

MIKE WINDER



**GOLD**  
*from the*  
**PLATES**

GREATEST HITS FROM  
**BOOK OF MORMON**  
SERMONS

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Paperback ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-5145-5  
eBook ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-5146-2

Published by CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.  
2373 W. 700 S., Suite 100, Springville, UT 84663  
Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc., [www.cedarfort.com](http://www.cedarfort.com)

Library of Congress Cataloging Number: 2026935958

Cover design by Sara Sontag dos Santos and Shawnda T. Craig  
Cover design © 2026 Cedar Fort, Inc.  
Edited by Katherine Jenkins  
Typeset by Liz Kazandzhy

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed on acid-free paper

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# 1

## TREE OF LIFE

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by Lehi, descendant of Manasseh (1 Nephi 1, 3, 5, 8, 10)

IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL DURING THE REIGN OF THE FINAL KINGS OF JUDAH TO have righteous preachers wandering the streets of Jerusalem, crying repentance and warning of God's wrath. "The Lord testified against Israel," we read in 2 Kings, "by all the prophets. . . . Notwithstanding, they would not hear."<sup>1</sup> In fact, rejection of these seers was the norm, not the exception. "They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets," we read in 2 Chronicles of that time.<sup>2</sup> By 600 BC and the ascension of the final king of Judah, Zedekiah, there "came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed," recalled Nephi.<sup>3</sup> It is into this frantic and volatile situation that Lehi came on the scene as one of these many revelators.

Lehi's sermons to his family and to his neighbors in Jerusalem echoed the lamentations and doom from Jeremiah and other prophets of his day. "Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations!" Lehi declared, prophesying that the city "should be destroyed and the inhabitants thereof;

many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon.”<sup>4</sup> These prophecies were fulfilled, of course, just a few short years later when Nebuchadnezzar’s siege of Jerusalem took place in 597 BC.

Yet, Lehi also struck a different tone in his talks than did Jeremiah, “the weeping prophet,” in much of his message. He had to be hopeful and strike some optimism in his sermon. After all, Lehi was not an ascetic dwelling in the wilderness like Elijah but rather a wealthy man of the city, with much to lose by having his hometown turn against him. “Lehi was very rich, and he was a trader,” concluded Dr. Hugh Nibley. “His world was a world of travelers and merchants.”<sup>5</sup>

So, we hear much in Lehi’s preaching about the goodness of God and the path of escape and refuge for those who come to the Father. “Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty!” Lehi exclaimed, “because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!”<sup>6</sup> Lehi’s son, Nephi, said words like this were typical of his father’s positive hope in God’s plan as taught in his prophecies.

The best example of Lehi’s continuous message of hope and deliverance was his vision of the tree of life, which is shared with his family (and us) in 1 Nephi 8. This teaching of Lehi encapsulates his dual focus on God’s justice and mercy. In his dream, Lehi saw a glorious tree, its fruit symbolizing God’s love and goodness. “It was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted,” he said. “And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also,” he continued.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, when we have tasted of the goodness of the good news, the sweetness and warmth of God’s love, shouldn’t we also desire to share it with those we love most?

In the vision, Lehi said, the path to this tree was straight and narrow, marked by an iron rod—a representation of God’s word—providing guidance through life’s challenges. Yet, obstacles abounded. A dense mist of darkness descended, obscuring the way and symbolizing the confusion and temptations of the world. Today, the mist might be the flood of digital noise—social media, news, endless opinions—clouding our focus. Nearby, a great and spacious building stood filled with mockers, a vivid metaphor for worldly pride and vanity, distracting many from the path to the tree. This palace of pride

represents society's obsession with status and validation. Clinging to the rod means prioritizing eternal truths over constantly changing trends.

Lehi saw different groups of people in their journey: some began along the straight and narrow path but quickly strayed and were lost. Tragically, many turned toward the towering, ornate edifice—the great and spacious building—drawn by its allure, and they abandoned the tree altogether. In fact, even some who held to the rod and made it to the tree and had tasted of the fruit “were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them;” Lehi said “and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.”<sup>8</sup> The pride of the world today smugly looks down on the faithful from the proverbial great and spacious building. Oh, how alluring the parties and glitz of Babylon may seem! Oh, how tragic are the stories of those who were on the righteous path but were lured away by the siren song of sin and decadence!

Yet, in Lehi's dream, there were those who clung steadfastly to the rod, partook of the fruit, and remained joyful in their faith. These, of course, are the ones Lehi wanted his loved ones and us to be like. The faithful, he said, “caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree.”<sup>2</sup>

In this vision, Lehi not only warned of the perils of sin but also emphasized the joy and hope awaiting those who choose to follow God's word. For Lehi, it was a testament to the goodness of God and the deliverance He offers to all who seek Him. This hopeful message, shared with his family in the turmoil of their own time, continues to resonate as a beacon for all striving to walk the path of faith. It is even more relevant to us today. “Because the iron rod is the word of God, it helps strengthen us to stay true to the covenants we have made. It helps us set righteous patterns, and keeping the commandments is easier if we have these righteous patterns of behavior,” advised Primary General President Cheryl C. Lant. “We have to hang on as though our lives depended on it because, in fact, our eternal lives do,” she said.<sup>10</sup>

After expounding his vision of the tree of life, Lehi taught his family that in six hundred years, “a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or in other words, a Savior of the world.” Lehi, once again hopeful and optimistic, taught that “all mankind were in a lost and fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer.” He prophesied of

John the Baptist, preparing the way of the Lord, who in the river Jordan “should baptize the Messiah with water.” This would be “the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world,” Lehi declared—the Savior who would gather together the scattered house of Israel, and graft the wayward branches back together, as they “come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer.”<sup>11</sup>

So, despite preaching hard truths of the consequences of sin in the wicked streets of Jerusalem and with his own rebellious family members, the visionary prophet Lehi also taught hope. He had hope in the mercy and goodness of God. He taught hope in a love of God so delicious that it was worth wading through mortality’s mists of darkness and mockeries. And Lehi ultimately preached hope in a Redeemer, a Savior, a Messiah who would deliver us all to the promised land of heaven if we followed the iron rod to Him. We, too, can choose to abandon the covenant path when tempted to do so; or we can choose to hold to the rod and step by step come closer to God and His exquisite realm of joy.

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

1. How does the fruit of the gospel “make one happy”? How have you found happiness from the love of God and His plan of happiness?
2. What are some of the “great and spacious buildings” today? Who occupies them, and what are their attitudes toward those following the iron rod?
3. What are the risks today of members of the Church being ashamed of the fruit of the gospel, and how can we help one another not fall away?
4. How does better understanding Lehi and Sariah’s challenges as parents help us better understand how our heavenly parents may feel toward all of us at times?

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1. 2 Kings 17:13–15.

2. 2 Chronicles 36:15–16.

3. 1 Nephi 1:4.

4. 1 Nephi 1:13.

5. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert* (Maxwell Institute Publications, 1988), 30.

6. 1 Nephi 1:14.

7. 1 Nephi 8:11–12.
8. 1 Nephi 8:28.
9. 1 Nephi 8:30.
10. Marianne Holman Prescott, “Brigham Young University Devotional: Sister Cheryl C. Lant — Hold to the Rod,” *Church News*, January 12, 2010.
11. 1 Nephi 10:4–10, 14.

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