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Author(s): David Rolph Seely and John W. Welch

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Zenos and the Texts of the Old Testament

David Rolph Seely and John W. Welch

When Jacob rehearsed to his people the extensive allegory of the olive tree, he quoted to them “the words of the prophet Zenos, which he spake unto the house of Israel” (Jacob 5:1). The words of Zenos were known to the Nephites from the plates of brass, which originated in Israel sometime prior to Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem around 600 B.C. The ancient Israelite origin of Zenos’s allegory logically invites a comparison between the writings of Zenos and those of other early Israelite prophets. In light of the fact that plants, especially the olive and the vine, were often used in the Bible to symbolize God’s relationships with Israel, a large field of Old Testament literature exists that can be extensively and profitably compared with Jacob 5.¹ This paper sets out the main texts in the Old Testament relevant to the allegory of the olive tree and shows how the olive tree was used anciently to symbolize both blessing and cursing, both prosperity and judgment. By approaching these Old Testament olive texts in their approximate chronological order, it is also argued that the best way to account for all of these texts is to conclude that Zenos was a relatively early prophet who stood near the head of this persistent and powerful Israelite literary theme. First, consider the following series of texts.



An old stand of olive trees in Israel. The image of the olive symbolized many positive aspects of God's relationship with Israel, including his mercy, love, care, and long-suffering. In addition, it symbolized positive qualities in Israel: its fruitfulness, longevity, and ability to thrive in relatively poor soil and to be improved by grafting. The olive, however, also symbolized certain negative characteristics in Israelite history, such as tendencies to revert to a wild state, to produce bitter fruit, and to decay. Several prophets in Israel utilized the imagery of the olive tree, but no one did so more comprehensively and effectively than did the Prophet Zenos.

EXODUS 15

The seminal text from which the olive imagery in the Old Testament seems to have sprouted is Exodus 15:17. Shortly after their exodus out of Egypt and into the Sinai, being delivered from bondage and oppression under the miraculous leadership of the prophet Moses, the Israelites sang a triumphant song celebrating Pharaoh's defeat and Jehovah's deliverance of his people on dry land in the midst of the sea. Exodus 15:1–19, known as the Song of the Sea,² is one of the earliest examples of Israelite poetry in the Old Testament.³ A sort of ballad commemorating the monu-

mental liberation of Israel, these verses became one of the foundational documents in the collective cultural memory and spiritual awareness of the Israelites for centuries to come. The Song of the Sea ends by extolling the Lord and prophesying that he will bring the Israelites into a new land and plant them there in a high and sacred station: "Thou shalt bring them in, and *plant* them in the *mountain* of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, *which thou hast made* for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established" (Exodus 15:17, emphasis added).

Implicit in this text are the seeds of a full-blown image. Here Israel is depicted as a plant. It is to be planted in a high place, the place of the Lord's inheritance, or, in other words, in the Lord's eternal family estate. This place is said to have been prepared personally by the hands of the Lord, obviously with love and care toward his people. The message of this imagery is not that God is exiling the Israelites to some remote and obscure place, but that he is bringing them home to his own property, to live in his own land and be a part of his own household. Consistent with common ancient Near Eastern imagery, this high and holy mountain is identified with the House of the Lord, the sanctuary, or temple, in which the Lord lived.⁴

The plant in Exodus 15:17 is not specifically identified but would likely be either an olive tree or a vine, both of which are used in the Old Testament to personify Israel. For example, Psalm 52:8, Hosea 14:6, and Jeremiah 11:16 all compare Israel to an olive tree, and Psalm 80:8–16, Isaiah 5:1–7, Hosea 14:7, and Ezekiel 19:10 compare Israel to a vine. Hosea 14:6–7 is an important passage because it compares Israel both to an olive tree and a vine. These passages demonstrate that in many ways the olive tree and the vine are synonymous images.⁵ Both represent staples of the

ancient economy and diet: oil and wine. For example, in Jotham's parable of the trees who would not be king and the bramble who would (Judges 9:7–21), the olive is the first candidate and the vine the third, after the fig. Olive trees and vineyards are often mentioned together as the mainstays of agriculture in Israel (Exodus 23:11; Deuteronomy 6:11; 24:20–21; Joshua 24:13; Judges 15:5; 2 Kings 5:26; Amos 4:9). In addition, both need to be cared for, nourished, and carefully pruned in order to be productive—all images conducive of a comparison with man's relationship to God.

