

JANUARY 20-26, 2020

1 Nephi 11–15

“Armed with Righteousness and with the Power of God”

Summary: *Nephi sees the Spirit of the Lord and is shown in vision the tree of life—He sees the mother of the Son of God and learns of the condescension of God—He sees the baptism, ministry, and crucifixion of the Lamb of God—He sees also the call and ministry of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb. About 600–592 B.C.*

Nephi sees in vision the land of promise; the righteousness, iniquity, and downfall of its inhabitants; the coming of the Lamb of God among them; how the Twelve Disciples and the Twelve Apostles will judge Israel; and the loathsome and filthy state of those who dwindle in unbelief. About 600–592 B.C.

Nephi sees in vision the church of the devil set up among the Gentiles, the discovery and colonizing of America, the loss of many plain and precious parts of the Bible, the resultant state of gentile apostasy, the restoration of the gospel, the coming forth of latter-day scripture, and the building up of Zion. About 600–592 B.C.

An angel tells Nephi of the blessings and cursings to fall upon the Gentiles—There are only two churches: the Church of the Lamb of God and the church of the devil—The Saints of God in all nations are persecuted by the great and abominable church—The Apostle John will write concerning the end of the world. About 600–592 B.C.

Lehi’s seed are to receive the gospel from the Gentiles in the latter days—The gathering of Israel is likened unto an olive tree whose natural branches will be grafted in again—Nephi interprets the vision of the tree of life and speaks of the justice of God in dividing the wicked from the righteous. About 600–592 B.C.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

How do Biblical and Book of Mormon times coincide?

The general time line of the emerging cultures in the Book of Mormon Lands can be compared to

Biblical and Book of Mormon personalities. It is helpful to remember that Jewish commentary about visions of the future acknowledge that only a Prophet is able to understand divine things and thereby prophesy.

B.C. 2500 2000 1000 800 600 400 200 0 200 400 600 800 1000 1200 1400 1600 1800 2000 A.D.

Abraham Lehi Mosiah	Jesus Moroni	Columbus Joseph Smith
Olmec 2500 B.C. -----300 B.C. Mayan Pre Classic 2000 B.C.----- Zapotecs 700 B.C.-500 B.C. Mayan Classic 300 B.C.-----	----- 300 A.D. ----- 900 A.D. Mayan Post Classic 900 A.D.-----	----- 1500 A.D. Aztec 1300----- 1511 A.D.

How is the Tree of Life thought of in Jewish life?

“The Hebrew term *etz chaim* (literally “tree of life”) is a common one in Jewish life, often used to refer to the Torah. It is a popular name for synagogues and Jewish schools as well as the title of one of the major works of Jewish mysticism. The first reference to the tree of life in Jewish texts comes from the biblical story of the Garden of Eden (**Genesis 2:9**) relates that God filled the garden with beautiful and tasty trees, and in the middle planted two in particular — the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the latter of which he forbade Adam and Eve to eat. (myjewishlearning.com/article/what-is-the-tree-of-life-etz-chaim)

How does the Torah become referred to as the Tree of Life?

“The tree of life as a metaphor for the Torah comes from the Book of Proverbs, which uses the term three times, the most famous of which is the saying in (**Proverbs 3:18**): *Etz chaim hee l'machazikim bah* (“She is a tree of life to those who grasp her”). This line, referring to the Torah, is commonly sung in Ashkenazi congregations as the Torah is returned to the ark after public readings. Proverbs also likens the “fruit of the righteous” (11:30) and a “healing tongue” (15:4) to a tree of life. And the term is the title of a major work of Jewish mysticism by Rabbi Hayim Vital. In the Jewish mystical tradition, the tree of life refers to the well-known diagram illustrating the ten divine emanations. In modern times, the term continues to be used widely. Many synagogues and Jewish educational institutions are named Etz Chaim. It is also a title of the 2001 Torah translation and commentary published by the Conservative movement.” (myjewishlearning.com/article/what-is-the-tree-of-life-etz-chaim)

How are dreams considered?

