

JACOB 5–7

John W. Welch Notes



Jacob 5

Jacob 5:1 — Jacob Quoted the Prophet Zenos

When Jacob spoke to his people, he read an allegory and explained it to them, but he had probably never even seen an olive tree. To Jacob, the concept of the olive tree must have been a great mystery. I imagine that Nephi was Jacob's tutor, teaching him how to write and especially to read and understand the writings on the plates of brass. Who else could have taught Nephi's younger brother? I suppose that at some point Nephi may have sat Jacob down and said, "Let me explain to you how olive trees grow, and how this extended prophetic allegory really works. In fact, before you were born we used to have olives on our property in the land of our inheritance." Presuming Nephi was familiar with olive horticulture, he could have passed on such knowledge—which he described earlier as "the things of the Jews" (2 Nephi 25:5)—to his brother Jacob.

Indeed, all the things that are mentioned in the allegory of the olive tree are the exact things that one needs to do to raise not just wild olives or bad, bitter olives, but to make them good. To be good olives they have to be cultivated. Unless you have actually been out there cultivating olives, it would not have the same allegorical value that it had when it was originally written by Zenos.

In reading this complicated and richly meaningful chapter, it helps to have some charts or a roadmap beside you. Here are three charts (Figures 1, 2, and 3) that make this allegory of the olive tree understandable, meaningful and applicable.

The Allegory of the Olive Tree Jacob 5

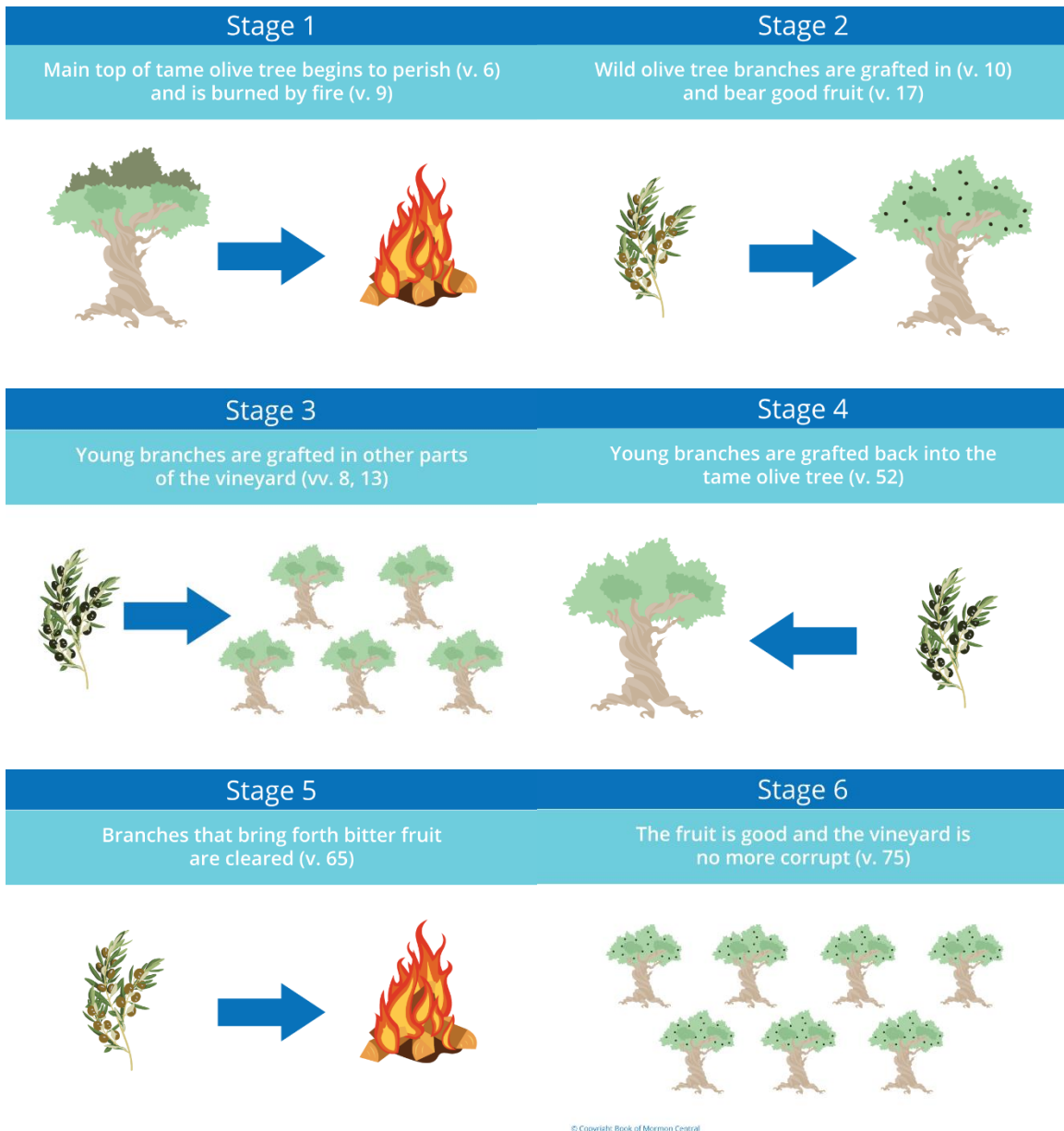


Figure 1 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 81.

Symbolic Elements in Zenos's Allegory

1. The Trees



a tame olive tree

young and tender branches

mother tree

main top

natural branches

root of the main tree

moisture of the root

transplanted branches

a wild olive tree

grafted branches

many other trees

good, tame, natural fruit

bad, wild, bitter fruit

equal fruit

Trees' Doings



growing

waxing old

decaying and perishing

cumbering the ground

overrunning the roots

bringing forth much fruit

becoming corrupt

withering away

growing faster than roots

taking strength

good overcoming evil

thriving exceedingly

(Chart Continued Below)

2. The Actors



master of the vineyard
servant

a few other servants

Actors' Doings



nourishing

digging about

dunging

pruning/plucking off branches

burning, casting into fire

grafting

planting branches

cutting down trees

grieving

laboring long, caring

sparing

balancing the root and top

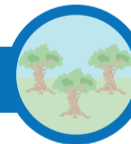
preserving

laying up fruit

obeying

rejoicing

3. The Places



a vineyard

nethermost part

poorest spot

poorer than the poorest spot

good spot

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Figure 2 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Symbolic Elements in Zenos' Allegory*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 82.