The dominance and the development of the themes of Exodus 15:17 in Jacob 5 are evident. Zenos begins with the image of "a tame olive tree, which a man *took* and nourished in his vineyard" (Jacob 5:3, emphasis added). This seems to allude back to the planting prophesied earlier in Exodus 15:17. As the plant in Jacob 5 waxes old and begins to decay, further plantings and transplantings are mentioned by Zenos. Eight times the English word *plant* or *planted* is used by Zenos (Jacob 5:21, 23, 24, 25, 43, 44, 52, 54), showing the strength of this metaphor from Exodus 15 in depicting God's dynamic relationship to his people.

Moreover, Zenos explicitly states that the olive tree was planted and cared for in the man's own vineyard (Jacob 5:3). Thus, the loving care and personal attention given to the vineyard by its Lord show that the preparations made by the hand of the Lord and mentioned in Exodus 15 were not discontinued or abandoned.

Furthermore, Zenos begins his allegory with the mental image of the large and central olive tree standing at the top of a high point in the vineyard, for when the Lord hides the natural branches in order to preserve them he takes them down into the "nethermost parts of the vineyard" (Jacob 5:14). The image of height recalls the mountain of Exodus

15:17. No explicit temple imagery, however, has been detected in Jacob 5. Since Jacob probably delivered the sermon reported in Jacob 4–6 from the temple in the city of Nephi (just as he spoke from that temple when he delivered his prophetic chastisements in Jacob 2–4; see Jacob 2:2), we can be relatively confident that no explicit temple allusions were present in Zenos's Hebrew text, for otherwise Jacob would probably have noted and utilized them in his own temple context as he spoke from the temple of Nephi. The absence of temple imagery in Zenos's allegory, like any other argument from silence, is not particularly significant, but it may be taken as slight evidence that Zenos wrote before the temple of Solomon was constructed, for if his allegory had been written when that temple was standing, the reference to the sanctuary in Exodus 15 would have been difficult for Zenos to overlook.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF OLIVE IMAGERY

The thrust of the plant imagery in Exodus 15 is positive. It emphasizes the merciful blessings given by the Lord to his people. The promised land of Israel was "a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey" (Deuteronomy 8:8). But early in the development of this Old Testament literary theme, negative implications of this imagery began to emerge. Just as plants, especially the olive, are symbols of life, they also symbolize death and decay; and just as the covenant promises great blessings, so it also contains curses. While olive trees live a long time and with fertilizer can survive in relatively dry and stony conditions, giving hope for an abundant harvest and a peaceful beautiful existence, this plant also requires regular attention and cultivation to pre-

vent it from reverting to a decayed or wild state. Thus, as early as Deuteronomy 28:40, one of many poignant curses heaped upon the heads of the Israelites in the event they disobeyed the voice of the Lord was couched in terms of olive symbolism: "Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil; for thine olive shall cast his fruit." Accordingly, the image of the olive tree supported symbols of blessing and also of cursing.⁶

Because the writers of several Old Testament texts seem to assume that their audiences were familiar with an extended allegory containing both the positive and negative images of this olive symbolism (as discussed later), it seems reasonable to conclude that the full development of this complex plant symbolism for Israel emerged about the time of the unification of Israel under Saul and David. From that time forth, Israel was settled and planted in one place to "move no more" (2 Samuel 7:10). Since Nathan's prophecy in Samuel 7 shows that plant imagery was drawn upon again as an image of Israel's settled affairs at the time of the early monarchy, one may see this as a terminus before which the full metaphor would have been developed and understood.

Thus it appears significant that the recently discovered pseudepigraphical book known as the *Pseudo-Philo* contains a text, attributed to the premonarchical leaders of Israel in the early generations after Joshua, that embraces both the negative and positive elements of this growing metaphor.⁷ In this setting an aged Israelite prophet named Cenez (or Zenez, Zenec, Kenas) is said to have called all Israel together when he was about to die and revealed to them the word of the Lord, prophesying how the Lord had toiled among his people, how he wanted to choose a plant to care for it and to call it by his own name forever, but how that plant did not recognize the Lord as its planter but destroyed

its own fruit. Despite Israel's rejection of the Lord, Cenez promised that the Lord would still spare Israel in the abundance of his mercy.⁸ This text has the ring of an early text, one closely related to Exodus 15. It introduced, perhaps for the first time (at least literarily), the ominous message that Israel would, in fact, not produce fruit for the Lord and that it would not be destroyed by outside forces, but would destroy its own fruit. Not exhibiting awareness of subsequent history to the contrary—for Israel in fact was conquered by outside forces and was not physically spared—the *Pseudo-Philo* (although only preserved in post-Christian Latin manuscripts) seems to reflect an early development of the imagery of Israel as the Lord's plant.