“The Zohar (see Kabbalah) argues that the dreams of the wicked derive from the forces of impurity, while the dreams of the righteous contain visions, images and prophecies of a higher order. Maimonides rejected supernatural forces, believing that one's daytime thoughts are translated by the imagination into dreams . . . only a prophet, who rids himself of conscious base thoughts and desires is able to perceive divine things.” “The early prophets played a prominent role in communal affairs and were consulted for advice and often influenced the political destiny of Israel; the prophet Samuel chose both Saul and David to be kings of Israel. Visions play an important role in the classical prophetic writings, but prophets did not merely predict the future. They often performed symbolic acts and used signs and wonders to authenticate their prediction of impending events. At times they had to bear the consequences of their own dire predictions --- Jeremiah was put into stocks for his unpopular prophecies.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

How are visions interpreted?

For many Moslems, Mohammed is called a Prophet although he apparently never claimed to be one. His writings did not particularly predict the future because he still held the Bible to be as accurate as he interpreted it. “From about 610 C.E. (A.D.) Muhammad claimed to have visions and to have been commanded, as messenger of God (Allah) to recite certain verses which came to his mind. In order to win over the Arabs to his new religion Muhammad realized that his appeal would have to be national and not aligned to either the Christianity of Byzantium or the Judaism of Babylonia. The holy book of Islam, the Koran, soon attracted a small community of devotees, and its message at this time concentrated on God's

goodness and power, the return to God and final judgment, the necessity for man to be humble and grateful to God and to worship Him, and the obligation of generosity and respect for the rights of the poor and defenseless.”

(**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

What do prophecies of an “America” reveal?

The prophecies of the “Colonization of America” in the Book of Mormon echo the blessings and prophecies given to Joseph, son of Jacob (Israel). The fascinating geographic connection in his blessing is the term, “everlasting hills.” Mountainous Israel is the “Crossroads of the East.” On the other hand, Utah (“Tops of the Mountains” in Navaho) is the “Crossroads of the West.” There are only two land masses on this planet that have a perpetual, unending range of mountains or “everlasting hills,” Israel and USA. The connection to God’s everlasting ways is also noted. “In the blessing given by Jacob to his son Joseph the inheritance of America is foreshadowed and predicted in the following words: ‘Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: . . . The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.’ (Genesis 49:26)” (**Joseph Fielding Smith, Doctrines of Salvation Vol.3, Pg.68**) The term “everlasting Hills” is also translated at “Perpetual Hills.” “He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.”

(**Habakkuk 3:6**)

How is immersion understood in the Bible?

The latter-day restoration included authority and clarification of ordinances such as baptism. Although the word “baptism” is not found in the Old Testament, observance of the Jewish ritual of immersion may give us a clue of what the ancient rituals were like. The Book of Mormon clearly explains these immersions and the picture that is created to a Jewish reader can be recognizable as being similar to Biblical practices. Some religious Jews who experience repeated immersions in a *Mikveh*, (monthly for women and regularly for men) step into their immersion font from the east side, immerse themselves, and then exit to the west side. This could be a reminder of entering into the gateway of cleanness as the Children of Israel entered into their Promised Land. For the religious Jews, immersions are favored below ground level in flowing water that emanates from bedrock - the “Rock of Salvation.” The Jewish description of immersion have certain rules to follow. “Mikveh (Hebrew: - ‘a collection [of water]’) a special pool of water constructed according to rigid legal specifications, immersion in which renders ritually clean a person who has become ritually unclean.” “1) A mikveh must not be filled with water that has been drawn (i.e., has been in a vessel or a receptacle), but with water from a naturally flowing source; spring water or rainwater are the ideal sources, but melted snow and ice are also permitted. 2) The water must be able to flow into the mikveh freely and unimpeded (any blockage renders the water ‘drawn water’) and must reach the mikveh in vessels that are not susceptible to ritual uncleanness. 3) The minimum size of the mikveh is of a vessel which has a volume

of '40 seah,' variously estimated at between 250 and 1,000 liters (quarts). 4) The mikveh must be watertight and must be constructed of natural materials on the spot, for otherwise it is deemed itself to be a 'vessel' and renders the water in it 'drawn water'." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

How were sacrifices connected to immersions?