Personal Applications of Olive Symbolism

Symbol	Possible Applications
Planted in God's vineyard	Membership in God's church
Olive trees grow slowly	Spiritual growth is slow
Without care olives become wild	We must remain faithful
Each tree needs particular care	Lord knows us individually
Even trees in good soil go wild	Use blessings properly
Branches should balance the roots	Grow patiently and deeply
Olive trees like dry, rocky soil	Adversity can be a blessing
Strong roots will support the stock	Keep spiritual roots strong
Branches should not become lofty	Avoid pride
Pruning is necessary	Repent regularly
Each branch needs light to grow	Keep Light of Christ in all
Prunings must not cumber the ground	Completely remove evil
Grafting will preserve the stock	Draw strength from others
Dunging is necessary	Study, ponder, and pray
Olive oil is very valuable	The worth of souls is great
Pressure is needed to extract oil	Attaining purity takes work
"What could I have done more?"	God does all he can for us
"It grieveth me to lose this tree"	God loves his children
"Spare it a little longer"	The Lord is patient with us

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Figure 3 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Personal Applications of Olive Symbolism*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 83.

First, this chart (Figure 1) divides the allegory into six stages. There is a lot of repetition in this text, as the steps of pruning, planting, grafting, tending, and gathering fruit are repeated over many seasons of slow and selected growth. Cultivating an olive tree is a lifetime's work that requires considerable knowledge and expertise. But in the end, the effort is well worth the loving care of the lord of this vineyard or orchard.

Second (Figure 2), notice all of the many features that play a role in this complex allegory of God's whole plan for the history of salvation for the covenant House of Israel. Each of these elements has symbolic value. (1) There are many trees, and indeed olive trees do not produce alone, they require an orchard, a community of trees of their same kind. These trees behave in many ways and experience various stages of life, growth, and decay. (2) There are also several key actors: the master, the main servant, many other servants, and undoubtedly lots of other workers. Raising olives is labor intensive, and so Zenos's allegory involves these actors in many necessary and beneficial tasks. (3) There are several locations in this allegory. Some are better than others. Some offer certain helpful advantages. Others are thought to be poor spots, but they turn out to be necessary in the overall success of the orchard. All these details show the dynamic interchange between the master and his trees and his servants. The meanings of these elements remain for readers to discern by careful reflection.

Third, this chart (Figure 3) serves as an aid in applying this elaborate parable to individual parts of our own personal lives. While the tame tree in Jacob 5 clearly represents the House of Israel, it can also apply more particularly to Jacob and to his people, and just as well to all of us. Of the many possible personal applications, here is a list of nineteen elements that readers can pause and think about. See how many of these spiritual truths and needs have meaning to you.

Further Reading

Swiss, Ralph E. "The Tame and Wild Olive Trees—An Allegory of Our Savior's Love," *Ensign*, August 1988.

Jacob 5:1 — Who Wrote This Allegory?

Was Jacob 5 written by a person other than Jacob or Joseph Smith? I do not think Jacob could possibly have written this. He did not have the botanical knowledge or agricultural experience, so while it is in the Book of Jacob, it was not written by Jacob. Jacob says that Zenos wrote these words to all the house of Israel. And indeed, there is evidence of different authorship here, including difference with any other author in the Book of Mormon either. Mormon did not write this. Nephi did not; he had gone, and his vocabulary was different.

In the 600-page book, *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, hundreds of details in this amazing text are probed in depth. For example, in chapter nine, called “Words and Phrases in Jacob 5,” I went through and tabulated how many vocabulary words we have in this lengthy chapter. There is a very small vocabulary to this allegory, but it is also a very distinctive vocabulary. There are 30 phrases or expressions in Jacob 5 that never appear again anywhere in the Standard Works. There are also seven idioms that are found in the early chapters of Genesis but nowhere else in the Bible or Book of Mormon. They are part of the Creation account, pertaining to how God created the world and the House of Israel. There are 21 further expressions that are found in Jacob 5 and in other Old Testament texts, but which don’t show up in the New Testament, and so on. As a whole, Zenos’s vocabulary does not belong to any other writer known to us in the scriptures.

This writing style is just one more important indication that this exquisite prophetic text was not written by anyone other than Zenos. It is an inspired work of a person who lived long ago, probably lived in Palestine somewhere, and was filled with a deep understanding of the mission and the plan of God for the House of Israel. Zenos embedded that synoptic vision in an elegant allegory that endures and continues to inspire us today in many ways. What a gem this great allegory is!

Could Joseph Smith have written this? As one of the authors in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, botanist Wilford M. Hess, concluded: “Joseph Smith probably had little knowledge of olive trees in New York, as they will not grow in the northeastern United States.” While some information on that topic was available in the Bible and other books from Joseph Smith’s time, the details were sparse.

Further Reading

Wilford M. Hess, Daniel J. Fairbanks, John W. Welch, and Jonathan K. Driggs, “Botanical Aspects of Olive Culture Relevant to Jacob 5,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 507.

John W. Welch, “Words and Phrases in Jacob 5,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 174–184.

Jacob 5:1 — The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph Work Together

In this chapter, we see a particularly strong example of how the stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph work together. Chapters 12 and 14 of the book, *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, discuss the allegory of the olive tree and related figurative language in the ancient

Near East (chapter 12), and the relationship of Zenos to the texts of the Old Testament (chapter 14). These two chapters show that there are allusions to this allegory in Exodus, Hosea, and Ezekiel. As David Seely and I went through these biblical passages and pseudepigraphic and other texts, we felt that a significant argument could be made that the reason that Hosea and those other writers could use specific tree imageries the way they did was because they presumed that their readers were familiar with some bigger picture.

Their poetic allusions assumed that their audience understood the whole story. If you take all of those Old Testament allusions to olive trees together, you find that they, as a composite whole, have remarkable similarities to the Allegory of the Olive Tree. Although Zenos' writings do not appear in the Old Testament, there is an interesting argument to be made that many people in ancient Israel, along with Lehi and Nephi, *knew* this general prophecy. Indeed, Lehi at one point spoke "much concerning the Gentiles, and also concerning the house of Israel, that they should be compared like unto an olive-tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth" (1 Nephi 10:12). Nephi reports this as if everyone knows the story about the broken branches being scattered all over the earth. Maybe Nephi suggested to Jacob that he should tell and preserve that story.

Further Reading

David Rolph Seely, "The Allegory of the Olive Tree and the Use of Related Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament," in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 290–304.

David Rolph Seely and John W. Welch, "Zenos and the Texts of the Old Testament," in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, eds. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo, UT/Salt Lake City: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies/Deseret Book, 1994), 322–346.

Book of Mormon Central, "Did Prophets Such As Ezekiel Know The Writings Of Zenos? (Jacob 5:24)," *KnoWhy* 440 (June 12, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "Was Lehi Familiar with Zenos's Allegory of the Olive Tree? (1 Nephi 10:12)," *KnoWhy* 466 (September 11, 2018).

