

Purpose: To help us better understand Zenos’s allegory of the olive trees and how it applies in our day.

1. Jacob quotes Zenos’s allegory of the olive trees. (Read [Jacob 5](#).)

“In this chapter Jacob quotes an allegory from Zenos, a Hebrew prophet mentioned several times in the Book of Mormon. An allegory is a literary device in which one object or event is used to describe or represent another. Zenos’s allegory uses olive trees to summarize Israel’s history and foretell its destiny.” (*Lesson Manual*)

What symbols did Zenos use in this allegory? What are the meanings of these symbols?

- †1. Additional information about olive trees
- †2. Metaphors: Allegory of the Olive Tree
- †3. Hugh Nibley
- †4. Stephen D. Ricks and John Welch

- Jacob 5:3-4 The master visits the vineyard and discovers decay. **What does this decay represent?**
- Jacob 5:4-14 The master of the vineyard responds to the decay he finds.

“Grafting is a process in which part of a second plant is joined to a first plant in such a way that it becomes a permanent part of the first plant.” (*Lesson Manual*)

What does grafting represent in this allegory? ([Acts 10](#))

What does transplanting the tame branches into far parts of the vineyard represent? ([1 Ne. 10:12-13](#))

What specific groups might these tame branches represent? ([1 Ne. 2:19-20](#); [22:3-4](#); [Amos 9:8-9](#))

“The master of the vineyard repeatedly worked with his servant to prune, dig about, and nourish his tree.” (*LM*)

What does this suggest about Christ’s involvement in our lives? †5. C. Terry Warner

- Jacob 5:15-18 The master visits the vineyard a second time. **What does the bearing of good fruit symbolize?**

How can new converts add life and strength to the Church?

- Jacob 5:19:-25 The master visited the tame branches. “The branches planted in poor ground brought forth good fruit, while the branches planted in good ground yielded both good and wild fruit.” (*LM*) **How might this apply to us?**

- Jacob 5:29-31, 37-42 The master visited the vineyard a third time to find all the fruit corrupted.

What caused the apostasy? (Jacob 5:37, 40, 48)

What might the “loftiness of the vineyard symbolize?”

How can our own loftiness, or pride, prevent us from bearing good fruit?

- Jacob 5:49-54, 58, 62-64 The master “decided to nourish and prune the vineyard once more and graft some of the transplanted branches back into the original tree.” (*LM*)

What does this represent? ([1 Ne. 10:14](#); [2 Ne. 29:14](#); [D&C 33:3-6](#))

- Jacob 5:70-75 **Although the servants are few, what are the results of their efforts?**

How can we help in this final nourishing, pruning, and grafting in the Lord’s vineyard?

2. Jacob exhorts his listeners to repent and follow Christ. (Read [Jacob 6](#).)

- Jacob 6:1-3 **What did Jacob prophesy after relating Zenos’s allegory?**
- Jacob 6:4-5 **How merciful is our God? What must we do to receive His mercy?**
- Jacob 6:3-13 **What gospel principles did Jacob emphasize after teaching us Zenos’s allegory?**

What are the responsibilities of those who “have been nourished by the good word of God?”

(See [Jacob 6:11-12](#); [Moroni 6:3-4](#))

“We should participate in this great gathering. Because we have been nourished by the Lord, we are obligated to help others receive this nourishment.” (*LM*)

What are some specific ways we can fulfill these responsibilities? †6. President Joseph Fielding Smith

3. Sherem’s false teachings (Read [Jacob 7:1-23](#))

- Jacob 7:1-7 **How did Sherem lead many people away from the truth?**
- Jacob 7:8-22 **How was Jacob able to confound Sherem?**

How can we protect ourselves from the deceptions of anti-Christ?

- See [Jacob 7:23](#); [Romans 16:17-18](#); [Ephesians 4:11-15](#); [6:11-18](#).

†7. President Joseph Fielding Smith

(*Book of Mormon Manual – LDS Institute (Religion 121-122)*. (You can download a free PDF manual.)

Next Week: Lesson 13: “The Allegory of the Olive Trees”; Jacob 5 – 7 † •

†1. **Additional information about olive trees:** “The more we know about olive trees, the better we can understand why Zenos was inspired to use this particular tree to symbolize Israel. . .

