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Borrowings from the Parable of Zenos

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Borrowings from the Parable of Zenos

John A. Tvedtnes

Critics of the Book of Mormon have attributed Zenos's parable of the olive tree in Jacob 5 to the idea that Joseph Smith borrowed its essence from various New Testament passages.¹ Indeed, the grafting of the branches appears to be related to Paul's comments in Romans 11:17–24, while some of the wording of Jacob 5 is very much like that found in Luke 13:6–8 and Isaiah 5:1–5.

But many New Testament scholars have conceded that Paul's olive branch analogy was inspired by the Old Testament, specifically by Exodus 15:17. It is my opinion that Paul was more likely inspired by the writings of Zenos. Here are some of my reasons for this belief:

- Some 28 percent of the verses in Romans 11 are known quotes from the Old Testament. In the two previous chapters (9–10), the percentage is even higher.² Clearly, Paul relied heavily on the writings of earlier prophets to provide evidence for the points he was making.

- There are also ties between Jacob's introduction to the parable of Zenos in Jacob 4 and some of Paul's statements in Romans 11, leading one to believe that they may have had a common source.³ Note, for example, the close similarity in the wording of Romans 11:34–36 (cf. Romans 11:22), which Paul borrowed from Isaiah 40:13, 28 (cf. Psalm 145:3), and Jacob 4:8–10. Paul wrote of the killing of Israel's

prophets (Romans 11:3), citing 1 Kings 19:14; Jacob did likewise (Jacob 4:13–15), though he did not draw on the same passage. Paul wrote that Israel had been partly blinded or calloused (Romans 11:7, 25); Jacob wrote of the blindness of the Jews (Jacob 4:14).⁴ Both Paul (Romans 11:15–16) and Jacob (Jacob 4:11–12) wrote of the firstfruit (Christ) in terms of the resurrection.

- The fact that a number of Old Testament and other pre-Pauline passages refer to olive and other branches in terms similar to those used by both Paul and Zenos suggests that there may be a common tradition for all of these passages. We shall refer to these other sources throughout this study.⁵

- The Zenos parable is self-contained and presents a logical flow, despite the fact that parts of it resemble various Bible passages attributed to different authors. This suggests (1) that the Zenos parable found in Jacob 5 is the original, and (2) that other writers (including Paul) borrowed elements of the Zenos parable and adapted them to suit their own purposes.⁶

We shall examine various biblical and other passages whose words and themes bear a resemblance to the Zenos parable in an effort to establish the antiquity of the ideas found in Jacob 5 and to attempt to ascertain whether the ancient writers were aware of the parable.

UNDERSTANDING ZENOS

In order to determine which Bible passages are related to the parable of Zenos, we must first understand the meaning of that parable. Jacob, after reciting the parable, explained that Zenos likened “the house of Israel . . . unto a tame olive-tree,” and that the vineyard in which the trees

were planted was “the world [which] shall be burned with fire” (Jacob 6:1–4).

Jacob continued his explanation by using elements also found in Lehi’s vision of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8). He noted the invitation to come to God (Jacob 6:5), similar to Lehi’s invitation to his family (1 Nephi 8:15–18). He exhorted his audience to cleave to God (Jacob 6:5); Lehi had seen people clinging to the rod of iron (1 Nephi 8:24, 30), which Nephi identified as the word of God (1 Nephi 15:23–24). Like Lehi (1 Nephi 8:20–21), Jacob spoke of a “narrow” way leading to “eternal life” (Jacob 6:11). Those who followed the path in Lehi’s vision partook of the fruit of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:24, 30). Nephi learned that the tree symbolized “the love of God,” as represented by Christ (1 Nephi 11:21–23, 25). Jacob told his audience that they (like the tree in the Zenos parable) had “been nourished by the good word of God” (Jacob 6:7), but that some had rejected “the words which have been spoken concerning Christ” and had even made “a mock of the great plan of redemption” (Jacob 6:8). In Lehi’s vision, too, there were people who mocked those who came to partake of the fruit of the tree (1 Nephi 8:27). The fruit of the tree is described in similar terms by Lehi (1 Nephi 8:10–12), Nephi (1 Nephi 11:8–9) and Zenos (Jacob 5:61).

But there is more direct evidence that Lehi’s vision of the tree of life is related to the parable of Zenos. Immediately after recounting his dream, Lehi spoke to his family of the captivity and the gathering of Israel and of the coming of the Messiah (1 Nephi 10:2–4). His teachings make it clear that he was aware of Zenos’s parable:

Yea, even my father spake 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. Wherefore, he said it must needs be that we should be led with one accord into the land of promise, unto the fulfilling of the word of the Lord, that we should be scattered upon all the face of the earth. And after the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; or, in fine, after the Gentiles had received the fulness of the Gospel, the natural branches of the olive-tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer. (1 Nephi 10:12–14.)