Jacob 5:1 — The Last Words of Cenez (or Zenez)

Another one of the chapters in the *Allegory of the Olive Tree* book, "The Last Word of Cenez," refers to a book that is not in the Bible. It has come to be known as *Biblical Antiquities*, not to be confused with Josephus' work of a similar title. In this early Christian-Jewish text (which dates to around the first century BC) there is an alternative

history of the Jews from the time of the creation of the world to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which happens to be the time that is said to have been covered in the history section on the plates of brass. In *Biblical Antiquities*, the grandson of Joshua is a prominent figure, and he gives a speech as they are establishing themselves in the new conquered land of Canaan. His name is *Cenez*, but in some texts his name is *Zenez*. Guess what he talks about? Olive trees, and how Israel is an olive tree and has been planted and so forth. That is interesting especially because the *Biblical Antiquities* book was not discovered until the 1880s, fifty years after the Book of Mormon was in print.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Is Anything Known of the Prophet Zenos Outside of the Book of Mormon? \(Jacob 5:1\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 67 (March 31, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[The Last Words of Cenez and the Book of Mormon,](#)” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 305–321.

Jacob 5:3 — What Does the Olive Tree Represent?

In this verse, Zenos says explicitly, “I will liken thee, O house of Israel unto a tame olive tree...” The allegory of the olive tree could be called the allegory of the olive orchard. Sometimes olive orchards were called *vineyards*. In Hebrew there is only one word for both “orchard” and “vineyard.” It is interesting that sometimes it was translated one way and sometimes the other, but here it is called “my vineyard.”

There are lots of plants and trees in a vineyard, but we are focused on one of them. The pattern we read about in this allegory may be a cycle that will repeat itself for other civilizations besides Israel. Nephi knew and prophesied that the Lord would speak to all nations and to the Lost Tribes of Israel, indicating that this is not just a one-tree story.

Further Reading

Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, “Introduction,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994). “The allegory speaks mainly of one much-loved tree. But there are others—an entire orchard of trees—each of which is valued by the Lord. In the allegory he toils personally alongside his hardworking crew of devoted servants as they cut and prune and transplant and nourish the precious trees. The allegory can be understood locally, perhaps in the context of a northern Israelite prophet who is deeply disturbed by the wickedness and apostasy that he sees in his beloved Israel in its early monarchical period or slightly later. Or it may be understood

cosmically, embracing the entire sweep of human history, or at least large portions of it. The allegory proves to be, at the same time, both precisely detailed and broadly pliable. Obviously, each individual and each group, in virtually any circumstance or period of time, can find in this graphic image meanings that are especially attractive to them in their daily lives and deepest thoughts. This allegory typologically represents many forms of God's love and care, as well as many states of righteousness and apostasy, whether collective or individual."

John A. Tvedtnes, "Vineyard or Olive Orchard?" in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 477–483.

Jacob 5:3 — How Did the Olive Tree Represent the House of Israel?

There is no question that Zenos was critical of the place in which the tree was planted, and since he was referring to the House of Israel, that central starting place, according to Exodus 15, can be understood as the temple mount. The tree was a representation of the whole House of Israel—their family tree if you will. How does this prophecy begin? A tree was planted and it was rotten to the core—so rotten that God had to come and chop off all the branches, take those branches, scatter them around somewhere, preserve them somehow, and keep the roots alive by bringing wild branches in. Now for the Jews, that was not very promising, was it?

When the tree did well, the whole House of Israel was doing well. In fact, there were other trees in this vineyard, but they are not quite as important to the Lord as this one tree, which was planted in the most prominent place. It was the one that he really is counting on to produce these best fruits.

In this image, individuals are but a leaf, a little twig, or a tiny part of that tree. That is the way ancient Israelites thought about their collective responsibilities, their civic duties, and who they were. Individuality was less important to them than group survival; individuals could not really survive in the ancient world all alone. They had to have a village; they had to work together; they had to share. One person raised olives and another person raised wheat. They had to work together in order to make that happen, and they were acutely aware of the responsibility of all to see that the whole of Zion or of the nation succeeded.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "What Are The Roots of Zenos's Allegory in The Ancient World? (Jacob 5:3)," *KnoWhy* 70 (April 4, 2016).

Jacob 5:7 — Who Are the Lord and His Servant?

In the allegory, we meet the lord of the vineyard. He is the overlord, but it is his servant who comes and directs all of the things that are going on. I think that the overlord, the owner, is God the Father, and the long-suffering servant, as in Isaiah, is always Christ. I think Jacob may have said, “Can you not see that this prophet understands, as we understand, that Christ will come, and that it will be his law and his orders that we will follow?” Jacob introduced his telling of Zenos’s allegory by stating: “And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness” (Jacob 4:5).

Sanctification, or being made holy, is what the anointing with the olive oil was all about, as reflected in the purification rituals of the temple. Jacob was trying to communicate that sanctification is ultimately through Christ! The word *Christos* or *Messiah* means “the anointed one,” and what were they anointed with? Olive oil. Again, a couple of chapters in the *Allegory of the Olive Tree* book elaborate on the importance and symbolism of the anointing.

Jews believed in Jehovah well before the coming of Christ. Regardless of whether Jehovah for them represented the Father or the Son, Jehovah at least represented a very important person who interacted with God and got orders from him. In the allegory, the master of the vineyard has a servant who is in some ways equal to and working together with the Father. Jacob probably understood the Father to be the owner of the vineyard, but the servant is the suffering servant, the Messiah or Christ, who boldly pleads with the master to spare the tree a little longer.

There are places in which it clearly appears that Nephi understood that the Messiah would be different from God the Father. Jacob, in the contests with Sherem, was tested and pushed on whether there would be a Messiah who would come, and whether the Messiah and God are two different beings. This is a very important doctrinal issue.

Further Reading

Donald W. Parry, “Ritual Anointing with Olive Oil in Ancient Israelite Religion,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 262–289.

John A. Tvedtnes, “Olive Oil: Symbol of the Holy Ghost,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 427–459.

Book of Mormon Central, “Did Pre-Christian Prophets Know About Christ? (1 Nephi 10:17),” *KnoWhy* 12 (January 15, 2016).

Jacob 5:7 — The Lord Does Not Want to Lose the Fruit of the Tree

This fruit was very precious, and the Lord of the vineyard really wanted it, because it had so many uses and so much value. It was a major cash crop for ancient Israelites, who exported olive oil. Not every place can grow olives because you have to have the right elevation and the right moisture. There are only certain places in all of the world where olives will grow: around the Mediterranean and North Africa, in central Chile, and southern and central California, in particular.

The first pressing of the olives produces the purest and most valuable oil because it is more highly concentrated. It actually comes out looking a little red the first time. This oil was used for anointing and for offerings as the first-fruits or the first oils.

Further Reading

Truman G. Madsen, “The Olive Press: A Symbol of Christ,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 1–10.

