We will concentrate on chapter 5, the longest chapter in the Book of Mormon. However, because chapters 4 and 5 were one chapter in the first edition of the Book of Mormon, and Jacob 4:15–18 is essential to understanding the allegory, I suggest that you read both chapters as part of the lesson.

Rather than the usual verse-by-verse list of thought questions, here are two outlines of the chapter followed by a few general thought questions on chapter 5 and then several questions on chapters 6–7.

Outline 1

*Jacob 4:15–16:* The stumbling stone is also the only possible foundation.

*Verses 17–18:* If someone has rejected the only stone that could be their foundation, how can it become that foundation? (Compare Romans 11.)

*Jacob 5:3:* The master finds the olive tree (the house of Israel) in “decay.”

*Verses 4–5:* The master prunes it, digs about it, and nourishes it, hoping it will send out new shoots.

*Verse 6:* It sends out new shoots, but the top dies.
**Verses 7:** In an effort to save the tree, the master commands his servant to bring wild olive branches to be grafted in, and he says the old branches will be burned.

**Verse 8:** The master says he will take the new shoots and graft them in somewhere else. What matters most is that the root of the old tree is preserved.

**Verse 11:** The master has the old grafted tree dug about, pruned, and nourished, saying he has grafted in the new branches in an attempt to save the root.

**Verses 13–14:** The master takes the new shoots to secret places in the garden and plants them to preserve them and their fruit.

**Verse 17:** The tree into which the wild branches were grafted bears good fruit, fruit like the natural fruit. The tree has been saved.

**Verses 20–25:** The master and the servant visit the transplanted new shoots. Two have been placed in poor spots in the garden but have produced good fruit. One has been placed in a good spot but has produced mixed fruit: some branches bear good fruit, some don’t.

**Verse 26:** The master commands the servant to cut off the branches that do not bear good fruit and to burn them.

**Verse 27–28:** The servant dissuades him. They dig about and nourish all the trees in the vineyard.

**Verses 30–32:** When they return to the original, grafted tree, they discover that it bears a lot of fruit, none of it good.
Verses 38–40: When they check the transplanted trees, they discover that they too all bear bad fruit. The good branch of the tree that brought forth mixed fruit has withered away.

Verse 48: The servant suggests that the trees have gone bad because the tops have been allowed to “overcome” the roots.

Verses 49–51: The master says, “Let’s cut all of them down and burn them,” but the servant asks him to wait and he agrees.

Verses 52–56: In order to save the roots, the master and the servant remove the worst of the branches of the old, grafted tree and graft the natural branches back in. Then they graft branches from the old tree onto the transplanted trees.

Verse 62: The master orders that the trees be dug about and nourished one more, final time.

Verse 65: As the trees grow, the master commands that the workers are to gradually remove the worst branches.

Verses 73–74: With the worst branches gradually removed and the growth of the tops kept in line with the root system, the trees begin to produce good fruit again, each of them equal to the other.

Verses 77–76: The Lord of the vineyard gathers fruit for a long time from these trees but suggests that some of the branches will eventually go bad again. He says that when that happens, he will preserve the good and put the bad “in its own place.” In the end, however, he will burn the entire vineyard.
Outline 2

I.

a. The stumbling stone and the foundation stone are the same.
b. How can a stumbling stone become a foundation stone?

II.

a. The olive tree is found in decay.
b. It is nourished but produces only a few new shoots; the old part remains decayed.
c. The wild is grafted in; the new shoots are transplanted.

III.

a. The old tree bears good fruit; of three transplants, three produce good fruit and one produces some of each.
b. The master is dissuaded from destroying the bad branches on the one transplanted tree.

IV.

a. Later all the trees are producing bad fruit, and the good branches of the one previously mixed tree has withered away. The cause: the tops grew faster than the roots could bear.
b. The servant dissuades the master from destroying the entire garden.

V.

a. They cross-graft the trees.
b. They nourish the trees and gradually remove the worst branches.
c. All of the trees begin to produce good fruit.

VI.

Some will produce bad fruit in the future; those branches that do will be removed.

VII.

At the end the whole garden will be burned.

Overall questions: Jacob 5

1. Why do the scriptures use allegories and metaphors? What might that say about how we should think about the scriptures? Might it say anything about how we should think? Does the fact that a prophet uses metaphors suggest that the things that he teaches might all be “only” metaphorical? Why not? Should we, perhaps, teach our children more about metaphor and allegory than we usually do? Should we, perhaps, learn to use them more than we usually do?

2. Who or what do each of the elements of the allegory represent? Verse 3 identifies the original tree. What does the
wild tree represent? What about the master? The servant? The grafting of the wild branches into the old tree? The transplanting of the old branches? Pruning, digging about, and nourishing? The good fruit? The bad fruit?

3. What does each event in the story stand for? Does this allegory have one meaning, or one way of being understood? If so, why is it given as an allegory? Why not just tell us the point? If not, what are some of the things it teaches us?

4. In two different places the servant dissuades the vineyard master from carrying out his plans for destruction, once with bad results, once with good. What might this teach us? About ourselves? About prophets? About the Lord?

5. Why was the allegory of Zenos important to the Nephites?

6. Why is it important to us?

7. Why is the olive tree used in this allegory?

8. What other trees are important scriptural symbols? The trees in the Garden of Eden? The tree of life in Lehi’s dream? The tree that grows from the seed planted in our hearts (Alma 32:37)? The cross? Any others? Why is a tree such an appropriate symbol? Does the use of the tree as a symbol in each of these places connect the others in some way or ways? How?

Jacob 6

How is the prophecy of this chapter related to the allegory? Why does Jacob first read/record the allegory, then give a prophecy of his own that has a similar message, if not the same one? To whom is Jacob speaking, those who are of the
house of Israel (the Church), or those who are not? How is that significant?

**Verses 4–5:** How are these two verses related to each other? One way to think about that is to ask what to make of the word *wherefore* at the beginning of verse 5.

**Verses 11–12:** Jacob commands the people to repent, and then he commands them to be wise. Do these mean the same thing? What kind of wisdom is repentance? Is the wisdom of repentance prudential: we will avoid our guilt if we do? Or is it something else? Is repentance, the mighty change of heart, itself a kind of wisdom?

**Jacob 7**

Why does this story follow the allegory of the olive tree? What is the thematic connection?

**Verses 1, 4:** Do these verses suggest that perhaps Sherem was an outsider, someone who did not come from among Jacob’s people and was not a native speaker of their language?