The plant for Cenez, however, was the vine. On a grander scale, Zenos introduced the image of the olive tree, one of the most impressive and beautiful sights on the landscape of ancient Palestine. In the extended allegory of Zenos, both the positive and negative images of the foregoing texts are developed to an exceptional degree. The Lord's love and concern is repeatedly projected. The Lord and his servants toil tirelessly, again and again, to bring forth fruit from this vineyard. No effort was spared. Even after it became obvious that it might be better to cut down all the old trees and start over, the servant begs with the Lord to "spare it a little longer" (Jacob 5:50). But the tree had already begun to wax old and decay; and in the process of the servant's pruning, all branches that produced bitter fruit were cut off and burned so they would not clutter or burden the soil. While a plentiful harvest was eventually obtained by the Lord of the vineyard, the specter of an ultimate purge remains: Zenos's allegory ends with this threatening warning: "Evil fruit shall again come into my vineyard, . . . then cometh the season and the end; and my vineyard will I cause to be burned with fire" (Jacob 5:77).

PSALM 52

Assuming that Zenos's allegory or something like it existed at an early stage in Israelite literary history, one can discern echoes of it and allusions to it down through the centuries. Some of these texts emphasize the favorable and merciful features of the olive or vine imagery, while at other times they draw upon negative, judgmental strands.

For example, Psalm 52, which praises "the goodness of God [which] endureth continually" (Psalm 52:1), ends positively by exhorting the righteous to trust in the strength of the Lord and in the abundance of his riches but not to trust in one's own strength or wickedness. The righteous man in Psalm 52 sings, "I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever" (Psalm 52:8; see also Psalm 128:3). In these lines we encounter an early indication that this plant in the house of God was already understood in Israel to be an olive tree. Interestingly, the Hebrew text describes the tree as *ra'anan*, meaning "green, flourishing, prosperous, or surrounded with foliage," or "anointed" (Psalm 52:8). And more to the point of Jacob 5, the Greek Septuagint translation rendered this Hebrew adjective as *katakarpos*, describing the olive as "fruitful" (cf. the frequent reference to fruit in Jacob 5). Evidently the Hebrew reader of the Psalms automatically understood the green, spreading, and flourishing tree—perhaps from an established and familiar image such as that reflected in Psalm 1, to which this verse in Psalm 52 is merely an allusion⁹—to be a fruitful tree. The emphasis on the fruitfulness of the green tree was spelled out explicitly when this Psalm was translated into Greek.

At the same time that Psalm 52 is beneficent, Psalm 52:5 contains the ominous foreboding that God shall "likewise" destroy the wicked by taking them away to some unknown

land or by pruning them out of the tree. The Psalmist sings, "God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living" (Psalm 52:5). Significantly, the word *pluck* or *plucked* is used nine times by Zenos (Jacob 5:7, 7, 9, 26, 45, 52, 57, 58, 73). Any Israelite who was familiar with the type of allegory related by Zenos would have readily seen in this single word an allusion to its entire image of judgment and destruction of the wicked. The fact that verse 5 refers to this "plucking" and "uprooting" before it mentions the tree itself in verse 8 is further indication that the Psalmist took it for granted that his audience already knew the allegory of the olive tree and the negative image that the wicked must be pruned out and destroyed. Moreover, the particle *gām* ("likewise") introduces verse 5, but it seems disconnected syntactically to verse 4. "Like what?" one wonders. Perhaps this, also, is an indication that the Psalmist assumed that his audience already had a general knowledge of Zenos's extended allegory of the olive tree with its judgmental elements so that they needed no more than an oblique reference to understand the relevance of these factors in this early psalm.