John Gee and Daniel C. Peterson, “Graft and Corruption: On Olives and Olive Culture in the Pre-Modern Mediterranean,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 186–247.

Jacob 5:8 — The Lord Preserves the Fruit of the Tree

The olive is a very plastic tree. It can be grafted and cut and moved and so on. I grew up in Southern California and we lived in an area where there were many very large, completely useless olive trees. They made a huge mess, purple stain all over the driveway and the car and so on, but they were evergreen and they were attractive. We liked them and we needed some olive trees to plant down in the nethermost part of our property. We went next door to an older lady and her husband who had lived there for many years and had lots of olives on their property and asked where we might get one. She said, “Well all you do is you just cut off a little branch, you shave off the bark and you stick it in the dirt and it grows.” So that is what we did and I have pictures of these little trees that we grew by doing exactly what you read about in Jacob 5, in which they cut off the branches and stick them in the nethermost part of the vineyard or orchard. Now who would ever think that that would really work? How many trees can you do that with?



Figure 4 Olive Tree Graft. Photo by Derek Winterburn via Flickr.

Wilford Hess wrote an article on the botanical aspects of the olive tree and went into lots of details on their plastic nature, and as far as I can tell there are no trees that you can do that with in upstate New York. But with the olive tree, you can graft and it will live. The roots are very durable. Almost like a Redwood tree, they are very resistant to infection, rot, and mold. And they do not need very much water, but they *do* need to be pruned and taken care of.

What does it mean to *preserve*? It means to *keep* something that was yours to begin with. In effect, God is saying, "This is my work and my glory ... to preserve my children, my people. These are the ones that I, as God, care about and want to see preserved." Does it help you to know that he is in the preservation mode? I think so. He wants to preserve absolutely every branch that can possibly be preserved. Some are going to be burned and thrown away and put in the fire because he cannot get the optimal result all the time, and sometimes there will have to be some selecting and choosing. He is trying to preserve everything he possibly can, but some little branches are going to have to be cut and thrown away. What will be preserved is the DNA, the stalk, or in relation to people, the reference is to the lineage, and posterity, in accordance with the eternal principle that we will eventually all be brought back into his presence.

Further Reading

Wilford M. Hess, Daniel J. Fairbanks, John W. Welch, and Jonathan K. Driggs, “Botanical Aspects of Olive Culture Relevant to Jacob 5,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 484–561.

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did Zenos Give So Many Details About Raising Good Olives? (Jacob 5:9-10),” *KnoWhy* 71 (April 5, 2016).

Jacob 5:11 — The Lord Will Take Care of the Olive Tree

We had an experience with a member of the church (a professional agronomist) in Aix-en-Provence in Southern France. We talked to him for a while about the Allegory of the Olive Tree, and he said, “Yes, that is exactly what we do. You could use that chapter as a handbook and go out and just do what it says and you would raise good olives.” And I remember Hugh Nibley saying years ago, “Whoever wrote Jacob 5 knew everything you need to know to cultivate olives.” It is pretty amazing.

If you do not prune olive trees, they go wild; they revert back to being worthless, and you have to burn them. If you do not burn the prunings, you will get infestations and bugs and problems that will destroy the fruit and sometimes kill the trees. By clearing and dunging and doing all of those things, Zenos and Jacob were warning their people (and us) that if they did not allow themselves to be cultivated by the master and servant of the vineyard, they would not succeed.

Further Reading

William H. Krueger, Zachary Heath, and Dominic DeLeonardis, “Patch Budding: A Convenient Method for Top-Working Olives,” University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources Publication 8115 (2004): 1–6. Olive culture in California follows exactly the same procedures as described.

Jacob 5:13—What Are the Nethermost Parts of the Vineyard?

By the “nethermost” parts, the Nephites would have understood that as being the farthest away you can get, and that would refer to them. However, “nether” also means “lower.” Even though it seems to be an obscure and undesirable place, being located in the nethermost part of the vineyard can be a good thing. Unlike the high point of the vineyard the lower areas can be in protected ravines and not exposed to high winds. The trees in these lower places would also receive a little more of the runoff water that comes down through little ravines. It is a place where you would put a precious tree if you really wanted it to survive.

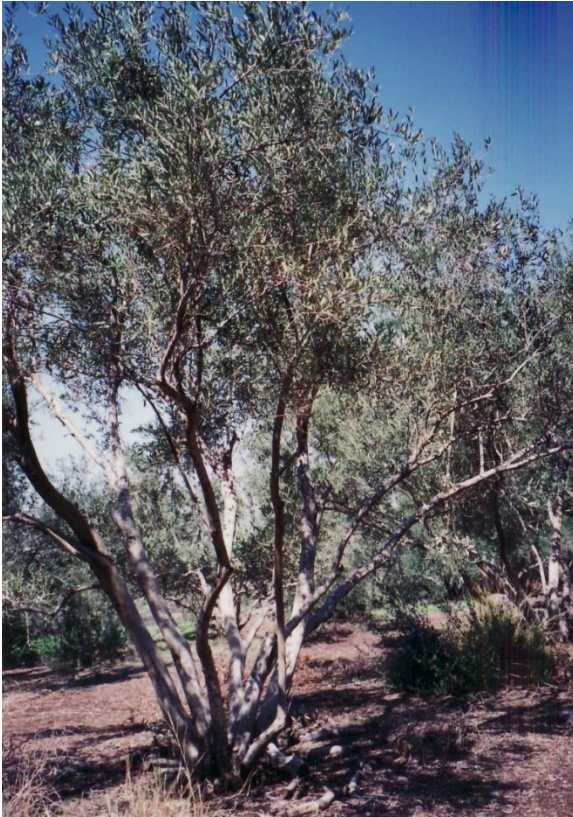


Figure 5 Small tree in a lower part of an olive grove in Galilee. Photo: John W. Welch

In a way, the trees in the nethermost parts of the vineyard are like the small, remote branches of the Church. They may not have the prominence and visibility that branches on the top of the hill have, but they often have the most cohesiveness. All fruit-bearing little branches in this parable can be grafted back up into the central tree where there are long-standing roots.

This goes back to the idea in Exodus 15 that Israel was planted in that place because it is a holy and special place. These deep roots—of the covenant with God in which he promised that he would always remember his people—are ultimately the ones that will be able to bear and support the longest time and produce the best fruit.

Jacob 5:34 — Grafting in Wild Branches to Nourish the Root

In the text, we read, “Behold, because thou didst graft in the branches of the wild olive tree they have nourished the roots, that they are alive and they have not perished,” and hence the master could see the tree was “good.”

According to Wilford Hess, “... it would also have been unusual for an olive grower to graft wild branches onto a tame tree, ... but circumstances exist when it makes good sense to do so. Due to the vigor and disease resistance of certain wild species, grafting wild stock onto a tame tree can strengthen and revitalize a distressed plant.”