Though Lehi identified the tree as Israel, yet the return of the scattered “natural branches” is said to represent Israel’s coming “to the knowledge of the true Messiah.”⁷ This parallels a later statement that those who accept the gospel are “as a branch grafted into the true vine” (Alma 16:16–17), who is Jesus Christ (John 15:1–8).⁸ On another occasion, Ammon specifically identified the descendants of Lehi as a “people, who are a branch of the tree of Israel . . . lost from its body in a strange land” (Alma 26:36). He may have been influenced by Lehi’s statement to his sons that their ancestor “Joseph . . . obtained a promise of the Lord, that out of the fruit of his loins the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel . . . a branch which was to be broken off” (2 Nephi 3:5).

Jacob, long before recording the Zenos parable, had also given a discourse in which he said of the Nephites, “in future generations they shall become a righteous branch unto the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 9:53). The following day, he continued his discussion “concerning this righteous branch of which [he had] spoken” (2 Nephi 10:1). He explained that he had reference to the restoration of his people’s descendants “to that which will give them the true

knowledge of their Redeemer" (2 Nephi 10:2). He then drew upon Isaiah 49 (which he had quoted) to discuss the scattering and gathering of Israel (2 Nephi 10:6–8) and spoke of the Gentiles being "blessed and numbered among the house of Israel" (2 Nephi 10:18). This reminds us of the wild olive branches grafted into the tree in Zenos's parable (Jacob 5:10, 17). Jacob further spoke of his people, saying that they had not been "cast off," but merely "driven out of the land of our inheritance . . . to a better land" (2 Nephi 10:20). The "better land" resembles the "good spot of ground" to which, as Zenos prophesied (Jacob 5:25, 43), Lehi's family had been taken. But other Israelites, too, had been "led away from time to time" and "broken off," according to Jacob (2 Nephi 10:22). The branch analogy appears to have been on his mind during the entire discourse.

Jacob's teachings in 2 Nephi 9–10 appear to have been influenced by what he had heard from his father. In a subsequent discourse—again delivered prior to the recording of the Zenos parable—he said, "Wherefore, thus saith the Lord, I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem, by the power of mine arm, that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph" (Jacob 2:25).

The most comprehensive explanation of the Zenos parable, however, is the one given by Nephi to his brothers in 1 Nephi 15:10–22. Laman and Lemuel asked the meaning of their father's words "concerning the natural branches of the olive-tree, and also concerning the Gentiles" (1 Nephi 15:7). Nephi replied that "the house of Israel was compared unto an olive-tree . . . and behold are we not broken off from the house of Israel, and are we not a branch of the house of Israel?" (1 Nephi 15:12). The "grafting in of the natural

branches," he explained, referred to the acceptance of "the gospel of the Messiah" by the Gentiles and the realization of Lehi's descendants that "they are of the house of Israel," that they might "come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer" (1 Nephi 15:13–14). Thus they would "receive the strength and nourishment from the true vine" and "come unto the true fold of God" (1 Nephi 15:15). Again, the tree seems to represent both Israel as a people and Christ.⁹

Nephi continued his explanation by noting that the lost remnants of "the house of Israel . . . shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive-tree, into the true olive-tree," in fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham that through his descendants "shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed" (1 Nephi 15:16–18).¹⁰

After Nephi had explained the scattering of Israel and the grafting in of the branches, his brothers asked about the tree that their father had seen in vision. It seems evident that they saw a connection between Lehi's vision and the parable of the olive tree. Nephi told them that "it was a representation of the tree of life" (1 Nephi 15:21–22).

Joseph Smith identified the tree of life with the olive tree when he designated D&C 88 (see its preface) as an "olive leaf . . . plucked from the Tree of Paradise, the Lord's message of peace to us." In early Jewish and Christian tradition, the tree of life is sometimes considered to be an olive tree,¹¹ around which is entwined the vine, often believed to be the tree of knowledge. Nibley has pointed out¹² that, in the artwork of the third-century A.D. Dura-Europos synagogue, the tree of life is depicted as both a tree and a vine. (Thus the olive tree is not out of place in the vineyard.)

Just before quoting Isaiah 48–49 to his brothers, Nephi said, "Hear ye the words of the prophet, ye who are a rem-

nant of the house of Israel, a branch who have been broken off" (1 Nephi 19:24). These words were evidently inspired by wording at the beginning of Isaiah 49:1 as found on the brass plates of Laban, but not included in our Bible versions: "Hearken, O ye house of Israel, all ye that are broken off and are driven out . . . all ye that are broken off, that are scattered abroad, who are of my people, O house of Israel" (1 Nephi 21:1).

