) that enabled this group to heed not the scolding and mocking of the people in the great and spacious building (see 1 Nephi 8:33). This is the group you and I should strive to join.

Nephi’s brothers asked, “What meaneth the rod of iron which our father saw, that led to the tree?

“And [Nephi] said unto them that it was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would *hold fast unto it*, they would never perish; neither could the

temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction” (1 Nephi 15:23–24; emphasis added).

What, then, is the difference between clinging and holding fast to the rod of iron? Let me suggest that holding fast to the iron rod entails, in large measure, the prayerful, consistent, and earnest use of the holy scriptures as a sure source of revealed truth and as a reliable guide for the journey along the strait and narrow path to the tree of life—even to the Lord Jesus Christ.

“And it came to pass that I beheld that the rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life” (1 Nephi 11:25).

The Book of Mormon Is for Us Today

The Book of Mormon sets forth truths that are relevant and essential in our day and for our circumstances. The spiritual and practical

relevance of the Book of Mormon in our lives is highlighted by Moroni: “Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35). Having seen our day and circumstances through the foreknowledge of God, the principal authors of the Book of Mormon specifically included the topics and examples of greatest importance to the inhabitants of the earth in the latter days.

I invite you to consider carefully and prayerfully the following question: **What lessons can and should I learn from Lehi’s vision of the tree of life and from the principle of *continually holding fast* to the rod of iron that will enable me to stand spiritually strong in the world in which we live today?**

As you work diligently and seek inspiration to answer this important question, you will come to understand more fully by the power of the Holy Ghost, both in your heart and in your mind, the importance of *continually holding fast* to the rod of iron. And you will be blessed to apply those lessons with faith and diligence in your individual life and in your home.

May we all have eyes to see and ears to hear additional lessons from Lehi’s vision that will help us to “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20). ■

NOTE

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 64.

DON’T LEAVE THIS PATH!

My sister introduced me to the Church, and I liked it so much that I was soon baptized. Even though I didn’t know how to read, I would open the Book of Mormon and flip through it. I had a great desire to read the words on its pages. My husband, who wasn’t baptized until later, was intrigued to see me sitting there just looking at the book, and he said I was wasting my time.

With great difficulty and with the help of my Relief Society sisters and my children, I began trying to read. It was always my objective to read the Book of Mormon.

During an especially hard moment, when I was having negative feelings, I clearly heard these words: “Don’t leave this path!” I looked to see if there was someone there, but there was no one.

One day I told my daughter that I was beginning to be able to read on my own. She didn’t believe me and asked me to show her. When I did, she was extremely happy.

My goal is to read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover. My reading is slow, but I am able to understand, and more important, I am able to feel the Spirit through this wonderful book.

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