When animals were sacrificed, the cleaned carcass had to be immersed. Likewise, in modern times, to make meat "kosher," it must be "immersed" in salt water. As stated in (**Numbers 19:1-9**), there was a Red Heifer ritual for forgiveness of sins. This can be seen as a symbol of the "red" atonement of the Lord on the Mount of Olives. Jews have a tradition that this red calf offering had to be high on the Mount of Olives, above the Temple itself and opposite the Gate Beautiful. Those who have had the experience of sitting on the upper part of the Mount of Olives opposite of the present-day Gate Beautiful can attest to the spirit of Gethsemane (well away from the traditional Church of Gethsemane on the lower part of the mount).

How do water and sins do have a connection and a place in Jewish traditions?

"On the afternoon of the first day (of Rosh Hashana), it is customary to walk to the nearest body of running water and there symbolically 'cast' one's sins into the water. The ceremony may be based on a verse in the biblical book of Micah: 'And Thou (referring to God) shall cast all their sins into the depths of the seas' (**Micah 7:19**). This practice, to which there is no reference in the Talmud, is generally called *Tashlikh*, probably after the Hebrew word meaning 'cast' (va-tashlikh) in the verse from Micah." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

Who is a Gentile?

In spite of the many similarities that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint and Jews have in their religious societies, it is inevitably essential for Latter-day Saints and Jews to have some dialogue on the definition of "Jew" and "Gentile." Are Jews "Gentile" to the members of the Church? Are members of the Church "Gentile" to the Jews? "An undoubted factor in the survival of the Jews as a people with a common identity has been their shared experience of persecution at the hands of gentiles (non-Jews)." "In ancient Israel the acceptance of monotheism (the belief that there is only one God) became the chief factor distinguishing Jews from gentiles, who then worshiped many gods." "At this time gentiles were either natives living in Erez Israel or travelers passing through it. Resident gentiles were protected by traditional hospitality and by contractual agreements made between Israel and the neighboring states. Native gentiles were expected to be loyal to Israel's civil laws in return for protection, but, were generally in a humbler position than the Israelite population." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

What prohibitions existed between Jews and Gentiles?

"During the latter part of the Second Temple period (from the second century B.C.E.) the prohibition against Jews marrying gentiles, limited originally to the seven Canaanite nations --- Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites ('neither shalt thou make marriages with them' Deuteronomy 7:3) --- was extended to include all gentiles, who might lure Jews away from the true God. In order to prevent the possibility of intermarriage the rabbis enacted a series of laws intended to limit social contact between Jew and non-Jew." "Jews were forbidden to

emulate gentile customs of an idolatrous or superstitious nature. The prohibition (*hukkat ha-goi*) was derived from the biblical commandment 'ye shall not walk in the customs of the nation' (Leviticus 20:23 and 18:13). Its purpose was to prevent Jews being converted to other religions." ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

What is a "Righteous Gentile?"

"During the 500 years of the talmudic period to 499 C.E. widely differing attitudes toward gentiles were expressed. When Jews were being tortured during the reign of the Roman emperor Hadrian, Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai stated that the best of gentiles should be killed. In later, less hostile times, it was sometimes claimed that no difference between Jew and gentile would be made on the Day of Judgment (see End of Days). The concept of the righteous gentile (*hasidei ummot ha-olam* -- the pious ones of the nations of the world) is first found in the Midrash. The Tosefta teaches that they are as eligible to a place in the hereafter as any

member of the House of Israel. Rabbi Isaac Arama states that 'every true pious gentile is equal to a son of Israel.' The Zohar states that all gentiles who do not hate Israel, and who deal justly with Jews, qualify as pious ones. According to Maimonides righteous gentiles were those who observed the Noachide laws and were motivated by belief in the divine origin and authenticity of Moses' prophecy." ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

Who said Jews are Gentiles?

I remember a humorous statement in an Israeli travel brochure outlining a tour of the USA. It included a stop in Salt Lake City . . . "the only place a Jew can walk down the street and be considered a Gentile!" Some day they will know, it's the same family!