Throughout these two chapters of Isaiah, we find imagery that the prophet may have borrowed from Zenos. In Isaiah 49:3–4 (cf. 1 Nephi 21:3–4), the Lord said, "Thou art my servant, O Israel," whereupon the prophet replied, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for naught." We are reminded of the labors in the vineyard, which seemed to be for naught (Jacob 5:29–35). Isaiah 49:8–9 (cf. 1 Nephi 21:8–9) indicates that the people are "to inherit the desolate heritages. . . . Their pastures shall be in all high places." The "high places" remind us of the "loftiness of [the] vineyard" (Jacob 5:48), while the "desolate heritages" resemble the "poor spot of ground" in the vineyard (Jacob 5:21–23). Similarly, in Isaiah 49:19 (cf. 1 Nephi 21:19), we read of "thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction." Isaiah 48:1 (cf. 1 Nephi 20:1) speaks of the Israelites who "come forth out of the waters of Judah," reminding us of the river or fountain of water near the tree of life in Lehi's vision (1 Nephi 8:13–14) and in the description of the Garden of Eden, where the tree was planted (Genesis 2:8–14). Note the heat, the sun, and the springs of water in Isaiah 49:10.

Following his reading of these two chapters of Isaiah, Nephi gave an explanation (1 Nephi 22), in which he spoke of the scattering and gathering of Israel, which fulfills the covenant to Abraham that "in thy seed shall all the kin-

dreds of the earth be blessed" (1 Nephi 22:9). This is the same thing he said in explanation of the broken branches of the tree in 1 Nephi 15:16–18. He further explained that when they are gathered the Israelites "shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel" (1 Nephi 22:12). This reminds us of his explanation of the gathered branches in 1 Nephi 15:14–16. As in the Zenos parable (Jacob 5:37, 42, 46–47, 49, 66, 77) and elsewhere, Nephi added that the wicked would burn while the righteous would be saved (1 Nephi 22:15, 17–18).

NEW USES OF THE PARABLE

By their very nature, parables lend themselves to reinterpretation and new uses. This is illustrated by Alma's use of Zenos's imagery in his discussion of faith (Alma 32). He likened faith to a seed that, when planted and properly cared for, grows into a tree.¹³ "As the tree beginneth to grow," Alma told his audience,

Ye will say: Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit unto us. And now behold, if ye nourish it with much care it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit. But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out. (Alma 32:37–38.)

Alma's admonition to nourish the tree (also found in Alma 32:42) reminds us of the care given the trees by the lord of the vineyard in Zenos's parable, where the word "nourish" is also used.¹⁴ In both cases, unfruitful trees/branches are plucked up and cast out (Jacob 5:66, 73, 77).¹⁵ As Zenos spoke of the "poor spot of ground" (Jacob

5:21–23), Alma spoke of barren ground (Alma 32:39). As the lord of the vineyard devoted much time to the care of his trees, in anticipation of fruit (Jacob 5:13, 18–20, 23, 27, 29, 31, 33, 54, 60, 71, 74–76), Alma admonished his audience to “patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof” (Alma 32:41; cf. 32:40–43). Moreover, Alma noted that by nourishing the word “ye can . . . pluck of the fruit of the tree of life . . . it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life” (Alma 32:40–41; cf. Alma 33:23).¹⁶ His description of the fruit of the tree (Alma 32:42) is identical to that given for the fruit of the tree of life seen in vision by Lehi (1 Nephi 8:10–12; cf. Jacob 5:61).

As we examine biblical and pseudepigraphic passages that may have drawn on the parable of Zenos, it becomes clear that Alma was not alone in finding new analogies for the parable of the vineyard. Indeed, he was preceded by the author of Proverbs, who wrote, “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life. Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded. The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death” (Proverbs 13:12–14; cf. 15:4).

Paul told the Colossian Saints that they were “rooted and built up” in Christ “and stablished in the faith” (Colossians 2:6–7). The reference to faith reminds us of Alma’s use of the tree of life as a symbol of faith. A similar statement by Paul appears in his epistle to the Ephesians, written at the same time as the one to the Colossians: “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend . . . And to know the love of Christ . . . that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:17–19). This passage resembles both Alma’s discussion of the seed of

faith planted in the heart and Nephi's understanding that the tree of life is a symbol of the love of Christ (1 Nephi 11:21–22).¹⁷

CHRIST AS THE TREE AND THE VINE

The tree or vine typically represents nations (usually Israel) in Old and New Testament prophecies and parables. But it sometimes represents the King of Israel, Jesus Christ. It is perhaps significant that he should be compared to both a tree and a vine, in view of the fact that in the parable of Zenos the olive tree is planted in a vineyard.

Jeremiah termed the Messiah "a righteous Branch" (Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15). Isaiah, in his famous prophecy of Christ, wrote that "he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground" (Isaiah 53:2). In another passage, he wrote that "there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots," and tied the concept of the "root of Jesse" to the gathering of Israel in the last days (Isaiah 11:1–13). In Doctrine and Covenants 113, Christ is identified as the stem of Jesse. He made this same identification when he told John, "I am the root and the offspring of David" (Revelation 22:16).¹⁸ In Romans 15:12 (four chapters after the parable of the grafted branches), Paul cited Isaiah 11:10 and identified Christ as the root of Jesse.

The Epistle to the Hebrews cites Psalm 110:4 in reference to Christ (Hebrews 7:17). In this connection, we should also note the wording of Psalm 110:2–3: "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion. . . . Thou hast the dew of thy youth." Psalm 110:7 adds, "He shall drink of the brook in the way." These verses resemble biblical passages to be discussed later, which compare the righteous man to a well-watered tree.