Hess states, “... knowing that it was highly unusual to graft wild branches into a domesticated tree teaches about the extent and effort the Lord makes to reclaim His lost children.”

Further Reading

Wilford M. Hess, Daniel J. Fairbanks, John W. Welch, and Jonathan K. Driggs, “[Botanical Aspects of Olive Culture Relevant to Jacob 5](#),” in *The Allegory of the*

Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 484–561.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Zenos Give So Many Details About Raising Good Olives? \(Jacob 5:9-10\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 71 (April 5, 2016).

Jacob 5:41 — The Lord Asks What More He Could Have Done

In this verse, we can see the long-suffering nature of the Lord. What does the owner of the vineyard want to do? He is tempted to get rid of the tree. The servant comes back and says, “You know, we still have not succeeded. There are still problems down there,” and then he begs, “Give me one more time,” and the Lord is merciful and says, “Fine.” They work, and they work, and the servant says, “What more could I possibly have done?” Well this mercy and long-suffering are the predominate feelings that Jacob gets out of this allegory—and he wants his people to hear that.

Jacob 5:48 — Balancing the Growth of the Roots and the Loftiness of the Branches

In botany, we learn that we must have a balance between the roots and the branches. If the roots become too strong, they will keep the nutrients down there, and they will not be pushed up into the branches. If the branches are too big, though, they suck up all the strength from the roots.

In the parable, a lot of effort was expended on keeping the tradition, the roots, the covenant, and the foundational elements of Israel balanced with not running too fast, not looking beyond the mark, knowing their (and our) place, and not getting too lofty. Those lofty branches are always lopped off. A lot of them are suckers that never produce anything way up there, but they take a lot of strength away from the root.

I have seen a lot of olive trees in California, Galilee, and other places, but it was not until we went to Sicily, driving along the highway, I noticed that all of the olive trees there had a flat top. They had *butched* the top of these trees. We ended up staying in a place where it was actually a farm, an agricultural touristic place, so we were able to talk to the owner who was very proud of the quality of the olive oil that they produced there. I asked him why the trees are all cut off. He said, “Well, there are two reasons we cut those off. The first is to make it easier to pick because they grow way up there. The second, we do not get really good fruit up high. The best fruit is grown on the lower branches.”



Figure 6 Very old Olive Tree, in the garden of the Church of All Nations, Jerusalem. Photo: John W. Welch



Figure 7 Well-pruned olive orchard in western Sicily. Photo: John W. Welch

Jacob 5:61, 70, 72 — Other Servants Are Called

There is one servant at first. There were no more servants until the very end, when the final pre-harvest efforts are essential. When it was harvest time, they got everybody out there shaking the trees and collecting—they would actually catch the olives in nets or little cloths. They stood there and shook the trees. Interestingly, the psalmists refer to shaking the trees with no more information about why they were doing that, but they were harvesting. They called for all hands on deck. All the servants went out to harvest the fruit from the trees. The fruit of the olive tree was very valuable. It was pressed in an olive press (Figures 8 and 9) and used for many purposes: (1) for lighting temple lamps, anointings, and offerings, (2) skin ointment, medicine, burning in household lamps, cooking, eating, (3) the initial press residue was for burning in stoves, and (4) even the dregs were used for fertilizer, herbicide, and curing and sealing new pottery jars.



Figure 8 Michael Spencer and John W. Welch with Olive Press in Sepphoris, Galilee. Photo: Rita Spencer



Figure 9 Olive Press, near Peter's home in Capernaum, Galilee. Photo: John W. Welch

In addition to the central tree of the allegory, there were lots of trees in the vineyard and in the nethermost part. We do not know how many there were, but they represent the whole world with all its people. Zenos, as an early Israelite prophet, may have seen Jerusalem as the high place where the tree was planted. The tree represented the people that were brought out of Egypt and planted in Jerusalem where they built the temple. Exodus 15:17 refers to the Lord planning to *plant* his people on a high mountain. That planting can be seen as a type of many plantings by the Lord of his people in many times and places, from the Old World to the New, from the East to the West, near and far.

Further Reading

For many other marvelous studies of the olive tree, see the full 625-page volume, *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994). In addition to the chapters already mentioned, see also Truman Madsen on the olive press as a symbol of Christ, Noel Reynolds on Nephite uses of the Zenos's allegory, Paul Hoskisson on a detailed reading of Jacob 5 in connection with the history of Israel, Authur Henry King on language themes in Zenos's brilliant scripture, and John Tvedtnes on olive oil as a symbol of the Holy Ghost.

In addition, for an update and review essay on olive horticulture, see Wilford M. Hess, "Recent Notes about Olives in Antiquity," *BYU Studies* 39, no. 4 (2000): 115–126.

Jacob 6

Jacob 6:2–5 — Jacob Discusses the Allegory

Having quoted Zenos in full, Jacob picks up where he left off at the end of Jacob 4, applying this prophecy to his own people. In verse 2, the Nephites heard Jacob say, "God is going to set his hand a second time to recover his people," and so Jacob assures his people that they should not feel too bad sitting way out here in the middle of nowhere. Remember that the Lord is going to set his hand another time, and we will play a role in that gathering.

Verse 3 teaches, "How blessed are they who have labored diligently in his vineyard," so get to work! We must be like these laborers coming and working diligently. It is hard work to prune and to dig and to dung and to cultivate and to work for a long, long time, year after year, to see that the Lord is pleased. "And how cursed are they who shall be cast out into their own place! And the world shall be burned with fire."

But there is hope in verses 4–5: “How merciful is our God unto us, for he remembereth the house of Israel, both roots and branches” (Jacob 6:4). Those roots are the roots back in Jerusalem. The Nephites are a part of the branches. “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. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you” (Jacob 6:4–5). God has not forgotten. Where in the allegory do you see this attitude of mercy, care, concern? Just about everywhere.

Jacob 6:7 — Jacob Does Not Want the Nephites to be Cast into the Fire

I think that Jacob, as the temple priest, may have been concerned about blood coming on to his own garments. Where would a temple priest encounter blood? Every time he sacrificed an animal, he would likely get stained in blood. That blood, of course, was atoning blood and was expiating for the sins of the people who were making the sacrifices. The priest was a holy person who could absorb that blood, whereas the other people could not. The priest would go through his own re-purification so that he could serve as a holy instrument ensuring that his people’s sins would be forgiven. He would also light a fire and keep it burning continually on the altar of the temple, day and night, according to Leviticus 6:12–13. They continually kept a fire burning so that the impurities could be put into the fire and burned. Thus, when Jacob referred to the branches that were being cut off, “hewn down and cast into the fire,” he may have also been referencing some of the things he did for them as their temple priest.

