

ENGAGING GOSPEL DOCTRINE (EPISODE 186)

LESSON 13

“The Allegory of the Olive Trees”

Hook	Jacob 5 is the longest chapter in the Book of Mormon and you may lose track of which branches are where, but close reading reveals a compelling portrait of God and opportunity profound personal application.
Manual Goal	To help class members better understand Zenos’s allegory of the olive trees and how it applies in our day.
EGD Goal	To help class members understand what these chapters teach us about the nature of God, relationships, and good and evil.

We are on the home stretch! 11 Lessons after this one, I have already recorded discussions for 15, 16, 19. I am already thinking about how I will improve the podcast through the next four years and my next project, a Home Evening podcast!

I. Sunday School

- a. Framing. Jacob 5 is the real treasure in this reading, as the title indicates. Most of the time could be taken up just discussing the allegory of the Olive trees.
- b. Two minute take home
 - i. What does the Allegory of the Olive Tree mean?
 - ii. What do we learn about God?
 - iii. How do we apply this passage to ourselves?
- c. Reading commentary
- d. Lesson
 - i. What does this allegory mean?
 1. Who are the characters?
 - a. Vineyard: the world
 - b. Tame olive tree: Israel/covenant people
 - c. Man/Master/Lord: God
 - d. Servant: Prophet and others
 - e. Wild olive trees: Gentiles
 2. Theme: Salvation history narrative, how God works with different groups of their children to maximize salvation (the “natural fruit”)
 - ii. What we learn about God from this allegory (Caring, empathetic, vulnerable, grieving, hard word, does everything possible, but still limited in important ways) POWERFUL implications about God’s nature, that God works among all people, loves all people, there is “good fruit” in all parts of the vineyard
 - iii. How we apply it to ourselves
 1. Personally: be constructive, nourish ourselves so that we can produce good fruit, avoid pride, increase the good so that the bad can be naturally cast away as the good grows, be open to good fruit from many sources, not just our “home tree”

2. Relationships (Life is hard work. Relationships are hard work. They take patience and dedication and persistence and hope and adaptation. Improvement takes time. Be patient, don't give up, keep working hard, even though you can't be sure about the result)
3. The problem of good and evil (in ourselves and in the world. Pride, there needs to be a balance, the good needs to become strong enough to overcome evil, to fill up the space if the evil/unhealthy is removed. You can't just break down what is; you have to build something better, Buckminster Fuller quote)
- iv. Saying farewell to Jacob (different personality types, insecurities, sensitivity, touch on "adieu")

II. Scripture Study

- a. So how do olive trees work, anyway? I found this helpful:
http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon/Evidences/Olive_culture
- b. Biblical parallels (Isaiah, Romans, NT)

Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing for my beloved
 my love-song concerning his vineyard:
 My beloved had a vineyard
 on a very fertile hill.
² He dug it and cleared it of stones,
 and planted it with choice vines;
 he built a watch-tower in the midst of it,
 and hewed out a wine vat in it;
 he expected it to yield grapes,
 but it yielded wild grapes.

³ And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem
 and people of Judah,
 judge between me
 and my vineyard.
⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard
 that I have not done in it?
 When I expected it to yield grapes,
 why did it yield wild grapes?

⁵ And now I will tell you
 what I will do to my vineyard.
 I will remove its hedge,
 and it shall be devoured;

I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.
⁶ I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and it shall be overgrown with briers and thorns;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.

⁷ For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
he expected justice,
but saw bloodshed;
righteousness,
but heard a cry!

Romans 11:17-24

17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root^{*} of the olive tree, ¹⁸do not vaunt yourselves over the branches. If you do vaunt yourselves, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. ¹⁹You will say, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' ²⁰That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you.^{*} ²²Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity towards those who have fallen, but God's kindness towards you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³And even those of Israel,^{*} if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.