In a passage reminiscent of the parable of Zenos, Christ identified himself as the plant of which his disciples are the branches:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. . . . Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. . . . Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. (John 15:1–2, 4–6, 8.)

As in the parable of Zenos, the branches take strength from the main plant (in this case a vine) and bear good fruit (cf. Jacob 5:18), while the unfruitful branches are removed and burned in the fire (Jacob 5:7, 26, 37, 42, 45–47, 49). Another feature shared by the two passages is that God is the husbandman (cf. Jacob 6:2, 4). The designation of Christ as “the true vine” is also found in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 15:15; Alma 16:16–17).

Significantly, the greatest act of “the true vine” took place at the “mount of olives,”¹⁹ in a place called Gethsemane, meaning “oil press,” though the Hebrew behind the first element of the name usually refers to a winepress (Matthew 26:36; Luke 22:39; John 18:1). There, pressed under the weight of the sins of the world, he shed blood at every pore (Luke 22:44; Mosiah 3:7; D&C 19:18), like a grape in the press.

Just before going to Gethsemane, Christ had washed his apostles’ feet (John 13) and given them bread and wine as

symbols of his body and blood (Luke 22:14–20). The choice of these elements, at least as old as Melchizedek and Abraham (Genesis 14:18), was deliberate. The Hebrew term *leḥem*, “bread,” originally meant “flesh,” and is therefore a fitting symbol of Christ’s body, as well as the second element in the name of the place where he was born, Bethlehem (“house of flesh/bread”).

The usual Hebrew term for “wine” is possibly a borrowing from the Greek, or both the Hebrew and Greek are borrowed from a common Mediterranean source. The earliest Hebrew term denoting wine appears to be “blood of grapes” (Genesis 49:11; Deuteronomy 32:14). In Jewish tradition, the Messiah is to come dressed in a red garment. This is based on Isaiah 63:2–3, where the garment is red because he has trodden the winepress. In Revelation 14:8, 19–20; 19:15, the content of the winepress is said to be blood.

It was while his blood dripped in Gethsemane, amid the olive trees, that Christ asked the Father, “Remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).²⁰ The cup of the indignation or wrath of God is, in the scriptures, filled with wine or blood (Isaiah 51:17, 22; Jeremiah 25:15; Revelation 14:10; 16:19; 17:4; 18:6; cf. Matthew 20:22–23).

THE SYRIAC FATHERS

Early Syriac Christian Fathers, such as Ephrem, Aphrahat, and Isaac of Antioch, drew upon the imagery of Christ as the true vine in explaining the role of Christianity as a replacement for Judaism. Christ is compared to a sweet grape in the midst of a cluster of sour grapes (Israel) that was uprooted from the vineyard. This single grape preserved the blessings of ancient Israel for the Gentiles, who

were grafted in.²¹ Thus, the concept of grafting branches to the olive tree in Romans 11 was applied to Jesus' account of the vineyard in John 15.

Aphrahat, in his treatise "On the Sons of the Covenant," after comparing Christians to laborers (in terms reminiscent of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard in Matthew 20:1–16), wrote, "Our Lord has hired us for his vineyard. Let us be planted as vines in his vineyard, who [which?] is the true Vine(yard). Let us be good vines, that we be not uprooted from that vineyard."²²

In this passage, Christians are both vinedressers and vines. In an address to the clergy, Aphrahat wrote, "You are vines in the vineyard, seed of good wheat, bearing fruit a hundredfold." A short while after this, he wrote of Christ, "He is the true Vine[yard] and his Father is the Vinedresser: and we are the vines planted in his [its] midst."²³

Especially relevant to the Zenos parable is a hymn that follows Ephrem's collection *On Paradise*. He wrote of the tree with "heavenly roots" and of "the Branch of Truth." The fifth stanza speaks of the "sons of Truth on that branch of Truth," who "ripened into fruit fit for the Kingdom. Yet though the branch is alive there are also on it fruits [which are] dead, only outwardly blooming. The wind tested them and shook off the shrivelled," in a manner reminiscent of the triage of the fruit of the olive tree in Jacob 5. The allusion is to Matthew 21:42 and John 15:5. Murray noted that the word rendered "shrivelled" really means "wild grapes."²⁴ This conforms to the "wild fruit" on the tree described by Zenos (Jacob 5:40) and to the "wild grapes" in Isaiah 5:4.

The eighth stanza of Ephrem's hymn speaks of people who came to the branch, "ate and were filled, but turned and insulted it," while stanza eleven, speaking of the

"Branch of Life," discusses of those "who came by, picked the fruit, then abandoned the vines," in contrast with the "vinedressers [who] persevere in his vineyard." Stanza thirteen likewise denounces the "workers in the vineyard . . . that only picked and carried off" but did not remain to work. We are reminded of those who, after eating the fruit of the tree in Lehi's vision, became ashamed and abandoned it (1 Nephi 8:24–25). That Ephrem's vine/tree is the tree of life is evidenced by the fact that the tree, after being rejected by others, bent down to take Adam back to Eden.