Jacob 6:8–9 — Jacob Implores His People to Not Reject His Words

In verse 8, Jacob implores his people to heed his words: “Do not reject the words of the prophets that have been spoken concerning Christ ... after so many have spoken concerning him; and deny the good word of Christ, and the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and quench the Holy Spirit, and make a mock of the great plan of redemption.” The Father (God), the Son (Christ), and the Holy Ghost are all present in that statement.

“Quenching” means “pouring water on.” This could be a plea that the people not extinguish the temple fire, which must always be kept burning (Leviticus 6:12–13). When Jacob declared, Do not “make a mock of the great plan of redemption,” for God should not be mocked, he wanted to be sure that they appreciated and did not mock and ridicule the things that were going on in that all-important temple. Otherwise, they would have “shame and awful guilt” when they would stand “before the bar of God” (Jacob 6:9).

The purpose of the temple, of course, is to bring people into the presence of God, and we all hope that it will be a pleasant experience, that we have been purified to be able to stand before God and to be in his presence. But if we are not pure, we will stand with shame and awful guilt. It is significant that Jacob focuses his brief concluding remarks on temple elements. Just as Zenos's allegory ends with God's judgment harvest, Jacob ends with counsel and exhortation to remain faithful to the Lord, keep the commandments, and honor their temple laws, rituals, and covenants.

Jacob 6:11–13 — Jacob Bids Farewell to His People

What did Jacob really want his people to learn from the long parable? He concluded, "O then, my beloved brethren, repent ye, ... and continue in the way" (6:11), which may be an allusion to Psalm 1:3, 5, 6), promising the righteous that they will be "like a tree ... that bringeth forth his fruit in his season, ... for the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

"Finally," Jacob says, "I bid you farewell until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear. Amen." Here Jacob is saying goodbye to his people. He tells them that God's judgment will be pleasant and pleasing for the righteous, but it will be awful for the wicked. Jacob used the word "pleasing" six times in this sensitive book, referring to the tenderness and chastity of wives and children as "pleasing unto God" (Jacob 2:7), three times to describe the word of God as "pleasing" (2:8, 9; 3:2), once here speaking of the "pleasing bar of God," and finally that the outcome of Sherem's case was "pleasing unto me, Jacob, ... for the Lord had heard my cry and answered my prayer" (7:22).

It seems that, at the time Jacob gave his speech and long allegory in Jacob 4–6, he was sick or old, for it seems that he saw himself as being close to dying. But yet he would live long enough to withstand Sherem's strong confrontation, which Jacob reports in his one remaining chapter. Perhaps Sherem took advantage of Jacob's old age or poor health. Perhaps Sherem was previously well-known to Jacob, and possibly Sherem was the one Jacob had in mind when he warned people not to "reject my words" or "reject the words of the prophets; and ... all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ" (Jacob 6:8). Indeed, Sherem opposed Jacob specifically on his prophecies and teachings about Christ and his way.

Jacob 7

Jacob 7:1 — Who Was Sherem?

Who was this anti-Christ? He is not called an anti-Christ here, but he clearly was not accepting the doctrines that Jacob had been developing, applying them even further than did Nephi. Jacob, knowing the temple and being involved in the temple, had been emphasizing the role of Jesus as the Redeemer, as the Messiah, and as the source of salvation.

We do not know where Sherem came from, but it appears he did not come from the “temple lot.” The group of people who were loyal to the temple, such as the priests who operated the temple, probably came from Jacob’s and Joseph’s own families. On the other hand, it appears that Nephi’s sons may have inherited the government, the kingship, and the palace. It could be that Sherem came from the palace side. Jacob had already upset everybody in the aristocracy by calling them strongly to repentance, especially for their excesses regarding wealth and women, things prohibited to the king by Deuteronomy 17 (Jacob 2–3).

So, there may have been a power struggle in this little city about whether the king or the high priest had ultimate authority over the other. Does that sound familiar? Congress, the Supreme Court, the President—who is going to have ultimate authority here? These power struggles are perennial.

In verse 1, though, we get an odd thing: “After some years had passed away, there came a man *among* the people of Nephi.” That almost sounds as though Sherem was coming from outside. It is possible he was coming from the Lamanite-Lemuelite-Ishmaelite people, since the people of Nephi consisted of the Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites and Zoramites. Even if Sherem was one of the Lamanites, at this era of history he would have been a close cousin of the Nephites.

Sherem often gets lumped in with the anti-Christes like Korihor. However, Korihor was an atheist; he did not believe in religion or being under God at all. Sherem, on the other hand, at least purported to believe in the Law of Moses. To paraphrase, he said, “I just want the Law of Moses plain and simple; don’t muck it up with all this Christology stuff.” Over at the palace they would have been perfectly happy to have stayed with the Law of Moses, and that’s clear and sufficient. In a way, it was similar to what Joseph Smith would encounter; people believed in the Bible, but that was all.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "The Case of Sherem" in John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press: 2008), chapter 5, 108. "Sherem was intelligent, eloquent, and persuasive (Jacob 7:4), abilities that link him to the educated people in the small city of Nephi and probably to the royal group controlled by the kings who succeeded Nephi in the land of Nephi. Sherem's strident defense of the law of Moses as the source of righteousness would have appealed to royal administrators, who perhaps supported or even were the source of Sherem's political points of view. Because Zoram had been a servant to a public official in Jerusalem, it is enticing to think that Sherem may have been a Zoramite or may have had Zoramite ties."

Jacob 7:3 — Sherem Wants to Meet Jacob

This was certainly a very serious legal event, but it was also an important spiritual event for the whole community, because this is a stand-off of cosmic significance. "Are we going to worship Christ? Are we going to look forward to his coming many years in the future? How can you be a true prophet and prophesy about something that is so far in the future that you cannot even verify whether the prophecy is going to come to pass or not?" Sherem argued that it was out of order for a prophet to speak of something so far in the future because the truth of any such statement was untestable; they could not verify it and in none of their lifetimes could they verify whether it was going to be a true prophecy or not (Deuteronomy 13). Therefore, he claimed, that worship of Christ must be considered illegal, based on false prophecy.

Jacob 7:4 — Sherem Was an Educated Man

Sherem was a very sophisticated and over-confident challenger. How do we know this? He had a substantial and technical vocabulary; he was a very persuasive person. In this verse, it says that he was learned, and that could only mean that he knew the religious tradition in this small world. What else would he have studied? They did not have a chemistry department or a statistics department, but he had a perfect knowledge of the language *of the people*. Notice that Jacob does not say that he had a perfect knowledge of the language *of the scriptures*. He may not have known how to read the reformed Egyptian and things like that, but he knew the vernacular; he knew the idioms and what would play well with the people.