Psalms are notoriously difficult to date as they do not have for the most part any explicit historical context and the poetic language often contains few hints of a specific date. Psalm 52 is a prayer for deliverance of an individual from an enemy in which the Psalmist compares himself to a green olive tree in the house of God. The introduction puts the psalm in the time of David and Saul, which is very early—about 1000 B.C. There are several conflicting chronological clues in this psalm. Verse 5 says, "God shall . . . pluck thee out of thy dwelling place [Hebrew, *tent*]." If this is a reference to a temple typology, as most scholars believe, it refers to the orig-

inal dwelling place of the Lord in the Tabernacle. In verse 8 the Psalmist refers to "the house of God," a common phrase referring to the temple. If these are to be taken as chronological clues, the "tent" might suggest a time before about 940 B.C., when the temple was built, and a reference to the temple would designate a period between 940 and 587 B.C., when it was destroyed. For a lack of any compelling reason to date this psalm later we will assume a fairly early date.¹⁰

PSALM 80

Using the imagery of a vine that grows larger than a cedar tree, Psalm 80 also reflects a broad cultural familiarity with the blessings and cursings implicit in the literature that compares God's relationship with Israel to that of a farmer with his plant:

- 8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt:
 thou hast cast out the heathen, and *planted* it.
- 9 Thou preparedst room before it,
 and didst cause it to take *deep root*, and it filled the
 land.
- 10 The hills were covered with the shadow of it,
 and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars.
- 11 *She sent out her boughs* unto the sea,
 and her branches unto the river.
- 12 Why hast thou then broken down her hedges,
 so that all they which pass by the way do *pluck* her?
- 13 The boar out of the wood doth waste it,
 and the wild beast of the field doth devour it.
- 14 Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts:
 look down from heaven, and behold, and *visit* this
 vine;
- 15 And the *vineyard* which thy right hand hath planted,
 and the *branch* that thou madest strong for thyself.
- 16 It is *burned with fire*, it is cut down:
 they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance.

- 17 Let thy hand be upon *the man* of thy right hand,
upon *the son of man* whom thou madest strong for
thyself.
- 18 So will not we go back from thee:
quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.
- 19 Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts,
cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

(Psalm 80:8–19, emphasis added.)

Several elements present in this early text are also found in Zenos's allegory. Psalm 80 speaks directly about the root of this plant, that it took "deep root" (Psalm 80:9). The roots receive extensive attention in Jacob 5 (see 5:8, 11, 18, 34, 35, 36, 37, 48, 53, 54, 59, 60, 65, 66, 73). Somehow, as the Psalmist envisions, the branches of this great plant will spread "unto the sea and . . . unto the river" (Psalm 80:11). More specifically, Zenos tells how this propagation will take place by carrying tender shoots of the plant to the nethermost parts of the vineyard (Jacob 5:13–14). As the hedges protecting the vineyard fall into disrepair (cf. Isaiah 5:5), the plant does not thrive, and it pleads with the Lord to come again and visit it, by the strong hand of "the man of thy right hand," promising that, this time, the plant will remember to "call upon thy name" (Psalm 80:17–18). These poetical verses reflect similar elements in Jacob 5, such as the deteriorated and desperate state of the tree and the emotional pleading and strenuous labors of the servant of the Lord. Finally, the abrupt and cryptic reference in this psalm to the ultimate fate of the plant being burned with fire and cut down (Psalm 80:16) seems to presuppose a knowledge of the final verses in Jacob 5.

Regarding the dating of Psalm 80, Israel is portrayed here as a vine brought out of Egypt and planted in the promised land; this psalm is a prayer for deliverance from national enemies. A natural historical context for this psalm

would be a time of national crisis or emergency. Verse 2 mentions that the threat is to the northern Israelite tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin—therefore the psalm must come from the period before 722—the destruction of the North. There were many national emergencies in this time period. Scholars have dated this psalm from the eighth century to the time of the Maccabees.¹¹ From the circumstantial evidence, we date this passage from the eighth century but clearly before Isaiah 5.

HOSEA 14

Next, a text from Hosea, written around 750 B.C.,¹² celebrated the loving mercy of the Lord, who promised to heal Israel, to love them freely, and to welcome their return. In this optimistic context the beauty of Israel is described “as the olive tree”:

- 4 I will heal their backsliding,
I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away
from him.
- 5 I will be as the dew unto Israel:
he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his *roots* as
Lebanon.
- 6 His *branches* shall spread,
and his beauty shall be *as the olive tree*, and his smell
as Lebanon.
- 7 They that dwell under his shadow *shall return*;
they shall revive as the corn,
and grow as the vine:
the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.
- 8 Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with
idols?
I have heard him, and observed him:
I am like a green fir tree.
From me is thy fruit found.

(Hosea 14:4–8, emphasis added.)