Stanza nine speaks of the greatness of the branch, noting that "whoever does not wish to grasp its greatness imagines in his weakness it is a feeble branch." They are like the people in Lehi's vision who did not grasp the iron rod. Stanza ten of Ephrem's hymn continues the thought, speaking of those who persevere "on that branch of Truth which sustains the true, casts away the false." Israel was "cast . . . away" in a process that "shakes off the shrivelled and ripens the true. Blessed be he who rejected the vineyard for being a source of wild grapes!" The pruning of the branches is a thought shared by Zenos (Jacob 5:4–5, 11, 47, 64, 69, 76).

The vine imagery from John 15 was applied by Ephrem to the olive tree, whose "leaves stand fast" through winter. These, he notes, "are an image of the faithful who persevere in Christ the Olive," while "the faithless have fallen like leaves." The Christians who hang on Christ "are like olive-leaves in winter . . . planted wholly in him."²⁵ Aphrahat and Cyril of Jerusalem used olive symbolism to denote Christ as the source of the sacraments.

Ephrem also treated the vineyard story of Isaiah 5 in the same way Paul dealt with the olive tree in Romans 11. The problem of the "wild grapes," he wrote, is solved. "Graft

into its vines thy grafting-slips," that the vine may bear fruit "for the Lord of the vineyard who threatened it!"²⁶ The concepts of bearing fruit for the lord of the vineyard and of his thoughts about destroying the vineyard are shared with Zenos (Jacob 5:13, 18–20, 23, 27, 29, 31, 46, 60, 71, 76–77). In the same work, Ephrem wrote of "the vine [of] our Lord, the Vine[yard] of Truth," where "souls have become like grafting-slips." After causing a vineyard (Israel) to prosper, the Lord "ruined a vineyard that yielded wild grapes" and "uprooted it."²⁷ These, too, are features of Zenos's parable (Jacob 5:18, 25–26, 37, 40, 42, 45–47, 49, 58, 65–66, 69, 73, 77).

Of particular interest is the twenty-first *Memra* of the *Liber Graduum*, entirely on the tree of life, which identifies the tree with Christ. "The good tree is there in that world of light. . . . He is the Tree of Life, giving life to all things by his fruits."²⁸

From these examples, we see that, in many respects, the commentaries of the Syriac Fathers go beyond Isaiah 5, Matthew 21, and Romans 11, and include elements found in the Zenos account in Jacob 5.

PEOPLE COMPARED TO TREES

Throughout the Bible, people are compared to trees, branches, and roots, as in the Zenos parable.²⁹ Scholars typically trace this imagery to Exodus 15:17, where Moses said of Israel, "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance."

Like unfruitful trees, the wicked are often burned in both the Bible and in pseudepigraphic literature. In *Pseudo-Philo*, we read that Kenaz, upon his election as judge, sought out the wicked of the people. "Even if someone from my own household comes out in the lot of sin, he will not be saved but will be burned in the fire," he declared.³⁰ After

shutting the sinners up in prison, he said, "Did not Moses the friend of the Lord speak about these people, saying, 'Lest there be among you a root bearing poison and bitterness'?"³¹ They were then burned.³²

Job 15:20–34, speaking of "the wicked man," said that "his branch shall not be green" and will be consumed by flames—elements found in Jacob 5:26, 37, 40, 42, 45–47, 49, 58, 66, 77. He is compared to a vine that loses its unripe grapes and to an olive tree that loses its flowers. Similarly, Job 18:14–16 says of the wicked man that "his confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle. . . . Brimstone shall be scattered upon his habitation. His roots shall be dried up beneath, and above shall his branch be cut off."

Jude 1:12 describes the wicked in similar terms, comparing them to "trees whose fruit withered, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots." A comparable passage is found in Psalm 52:5, 8: "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. . . . But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God." The fate of the wicked in these passages corresponds to the threat made in Jacob 5 to uproot the unproductive branches (Jacob 5:7–9, 26, 42, 44–47, 49, 57–58, 65–66, 69, 73, 75, 77).

In contrast to the fate of the wicked, "the righteous shall flourish as a branch; . . . the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life" (Proverbs 11:28, 30); and "the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit" (Proverbs 12:12). "A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved" (Proverbs 12:3). In Psalm 128:3, the righteous man is promised, "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table." In *Pseudo-Philo* 50:1, Peninah calls the barren Hanna "a dry tree," but says that her own sons are "like

a plantation of olive trees."³³ In 1 Enoch 93:2, the righteous are termed "a plant of truth."³⁴

Job said, "My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch" (Job 29:19). This agrees with the description of the righteous man in Psalm 1:3: "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."³⁵ Jeremiah evidently borrowed from this Psalm when he wrote:

Cursed be the man that trusteth in man. . . . For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit. . . . I the Lord . . . give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. (Jeremiah 17:5-8, 10.)³⁶