- a. The olive tree is a living thing that can produce much fruit. It requires constant nourishment to survive.
- b. The olive branch is traditionally a symbol of peace.
- c. The tree must be carefully pruned to be fruitful and productive.
- d. For a wild olive tree to become tame and productive, its main stem must be cut back completely, and a branch from a tame olive tree must be grafted into the stem of the wild one.
- e. An olive tree may produce fruit for centuries. Some trees now growing in Israel have been producing abundantly for over 400 years.

f. As a tree grows old and begins to die, its roots send up new shoots, which, if grafted and pruned, will mature to full-grown olive trees. Thus, the root of the tree may go on producing new trees and fruit for thousands of years.” (LM)

†2. **Metaphors: Allegory of the Olive Tree**

- The vineyard = The world
- Master of the vineyard = Jesus Christ
- Tame olive tree = The house of Israel, the Lord’s covenant people
- Wild olive tree = Gentiles, or non-Israel (later in the parable, wild branches represent apostate Israel)
- Branches = Groups of people
- Roots of the tame olive tree = The gospel covenants and promises the Lord makes with his children, a constant source of strength and life to the faithful
- Fruit of the tree = The lives or works of men
- Servants = Prophets and others called to serve
- Digging, pruning, fertilizing = The Lord’s work with His children which seeks to persuade them to be obedient and produce good fruit
- Transplanting the branches = Scattering of groups throughout the world, or restoring them to their original position
- Grafting = The process of spiritual rebirth through which one is joined to the covenant
- Decaying branches = Wickedness and apostasy
- Casting the branches into the fire = The judgment of God (Various sources)

†3. **Hugh Nibley:** “Jacob’s (or rather Zenos’s) treatise on ancient olive culture (Jacob 5-6 is accurate in every detail: Olive trees do have to be pruned and cultivated diligently; the top branches are indeed the first to wither, and the new shoots do come right out of the trunk; . . . a good olive tree is greatly cherished, and no end of pains are taken to preserve it even through many centuries, for really superior fruit is very rare and difficult to obtain and perpetuate; the ancient way of strengthening the old trees (especially in Greece) was to graft in the shoots of the oleaster or wild olive; also, shoots from valuable old trees were transplanted to keep the stock alive after the parent tree should perish; to a surprising degree the olive prefers poor and rocky ground, whereas rich soil produces inferior fruit; . . . the top branches if allowed to grow as in Spain and France, while producing a good shade tree, will indeed sap the strength of the tree and give a poor crop; fertilizing with dung is very important, . . . and has been practiced since

ancient times; the thing to be most guarded against is bitterness in the fruit.” (*Since Cumorah*, 269-270)

†4. **Stephen D. Ricks and John Welch:** “In this single chapter of the Book of Mormon there are many detailed horticultural practices and procedures that were not likely known by an untrained person, and may not have been fully appreciated by professional botanists or horticulturalists at the time the Book of Mormon was translated. Even today, outside of olive-growing areas, professional horticulturalists may not fully appreciate some of the unique aspects of olive culture. Given the extensive detail about olive culture present in Jacob 5, we must give Zenos much credit for a high degree of horticultural knowledge, which many take for granted.” Quoted in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, 522)

†5. **C. Terry Warner:** “And besides all this . . . the allegory enables us to feel the pains the Lord has taken for the nurturing and reclamation of Israel. What looks like punishment—the scattering of Israel as branches cut off from their main trunk and the roots whose nourishment they could not assimilate—was not punishment at all, but the Lord’s devoted effort to do the one thing that could save his people. . . It shows why Jacob, fully aware of the afflictions that awaited Israel, could nonetheless write, “And 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.” (Jacob 6:4; cf. 2 Ne. 9:17-22.) (“*Jacob*,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1976, 25)

†6. **President Joseph Fielding Smith:** “Today Latter-day Saints are going to all parts of the world as servants in the vineyard to gather this fruit and lay it in store for the time of the coming of the Master.” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. [1957-66], 4:142)

†7. **President Joseph Fielding Smith:** “*There is not anything in this world of as great importance to us as obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ.* Let us search these scriptures. Let us know what the Lord has revealed. Let us put our lives in harmony with his truth. Then we will not be deceived. (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954-56], 1:301)

Recommended Reading:

Ralph E. Swiss, “[The Tame and Wild Olive Trees—An Allegory of Our Savior’s Love](#),” *Ensign*, Aug. 1988, 50.

Nancy W. Jensen, LDS Gospel Doctrine Plus, BkM L13 The Allegory of the Olive Tree, Jacob 5-7, [ABOUT OLIVE TREES](#).

Scriptural Insights Lenet H. Read, [BkM L13 The Parable of the Tame and Wild Olive Tree](#) (Jacob 5-7).

Visit www.stephenmbird.com/library/gospel-doctrine †