This too is a powerful literary passage, and its effectiveness is enhanced by, and perhaps dependent upon, a knowledge of Zenos's allegory. By mixing a variety of plant species into this passage, including the lily, olive, corn, vine, and the green fir tree, Hosea seems conversant with a tradition that allowed for the combination of olive and vineyard terminology, as in Jacob 5. He extends that imagery to include a range of plants, but with an emphasis on strengthening of the roots, the spreading of branches, and finding fruit. Obviously, the lily and the fir tree cannot have been the original focus of attention in Hosea's imagery, since they do not bear fruit or grow in this way.

The main emphasis in Hosea's prophecy is upon the return of those who dwell under the shadow of the olive tree. His point makes good sense only if one assumes that the tender shoots that once grew under the shadow of the trunk of the olive tree were taken away and transplanted so that they might "return." In addition, the reference to Lebanon may contain an allusion to the role of the Gentiles in the allegory of Zenos. At first, Hosea says, Israel will cast forth roots like a Gentile nation, "as Lebanon." In time, however, Ephraim will repent and realize that it wants to have nothing more to do with idols, for Ephraim has heard Lebanon and observed Gentile ways; then Ephraim will see itself as a green fir tree and like a fruitful olive. The concept of fruitfulness, recalling again that Jacob 5 uses the word *fruit* or *fruits* sixty-seven times, is even stronger in the Septuagint version of Hosea than in the Hebrew. Instead of the phrase "calves of our lips" in Hosea 14:2, the Greek reads, "And we will render in return the fruit of our lips"; four verses later the olive tree is described as "a fruitful [*katakarpos*] olive," reminiscent of the same word used in the Septuagint translation of Psalm 52.

In any event, Hosea ends with the acknowledgment

that his prophecy is intentionally cryptic. He promises, however, that it will be understood by the wise and the prudent who know the ways of the Lord (Hosea 14:9). Evidently, Hosea addressed a group he expected to catch on to what he was talking about because of some prior understanding of the ways and words of the Lord.

ISAIAH 5

The next prophet relevant to the examination of possible lines of biblical dependence and comparison with Zenos is Isaiah, who prophesied and wrote between 740–701 B.C. (Isaiah 1:1). Three of his texts are particularly pertinent. Among the earliest of Isaiah's writings is his beautiful song for his beloved, a love song about his vineyard. This text, also found in 2 Nephi 15, reads as follows, with notes in brackets demonstrating significant cognates, ambiguities, and word plays:

- 1 Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard.
My wellbeloved hath a *vineyard in a very fruitful hill* [mountain]:
- 2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth *wild grapes* [stench].
- 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.
- 4 *What could have been done more to my vineyard,* that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes [stench]?

5 And now go to;
 I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard:
 I will take away the hedge thereof,
 and it shall be eaten up;
 and break down the wall thereof,
 and it shall be trodden down:
 6 And I will lay it waste:
 it shall not be *pruned* [sung], nor *digged* [missed]; but
 there shall come up briars 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 men of Judah
 his pleasant plant:
 and he looked for judgment [*mšpt*],
 but behold oppression [*mšph*];
 for righteousness [*šdqh*],
 but behold a cry [*š'qh*].

(Isaiah 5:1–7, emphasis added.)¹³

It is evident that in this text, Isaiah drew, at least to some extent, upon prior Israelite lore. In Isaiah 4:2 he simply said, “In that day shall the branch [plant] of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely.” Since he gave no further explanation there, we assume that his audience was familiar with such imagery as appears in Exodus 15:7, of Israel as the planting of the Lord. Isaiah adapts and extends this imagery at the end of his song in Isaiah 5 to specify that the entire vineyard represents the house of Israel and its most precious plant symbolizes, not just the house of Israel, but specifically the men of Judah, their leading tribe.

In chapter 5, Isaiah portrays a judgment scene in which the Lord asks the inhabitants of Jerusalem to judge between him and his vineyard. In a fashion similar to other so-called

prophetic lawsuits,¹⁴ the prophet begins by rehearsing certain facts and then lodging a legal complaint. The facts explain how the friend of Isaiah had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He was responsible to take good care of the vineyard, fence it, remove stones or stumbling blocks, plant it with the best possible plants, build a tower for protection and a wine press; but the vineyard brought forth wild grapes, a stink. The man then asks the elders of Israel to acquit him of any legal liability toward the vineyard and states his intentions to withdraw from this venture, to take back his assets, to stop pruning and digging the vineyard to keep out the weeds. Obviously the house of Israel, the Lord's "pleasant plant," had not produced the righteousness that the Lord had expected, and instead the Lord is left only with a cry, like a widow or orphan pressing charges for relief (cf. Exodus 22:22–23).