The same concept is reflected in the pseudepigraphic book of *Ahiqar*:

O my boy! I brought thee up with the best upbringing and trained thee like a tall cedar; and thou hast twisted and bent me. . . . And Haiqar said to him, "Thou art like the tree which was fruitless beside the water, and its master was fain to cut it down, and it said to him, 'Remove me to another place, and if I do not bear fruit, cut me down.' And its master said to it, 'Thou being beside the water hast not borne fruit, how shalt thou bear fruit when thou art in another place?'"³⁷

There are several elements here that resemble the Zenos

parable. The young man is compared to a tree that, though planted in a good spot, is fruitless (cf. Jacob 5:25, 43). He begs to be removed to another place, reminding us that some of the cuttings in Jacob 5 produced well in barren spots (cf. Jacob 5:21–22).

The author of Psalm 52 compared himself to “a green olive tree in the house of God” (Psalm 52:8). In his vision of the future temple, Zechariah saw two olive trees beside the candlestick, which is a representation of the tree of life, with its seven branches (Zechariah 4:2-3).³⁸ When he asked the angel what the trees meant, he was told that “these are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:11–14).³⁹ In a similar vision of the future temple, John was told that the “two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth” were “two witnesses” or “prophets” who should defend the Jews against their enemies in the last days before being slain and then restored to life (Revelation 11:1–12).

That the “anointed ones” of Zechariah’s prophecy should be represented by olive trees is significant because the anointing is with olive oil. A similar idea is found in Judges 9:8–15, a parable in which the trees, wanting a king, offered to “anoint” the olive tree, source of the anointing oil. The olive tree declined the offer, which was then made to the fig tree and the vine (each of which also refused the honor) and then the bramble (which accepted). The olive tree is clearly Gideon who, though qualified to serve as king, declined the position for himself and his descendants (Judges 8:22–23). The fig tree and the vine perhaps represent Gideon’s offspring.⁴⁰ The parable was told by one of Gideon’s sons, Jotham, in order to refute the royal claims of his half-brother Abimelech, who is the bramble (Judges

9:1–6), as Jotham’s explanation of the parable makes clear (Judges 9:16–20).

Jotham’s parable contains two other elements found also in the parable of Zenos. It mentions “good fruit” (Judges 9:11) and speaks of a fire devouring the trees. However, the fruit belongs to the fig tree, while the trees devoured by the fire are cedars (Judges 9:15).⁴¹

Jotham’s parable, while bearing a few resemblances to that of Zenos, was particularly suited to the occasion, and may not be dependent on Zenos at all.⁴² One is tempted to suggest, however, that Zenos may have been influenced by Jotham. Significantly, both appear to have been of the tribe of Manasseh.⁴³ Might Zenos have been a descendant of Jotham? Or could Jotham have counted Zenos among his fathers?

Nibley likened Zenos’s olive tree allegory to the *Thanksgiving Hymns* from Qumran, wherein well-watered trees in the desert are the righteous in the world, whereas the wicked are cut down and burned.⁴⁴ Of those who follow God’s counsel, *Thanksgiving Hymn 10* says:

[For these hast Thou planted a tree] which blooms with flowers unfading, whose boughs put forth thick leaves, which stands firm-planted for ever, and gives shade to all []; [whose branches tower] to hea[ven], whose roots sink down to the abyss. All the rivers of Eden [water] its boughs; it thrives beyond [all bounds], [burgeons beyond all] measure. [Its branches stretch] endless across the world, [and its roots go down] to the nethermost depths. Moreover, there shall well forth for them a fountain of light, a perpetual spring unfailing. Howbeit, in its [fiery] sparks all [infamous] men shall be burned; it shall be as a flame devouring the guilty, until they are destroyed.⁴⁵

The author continued by stating his reliance on God “to

bring [what I have plan]ted to flower, to make the shoot to grow."⁴⁶ Elements that the hymn shares with the Zenos parable include the tall branches, the watering by the rivers of Eden, and the burning of the wicked.

Thanksgiving Hymn 14 also has elements found in the Zenos parable and Lehi's vision, such as the stream that waters the trees and the tree of life, which apparently represents the Messiah (being called the "stock of Truth").

I give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, because, in a dry place, thou hast set me beside a fountain; in an arid land, beside a spring; in a de[sert], beside an oasis; like one of those evergreen trees—fir or pine or cypress—planted together to Thy glory, which, hidden 'mid other trees—trees that stand beside water—are fed from a secret spring, and which put forth blossom unfading upon an eternal trunk, striking firm root ere they burgeon, spreading their roots to the stream; a tree whose stem is exposed to living waters and whose stock lies beside a perpetual fount; a tree on whose flowering leaves all the beasts of the woodland can feed; whose roots are so widespread that all wayfarers cannot but tread them; upon whose dangling boughs there is room for every bird.