In this, he was a little bit like Korihor, who certainly was a demagogue and knew how to raise arguments that sounded good, but that were obviously pernicious and misguided. We read that Sherem "could use much flattery," so he was obviously playing to the crowd. He may have tried to appeal to their wanting to have things plainer, or at least to doing things the more familiar or traditional way.

He was dedicated in some way to the Law of Moses, and he thought that what Jacob was doing was not strict enough or did not follow the correct way of understanding the Law of Moses. He did not oppose the Law of Moses at all. In fact, he thought that Jacob was the one who didn't understand it quite correctly. However, what his view of the Law of Moses was or what the details of that argument were, we do not know.

Jacob 7:5 — Sherem Wanted to Shake Jacob's Faith

In Jacob 4:6, Jacob had said that their faith had become “unshaken,” but when we read Jacob 7:5, what did Sherem hope to do? Jacob said, “He had hoped to shake me from the faith.” Apparently, Sherem took Jacob's statement as a challenge. “Well you think you are unshaken; I will do my best to shake you.”

Jacob 7:6–7 — Sherem Raises a Judicial Complaint against Jacob

If you look back to see how people have previously described this encounter, they have usually seen it in the light of a philosophical or theological argument. Yet in the ancient world, these matters were never just theological concepts. If it were some kind of an intellectual discussion, why should Sherem end up dying over it?

There are clues that we are in the sphere of high-level legal material from the very outset. That word “contend” shows up in the Old Testament, so we have a good idea what it would have been in Hebrew; it is *rib*, the word for a “lawsuit.” So, when it says that Sherem *contends*, it means that he was bringing a legal action. He was raising an accusation against Jacob. As the high priest, Jacob would typically have been the chief judge in such matters. However, since Jacob was the accused, all that either of them could do was submit the matter to divine judgment. Likewise, in this context, if Jacob bore to Sherem his “testimony,” the word would mean here “witness” as in a witness in court under oath.

The accuser typically had to have personal knowledge of the alleged violation before he could commence his accusation. This is somewhat like our rule that you have to have *standing* in order to bring a lawsuit. The accuser also bore the burden of proof.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “The Case of Sherem,” *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, 122. “The crucial test in this regard is found in Deuteronomy: ‘If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him *that which is wrong*; Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD’ (Deuteronomy 19:16–17). Thus, Sherem's conduct requesting Jacob to produce divine evidence was not a casual case of idle sign seeking, but rather followed a significant rule of ancient Israelite jurisprudence.’”

Jacob 7:6–7 — A Nephite Trial with Jewish Roots

In the ancient world, trials could take place anywhere, but they typically took place either on the steps of the temple or the gates to the city. This case probably happened in a public place, partly because of the use of the word *contend* which is normally associated with contending in the gates. In addition, if Jacob and Sherem had simply conversed in private without public witnesses or observers, the pro-Sherem portion of the populace may have suspected foul play when Sherem fell helplessly to the ground. Nobody said, “What happened to him?” So it would seem that there were people present who knew, when Sherem fell, that the will of God had been manifested. And someone needed to care for him and keep him alive “for many days” after he fell to the ground (7:15). In addition, there would have been less reason for Sherem to have made a public retraction, had he not made a public accusation. His final confession was more than just a confession; it was an attempt to undo the damage that he had done. He had probably spoken out on many occasions; he probably had a following, so there was a great likelihood of this involving some of the public.

Nowadays, we recognize a professional judge by the robes he wears. There was no professional judiciary in the ancient world. Every man could be called to sit on a panel of judges, rather like our juries are. People who happened to be at the town gate could be impaneled and sit as a judge on that case. Trials usually were short. They would never go over a day or two long. If they did not have the necessary witnesses, the court would simply adjourn and give people time to bring the witnesses, but typically, cases in the ancient world probably lasted only a couple of hours.

Jacob was wise. He knew he would be unable to persuade Sherem, but Sherem also was skilled; he presented his case competently and sufficiently to call the question. Sherem probably knew that he would have to go through some kind of ordeal to seek validation of his claims and to substantiate his accusations.

Sherem accused Jacob of the capital offense false prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:20), likely on several grounds. This was a capital offense. Second, he also accused Jacob of blasphemy. The crime of blasphemy was narrowed by later Jewish traditions and law, so that that only speaking the holy name of God out loud qualified as an offense, but in pre-exilic Israel, *blasphemy* could mean a broad range of insolent or seditious statements; anything that was demeaning of God, of the king, or the leader could qualify. Even a slave could blaspheme the master by speaking insolently. It was a very serious offense, as we see when Abinadi said that God would come down and suffer, a very unflattering statement about God, and so the priests of Noah accused Abinadi of blasphemy on that very ground. Blasphemy was also a capital offense, under Leviticus 24. Third, leading

people into apostasy was another accusation that Sherem levelled; it was also a capital crime under the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 13).

So, Sherem accused Jacob of three capital crimes, and I guess he figured that all he had to do was win on one of the three. Sherem may have felt certain that God would sustain him. However, God does not support the wicked, and we know how the story ends. If Sherem had won, there likely would have been friends of Sherem who would have executed Jacob. But the way it turned out, in many ways, must have become a foundational precedent at the beginning of Nephite legal history which would affect the next 400 or 500 years of Nephite history until the coming of Christ.

Jacob 7:8–12 — Jacob Answers Sherem’s Accusations

The reason Jacob did not simply ignore Sherem’s slander, is that it was Jacob’s obligation to answer. Under this legal system, once a formal accusation had been raised, silence or failure to respond was a confession of guilt. Whereas we have the right to remain silent under our law today, they did not. So Jacob spoke up boldly, “having the spirit of the Lord insomuch that Jacob did confound him in all his words.” Such a protestation of innocence could be transformed into a legal accusation against the accuser, raising a counterclaim of some kind, and indeed, that was the effect of what Jacob said in his reply.

Jacob, responding to Sherem’s sentiments (“How can you say these things? Your ideas are confused”), rebuffed Sherem with scriptures regarding the coming of the Messiah and withstood him with contrary testimony. Jacob may have even responded to Sherem with an oath. If a party to a lawsuit swore an oath by God, that was the most powerful piece of evidence that a person could bring before a court. In Neo-Babylonian texts, after the Jews were taken captive to Babylon, we notice that the Babylonian legal system shifted from what we might call *religious* trials to more evidentiary-based trials. People no longer used ordeals, consulted the gods, or required people to take oaths before the rising of the sun, and so on, as they had in previous centuries. What they now asked for was documents, witnesses, and evidence. But that legal development had not yet occurred in the world that Lehi and Nephi and Jacob would have known. Their trials would likely have still involved putting more weight on oaths and ordeals to show the will of God than some kind of logical argumentation.