Several words in Isaiah's judgment scene are reminiscent of Zenos, including the "vineyard" on a very fruitful hill; the bad fruit being "wild"; the plea of the Lord asking, "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" (cf. Jacob 5:41, 47, 49); and the declaration that the Lord will stop pruning and digging.

The following factors suggest that Isaiah was not announcing an original idea in this poetical song, but reshaping an existing literary tradition into poetic form:

1. By listing in verse 2 what he had done for the vineyard, the Lord does not mention that he had pruned and digged the vineyard. Later, however, the text clearly implies that the Lord had pruned and cultivated the vineyard on previous occasions, for the Lord asserts that he could have done nothing more for his vineyard and says that he plans to stop doing these things (verse 6). Nevertheless, the pruning and digging are not mentioned in the list of things the

Lord asserts that he had done in his vineyard (verse 2), and so one has to supply these elements to that list. Apparently Isaiah did not feel the need to provide a complete list of things that the Lord had done, because he could assume from the common culture that the audience knew full well the complete story as told by Zenos or someone like him.

2. The lawsuit setting of Isaiah 5 makes the best sense if we assume that the allegory of the vineyard was already known to Isaiah's Israelite audience. The legal action implied in the Lord's request that the elders of Israel judge between him and his vineyard is a complaint for the dissolution of a partnership. This action presupposes the prior existence of an understood joint venture based upon an agreed undertaking and set of obligations. For Isaiah to begin at the legal stage of dissolution without presupposing a prior contractual understanding constituting that relationship would seem to place the cart before the horse.

3. Isaiah borrows and adapts the standard metaphor in Isaiah 5:1–7. Often Israel is represented as a single plant, but Isaiah goes out of his way to explain that for his purposes all Israel is the vineyard and the men of Judah are the one central plant in which the trouble and the decay begins. The fact that he can draw on this general image in making his specific point about Judah's wickedness is an indication that an older account existed that has been adapted by Isaiah for use in his oracle to Judah and Jerusalem (see Isaiah 2:1).

4. This short passage gives an incomplete picture. From the prophecies of Hosea and others, Isaiah's audience would have known that the Lord would return and that Israel would again become beautiful and fruitful. The audience in Isaiah 5 understands that the judgment against the house of Israel will be suspended—the typical outcome in prophetic lawsuits—in order that the people might repent

and change their ways. The song in Isaiah 5, standing alone however, gives the impression that the Lord's judgment will be carried out immediately and that the allegory is an exclusively negative, judgmental image. Other passages throughout Isaiah, however, prove that he is always working implicitly with a fuller metaphor, drawing upon parts of it from passage to passage depending upon his immediate needs and purposes. For example, in Isaiah 17:9–11, Isaiah prophesies:

- 9 In that day shall his strong cities be as a forsaken bough, and an uppermost branch, which they left because of the children of Israel: and there shall be desolation.
- 10 Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it [graft it] with strange slips:
- 11 In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish:
but the harvest shall be a heap
in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.

Here we see other parts of the full image—that the lofty branch will be forsaken for a time, but eventually it will be grafted with strange plants so that, in the end, the plant will grow and yield a substantial harvest, albeit in a day of grief and sorrow as some are cut off and destroyed in the fire.

Ultimately, the image of the olive tree is positive for Isaiah. When “the days of thy mourning shall be ended, thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified” (Isaiah 60:20–21). In the end, for Isaiah, the final judgment is compared to a joyous harvest of olives and grapes:

13 When thus it shall be in the midst of the land
 among the people,
 there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree,
 as the gleaming grapes when the vintage is done.

14 They shall lift up their voice,
 they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord,
 they shall cry aloud from the sea.

Wherefore, glorify ye the Lord in the fires,
 even the name of the Lord God of Israel in the isles of
 the sea.

(Isaiah 24:13–15.)

Especially noteworthy here is the simultaneous appearance of the olive, the harvest, the fire at this final judgment, and the consciousness that Israel will be scattered upon the isles of the sea. From these disconnected references in Isaiah to plant symbolism, it seems that behind them all stands a consistent but complex metaphor of the growth and development of a full course of God's relationships to and dealings with the house of Israel. All of the features of that metaphor compare with similar elements blended together in the Book of Mormon text in Jacob 5.