The "other trees . . . that stand beside water" rail against the tree, "which puts forth the shoot of Holiness upon the stock of Truth," because they cannot have access to the water. That the tree in question is the tree of life is evidenced by the fact that its fruit has been hedged "by the mystic power of stalwart angels, by holy spirits, and by a flaming sword turning this way and that" so that the wicked "may not [drink] from the Fountain of Life." The trees of the wicked will be burned by fire "and they shall wither, and the planting of that fruit [prove in vain]," while the trees of the righteous are to bloom forever, "their roots . . . firmly set and their trees planted in line of the sun, in

light [unfailing;] that their [boughs] may yield glorious foliage." As long as the author works to preserve the tree, it flourishes, but when he slackens off, the tree turns to "briars and brambles" and he becomes "like a man abandoned in [a desert]." ⁴⁷ In this respect, the tree of life is like the tree of faith planted in the heart, as described in Alma 32; without nourishment, it cannot flourish.

Thanksgiving Hymn 16 from the Qumran scroll has the writer declaring, "Wherefore, with heart exposed to a spring unfailing, drawing my strength from on high, I shall blossom like a lily, [while all the fruit of the wicked shall be but travail] and woe; they shall wither like a flower before [the heat]." ⁴⁸

Elsewhere, Nibley has suggested that the writer of the hymns may have been Zenos himself, since many of the other sayings attributed to Zenos in the Book of Mormon parallel statements found in the Qumran hymns. ⁴⁹ If this assessment is correct, the presence of so many parallels between Jacob 5 and some of the hymns (notably 10 and 14) is more than coincidence.

THE PLANTING OF THE LORD

"Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit" (Jeremiah 12:2). Like Jeremiah, a number of biblical authors stressed that it was God who planted Israel. ⁵⁰ Micah spoke of Israel's capital Samaria as "plantings of a vineyard" (Micah 1:5-6). Through Isaiah, the Lord called Israel "the branch of my planting" (Isaiah 60:21) and noted that Israel was to "be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord" (Isaiah 61:3). The Lord addressed Judah in the words, "Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how

then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?" (Jeremiah 2:21).

This concern that a planting of the Lord should not produce good fruit is frequently repeated throughout the Bible. Isaiah, declaring that "the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant,"⁵¹ compared Israel to a "vineyard in a very fruitful hill," whose owner, having worked hard to prepare the spot, "planted it with the choicest vine . . . and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes." In words reminiscent of Jacob 5:41, he declared, "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?" Like the lord of the vineyard in Jacob 5, he proposed destroying the vineyard, that "it shall not be pruned, nor digged" (Isaiah 5:1-7). Later in the same chapter, he spoke of the captivity of Israel (Isaiah 5:13) and of "the fire [that] devoureth the stubble, and the flame [that] consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness and their blossom shall go up as dust" (Isaiah 5:24; verses 25-30 describe a foreign invasion, the means by which Israel was scattered).

Jesus, evidently borrowing from Isaiah's parable,⁵² compared God to "a certain householder, which planted a vineyard . . . and let it out to husbandmen," expecting to "receive the fruits of it" (Matthew 21:33-45). Though his parable has a different point, it is clear that the vineyard represents the people of Israel and the husbandmen its leaders, while the servants whom they slew were the prophets and the son, Jesus himself.⁵³

In explaining the parable (Matthew 21:42), Jesus cited the passage about the rejected cornerstone⁵⁴ from Psalm 118:22-23, which Jacob had used to preface his record of

Zenos's account of the olive tree parable (Jacob 4:15–18).⁵⁵ This is one of the Hallel psalms recited at the feast of Tabernacles, which celebrated the grape and olive harvest and was the occasion of royal anointings.⁵⁶ It is also the time when Christ will return to the Mount of Olives (whence he rose to heaven and where he wrought the Atonement in Gethsemane) to rule on earth (Zechariah 14:4, 16-19).⁵⁷ Was the cornerstone element, too, borrowed from Zenos? It is used by Paul two chapters before his discussion of the grafted branches (Romans 9:32–33).

The earliest reference to Israel rejecting “the Rock of his salvation” is found in Deuteronomy 32:15, following references to honey and oil from the rock, along with milk and “pure blood of the grape” (Deuteronomy 32:13–14). When the text returns to the subject of the Rock (Deuteronomy 32:30–33), the passage is tied to the vine of Sodom and the bitter grapes of Gomorrah, referred to earlier (see also Deuteronomy 32:37–38).

In Psalm 80:8–16, Israel is compared to a vine and a tree brought up out of Egypt and planted by the Lord in the land of Canaan, where the previous population had been removed.⁵⁸ The subsequent scattering of Israel is symbolized by its branches going over the waters. But the Psalmist asked that the Lord “visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself” (Psalm 80:13–14). In the end, the branches are plucked, devoured, cut down, and burned, as in Jacob 5.

The *Damascus Rule*, speaking of Israel, says that God “caused a plant root to spring up from Israel and Aaron to inherit His land and to prosper on the good things of His earth.”⁵⁹

The most striking characteristic of the Lord of the vine-

yard in Zenos's parable is his patience with an unfruitful tree and his willingness to spend much of his time nourishing it. To Hosea, the Lord said, "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree. . . . They shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine. . . . Ephraim shall say, . . . I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found" (Hosea 14:4–8).