In the ancient world these oaths would invoke curses upon the oathmaker, such as, “If I am not telling the truth, then may I die of this awful disease, or may all my crops fail, or may all my animals die, etc.” Sometimes they would even take a little animal, cut the animal’s throat, and say, “If I’m not telling the truth, then may I die like this animal has died, may the gods make this happen to me.” In Alma 46:21, when Captain Moroni

gathered the troops, they all ripped their coats, and started stomping on the coats as a symbol of what would happen to them if they did not fight. They were making their covenant of allegiance and loyalty to Moroni with that same kind of symbolic action. They took these oaths very, very seriously.

But do we have any evidence that Jacob swore an oath? It may be found in the word *truly*. “They [the scriptures] *truly* testify of Christ.” The word *truly* is like the word *verily*, which is the word *amen*. When you used that word, you were often doing so in some kind of oath-swearing context. Maybe Jacob went that far. He was saying something like, “How can I counter your accusations except by my taking an oath.” That would then shift the burden of proof back to the other person, because the one who has taken the oath was presumed to be telling the truth. It was a very drastic level of testimony, because if they were wrong, they were not only causing themselves harm but they were offending God himself.

Jacob 7:13 — Sherem Requests a Sign

Sherem’s response to Jacob’s rebuttal turned out to be ill-fated. He could have retracted his allegations, but a retreat would have been hard, because the laws were pretty strict against false accusers. People could not lightly initiate a complaint without its being, in effect, a sworn statement. Presumably, if Sherem had retreated, Jacob probably would have not pursued the matter, but as you read in Deuteronomy 19, the punishment for those who initiate false lawsuits was strict. “Then shall ye do unto him as he thought to have done unto his brother.” If someone falsely brought a claim of capital significance and lost, the punishment was that the accuser was put to death. The threshold for bringing a legal action in this world was very high. They did not have a litigious society as a result of that.

So, at this point there were Sherem’s accusations and Jacob’s testimony in contrast—and it was a tie, a stand-off. The most common method of breaking such a tie was to draw on divine directions. In the case of Jacob and Sherem, it was Sherem who said, “Show me a sign.” He asked for some kind of divine oracle or manifestation, and that put the burden back on Jacob. Jacob had brought into the discussion the Holy Spirit, and therefore Sherem no doubt felt justified in saying, “Alright, let us take this one step further. You show me something to prove that God is on your side.” It appears that Sherem genuinely believed that he was right. He was about to learn that he had been deceived. I am willing to give him the benefit of the doubt; this matter was so serious that he would not have just gone casually through this as a political or intellectual maneuver of some kind.

Jacob 7:14–15 — The Lord Smites Sherem to the Earth

Then the question becomes, “Why does Jacob comply?” Jacob may have been willing to do this because he was not the one who had asked for the sign, so there was a manifestation of divine punishment that occurred as Jacob asked that the will of the Lord be done. The power of the Lord came upon Sherem insomuch that he fell to the earth. He was brought down to the dust, and this was a sign that he was wrong. Well, you might say, “Why does falling down prove that you were wrong?” In order to be an accuser, you had to stand up, and now that he was unable to stand his accusation literally fell flat.

Jacob 7:16–18 — Sherem Confesses His Sins

Under such circumstances, it would have been pretty clear to everyone that God had *cursed* such a person, and Sherem realized this. He also knew that if he went to his death without confessing what he had done wrong, things would go really badly for him. He had been nourished, or kept alive, by the ministering of the people for many days (7:14). And as he admitted, he believed that God was there and he believed in judgment, so he confessed.

Under Jewish law, if a person was going to be executed, the priests were told to instruct the person on how to give a proper confession, so that things would go as well as possible in the next life. Once they had obtained the confession of the guilty, they could then stone them. Sherem probably knew this. He confessed. In verse 18 he plainly said that he had been deceived.

In Jacob 6:8–10, Jacob had spoken interesting words in describing those who reject the prophets and reject the words concerning Christ. It refers to standing before God with shame and awful guilt. Sherem expressed that shame and guilt as a part of his confession. He knew that his condition and state would be awful and used several of these same words that Jacob had used.

As part of Sherem’s confession, shortly before his death, he requested that a public assembly be convened so that he could speak to the people. The assembly met so that Sherem could publicly confess his error and retract his previous teachings. A *rib*, or juridical dispute, was completed through some kind of confession, so it was perfectly suitable to the nature of this proceeding that it would have to come to some resolution by a confession, and it is interesting that it was not a forced confession. Later, Nehor will be “caused” to confess in Alma chapter 1, while Korihor will not confess entirely voluntarily, and his confession was deemed incomplete and inadequate by Alma. But Sherem seems to have given a fully acceptable, voluntary confession.

He denied the things which he had taught them. He “confessed the Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels. And he spake plainly unto them, that he had been deceived by the power of the devil. And he spake of hell, and of eternity, and of eternal punishment” (Jacob 5:17–18). Bear in mind Jacob’s discussion of the fate of those who would be punished eternally, back in Chapter 6. Then he says—and notice that this is a chiasmic confession, of which the center is, “I fear lest I have committed the unpardonable sin.”

This is the only quotation we have from Sherem. Jacob had simply summarized previously, but here are Sherem’s actual words. Bear in mind that Jacob introduced Sherem to his readers as someone who was skillful with the use of words. Interestingly and true to form, he made as complete a confession as possible. Why? Maybe he was hoping that somehow the curse would be lifted; that he will be healed. That did not happen in Sherem’s case, but he may have been trying to do everything he possibly could to reconcile himself not just with Jacob and Jacob’s people, but primarily with God.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Do We Learn About Ministering from the Account of Sherem? \(Jacob 7:15\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 534 (October 3, 2019).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Sherem Die? \(Jacob 7:7\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 73 (April 7, 2016).

Jacob 7:23— Peace and God’s Love Are Restored

When a controversy came up in the ancient world, when there were arguments and problems, society was disrupted. The overriding purpose of any lawsuit was not so much to punish someone. The ultimate objective of law in the ancient world was to settle the dispute, to restore peace, to get the people happy with each other again, somehow, and on terms that everyone could accept.

When you think of the temple, what is its purpose? Unity, peace, harmony, building Zion. Sometimes you have to cast the devil out to make that happen, but the objective is to have the peace of the spirit of God on the earth and for eternity. And thus Jacob concludes “that peace and the love of God was restored again among the people” (7:23). They again searched the scriptures, gave no more heed to Sherem, and *tried* (even if it was in vain) to restore the Lamanites to the truth (7:24). Life ended sadly for Jacob, born in tribulation, lonesome, and mourning. But he passed on the records obedient to Nephi’s command, hoping that many may read his words (7:27).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Do the Authors on the Small Plates Follow a Pattern? \(Jacob 7:27\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 74 (April 8, 2016).