JEREMIAH 11

Jeremiah prophesied from about 627–580 B.C. (Jeremiah 1:1–3).¹⁵ One of the themes of Jeremiah, as he was commissioned in his prophetic call, was to “root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:10). Jeremiah was to prophesy destruction and restoration and the corresponding horticultural imagery of “rooting out” and “planting” pervade his book.¹⁶ While Hosea used only the positive images of the basic allegory and Isaiah featured both the positive and negative, Jeremiah utilized only the negative in his use of the olive tree. But he does prophesy of the restoration of the gospel

and the gathering of Israel in the latter days in terms of "sowing" and "planting" (Jeremiah 31:5; 31:27–29; 32:41). Because Jeremiah was a prophet in times of lamentation and judgment, it is not surprising that he used the allegory of the olive tree to heighten his message of catastrophic suffering for breaking the covenant with the Lord. The main text in this regard from Jeremiah is as follows:

14 Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble.

15 What hath my beloved to do in mine house, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many, and the holy flesh is passed from thee? when thou doest evil, then thou rejoicest.

16 The Lord called thy name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon it, and the branches of it are broken.

17 For the Lord of hosts, that planted thee, hath pronounced evil against thee, for the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done against themselves to provoke me to anger in offering incense unto Baal.

(Jeremiah 11:14–17.)

The general image projected here is that of a tree struck by lightning. Although the Hebrew text is quite corrupt and therefore difficult to interpret, it begins with a reference to the fact that the Lord in the past had "called thy name a green olive tree, fair and of goodly fruit." Clearly Jeremiah reminds his audience of a known metaphor, which could have been known to them from Psalm 52 or a text such as that of Zenos.

Jeremiah then moves directly to the judgment motif: "With the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon

it, and the branches of it are broken" (11:16). The Septuagint version reads, "The branches are become good for nothing [*ēchreiōthēsan*]," which is a reading close to Zenos, "And now all the trees of my vineyard are good for nothing" (Jacob 5:42). Behind the Hebrew and Greek versions of this text, there were evidently two traditions in ancient Israel about the fate of these branches: were they "broken off" or did they "become good for nothing"? Perhaps both of these traditions trace their origins to the allegory of Zenos, for Zenos also refers to the "natural branches [that] had been broken off" (Jacob 5:30), as well as becoming "good for nothing" (Jacob 5:42).

Next, Jeremiah reminds his audience that the Lord had planted his people (Jeremiah 11:17), clearly in the tradition of Exodus 15:17 (cf. Jacob 5:3). And Jeremiah is able to accuse the people of the "evil which they have done against themselves," an accusation that receives no further explanation and thus assumes everyone understands the responsibility for the corruption of the olive tree lies within the house of Israel itself, or as Zenos says, "Taking strength unto themselves, . . . is not this the cause that the trees of thy vineyard have become corrupted?" (Jacob 5:48).

In the end, the people plotted against Jeremiah by throwing his allegory back at him. They said, "Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof and let us cut him off from the land of the living" (Jeremiah 11:19). Obviously two can play the allegory game, and one way to eliminate the problems caused by Jeremiah was to eliminate Jeremiah himself. The spontaneous use of the tree and fruit imagery by the people themselves in response to Jeremiah shows once again the great extent to which this imagery had become common parlance in pre-exilic Israel.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have focused here primarily on Old Testament texts that deal expressly with olive tree imagery and would have been known to ancient Israelites down to the time of Lehi. Many other texts could be cited if we were to expand our coverage to include allegories involving other kinds of plants or texts from post-exilic Israel. See, for example, Ezekiel 17:1–24; 19:10–14. All these texts demonstrate that Jacob 5 stands as part of an extensive literary tradition whose elements surface often; that tradition is not to be understood by reference to any single source alone. Sufficient examples of these texts have been identified and analyzed to support the hypothesis that the image of the olive tree was well known and very significant in pre-exilic Israel.

Although the evidence does not allow a firm conclusion with respect to the dating of the allegory of Zenos, the positive and negative dimensions of the Old Testament image of the olive tree are difficult to reconcile in these texts without assuming that a single paradigm (such as the allegory of Zenos) existed in ancient Israel utilizing both of these dimensions. Jacob 5 provides the full paradigm unifying the many scattered references in the Old Testament to the olive tree as an image for the house of Israel and illuminating what that image would likely have meant to an ancient Israelite audience.

While it remains possible that these two diametrically opposed strands of negative judgmental imagery and positive merciful imagery developed haphazardly in ancient Israel and that Zenos came late in that tradition and served to synthesize all these elements into a single coherent story, the simpler explanation is that Zenos probably preceded Psalms 52 and 80 by a few years and Hosea, Isaiah, and

Jeremiah by several generations, and that all these later prophets knew and drew upon Zenos, often quite specifically. In any event, it seems highly unlikely that Joseph Smith, operating on his own mental faculties, could have worked within the limited vocabulary of Jacob 5, while keeping in mind all the diverse and specific elements of each of these Old Testament texts, to weave back together from these complex strands such an elegant and vivid image as that of Zenos's masterful allegory in Jacob 5.

Notes

1. Several passages in the Old Testament explicitly use the olive tree symbolically: Deuteronomy 6:11; 24:20; 28:40; Judges 9:8–9; Psalms 52:8; 128:3; Hosea 14:6; Isaiah 17:6; 24:13; Jeremiah 11:16; Zechariah 4:3, 11–12. Many other texts use vine imagery or other horticultural metaphors in general to describe relationships between God and his people. Despite the significance of this literary motif in the Old Testament, no scholarly article has specifically been devoted to the subject of olive symbolism in the Old Testament. In addition to the basic Old Testament commentaries, see generally W. D. Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 153–63; Ralph W. Doermann, "The Metaphor of the Vine and the Vineyard in the Hebrew Scriptures," SBL Regional Meeting, 1989, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio; E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 121–24; and Shozo Fujita, "The Metaphor of Plant in Jewish Literature of the Intertestamental Period," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 7 (1976): 30–45.

2. This poem has also been designated as the Song of Miriam because of the reference to her in Exodus 15:20.

3. Frank M. Cross, Jr., and David N. Freedman, "The Song of Miriam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14 (1955): 237–50; George W. Coates, "The Song of the Sea," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 1 (1969): 1–17; D. N. Freedman, "The Song of the Sea," in *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 179–86. For a detailed discussion of the dating of Hebrew poetry, see Frank M. Cross and David N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Baltimore, 1950; reprinted Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975) and David A. Robertson, *Linguistic*

Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975).

4. Most scholars argue that the mountain refers to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. For a brief discussion see Cross and Freedman, "The Song of Miriam," 249–50. Psalm 78:54, echoing the hand of God imagery of Exodus 15:17, also suggests this is a reference to the promised land, "And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, even to this mountain, which his right hand had purchased." Freedman later argued that the "mountain of thine inheritance" was originally a reference to Mount Sinai where the people originally entered into the covenant. D. N. Freedman, "Temple Without Hands," in *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times*, ed. A. Biran, et al. (Jerusalem: Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology of the Hebrew Union College, 1981), 21–30. This is interesting in light of the fact that the roots of the olive tree in Jacob 5 are often interpreted as the covenant. Of course, the Temple in Jerusalem also represents the covenant.

5. For further discussion of the relationship between olives and vines, see John A. Tvedtnes, "Vineyard or Olive Orchard?" in this volume.

6. The formal lists of blessings and curses typically list the productivity of plants and trees. Righteousness is blessed with fertility and productivity: Leviticus 26:4, "And the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit"; Deuteronomy 28:4, "Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground." Wickedness is rewarded with the opposite: Leviticus 26:20, "And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits"; Deuteronomy 28:18, "Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land."

7. D. J. Harrington's translation of *Pseudo-Philo* with detailed notes can be found in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2:297–377.

8. For a full discussion of this text see John W. Welch, "The Last Words of Cenez and the Book of Mormon" in this volume.

9. "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit (LXX *karpos*) in his season" (Psalm 1:3).

10. Most scholars do not attempt to date this psalm precisely. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 510.

11. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 140.

12. The heading of Hosea 1:1 dates him between Uzziah and Hezekiah in the South (783–715 B.C.) and Jeroboam in the North (786–46 B.C.)

13. We are grateful to John Gee for his alternate renditions given in this text.

14. The prophetic lawsuit is a speech form discussed by many Old Testament scholars. See, for example, Kirsten Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge* (Sheffield, England: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1978); James Limburg, "The Root R-I-B and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 291-304.

15. Jeremiah was forced to accompany a group of his fellow countrymen to Egypt who were fleeing the feared Babylonian reprisals following the assassination of Gedaliah (Jeremiah 40–41). The last of Jeremiah's prophecies (chaps. 42–44) were uttered in Egypt around 580 B.C.

16. See Robert Bach, *Bauen und Pflanzen*, in *Studien zur Theologie der alttestamentlichen Überlieferungen* (Festschrift G. von Rad; Neukirchen, 1961), 7–32.