In the pseudepigraphic account in *Pseudo-Philo*, the Lord tells Joshua, when he divided the land at Shiloh, "And your land will be renowned over all the earth, and your seed special among all the peoples, who will say, 'Behold a faithful people! Because they believed in the Lord, therefore the Lord freed them and planted them.' And so I will plant you like a desirable vine, . . . and I will command the rain and the dew, and they will be abundant for you during your lifetime."⁶⁰

The same work tells of a vision of the high priest Eleazar, which he recounted to his son Phinehas, in which the Lord said: "How much I have toiled among my people . . . And I would plant a great vineyard, and from it I would choose a plant; and I would care for it and call it by my name, and it would be mine forever. When I did all the things that I said, nevertheless my plant that was called by my name did not recognize me as its planter, but it destroyed its own fruit and did not yield up its fruit to me."⁶¹ Kenaz, hearing these words recounted years later by Phinehas, remarked, "Will the Shepherd destroy his flock for any reason except that it has sinned against him? And now he is the one who will spare us according to the abundance of his mercy, because he has toiled so much among us."⁶² The great care taken of the vineyard by the Lord,

along with the failure of the plants to yield fruit, are features shared with the Zenos account in Jacob 5.

In Jubilees 36:6, Isaac tells Jacob and Esau that God "will plant you on the earth as a righteous planting which will not be uprooted for all the eternal generations." If they prove unrighteous, they would "be uprooted from the land of the living" and burned "with devouring burning fire" (Jubilees 36:9–10).⁶³

In another pseudepigraphic work Enoch, knowing that the deluge would come, asked God to "not destroy all the flesh of the people," but to "sustain the flesh of righteousness and uprightness as a plant of eternal seed."⁶⁴ That plant was the family of Noah, whose descendant Abraham was selected as "a righteous planting for eternal generations, and a holy seed."⁶⁵ In the *Apocalypse of Adam*, we read that "the Illuminator of knowledge will pass by in great glory in order to leave a remnant of the seed of Noah and the sons of Ham and Japheth so that he might leave behind for himself fruit-bearing trees," by which we understand Israel.⁶⁶

A late tradition associated the planting of the Lord with the royal line of David, and placed these words in the mouth of Solomon:

For I was established and lived and was saved, and my foundations were laid on account of the Lord's hand; because he has planted me. For he set the root, and watered it and adapted it and blessed it, and its fruits will be forever. It penetrated deeply and sprang up and spread out, and it was full and was enlarged. And the Lord alone was praised, in his planting and in his cultivation; In his care and in the blessing of his lips, in the beautiful planting of his right hand; And in the attainment of his planting, and in the understanding of his mind. Hallelujah.⁶⁷

The writer of the *Odes of Solomon* compared himself to a

planting of the Lord, placing stress on the care the Lord gave, the deep roots, the spreading branches, and the eternal fruit. These features are all found in Jacob 5. Earlier in the ode, the writer spoke of the Lord helping him "to pass over chasms and gulfs, . . . cliffs and valleys," becoming "for me a haven of salvation, and set me on the place of immortal life. And he went with me and caused me to rest and did not allow me to err; because he was and is the Truth. And there was no danger for me because I constantly walked with him; and I did not err in anything because I obeyed him."⁶⁸ These elements remind us of Lehi's vision of the tree of life, of the rod and path which led thereto, and of the gulf into which the wicked, who did not cling to the word of God, fell.

Chapter 11 of the same work also has a number of parallels with the Zenos parable. The author spoke of his heart being "pruned and its flower appeared, then grace sprang up in it, and it produced fruits for the Lord."⁶⁹ The Lord established him "upon the rock of truth" and provided waters from a spring, "living water that does not die."⁷⁰ "Renewed . . . with his garment, and possessed . . . by his light," he "became like a land which blossoms and rejoices in its fruits."⁷¹ Continuing the tree analogy, he compared the Lord to "the sun upon the face of the land" and spoke of receiving dew.⁷² Taken to paradise, he saw

blooming and fruit-bearing trees, and self-grown was their crown. Their branches were flourishing and their fruits were shining; their roots (were) from an immortal land. And a river of gladness was irrigating them, and the region about them in the land of eternal life. Then I adored the Lord because of his magnificence. And I said, blessed, O Lord, are they who are planted in your land, and who have a place in your Paradise; And who grow in the growth of your trees, and have passed from dark-

ness into light. Behold, all your laborers are fair, they who work good works, and turn from wickedness to your kindness. For they turned away from themselves the bitterness of the trees, when they were planted in your land. And everyone was like your remnant. (Blessed are the workers of your water,) and the eternal memorial of your faithful servants.⁷³

This passage has a number of parallels to the Zenos parable. People, compared to trees, are planted by the Lord, who waters them, provides sunlight, and prunes them, whereupon they produce fruits. The ultimate planting is in the Paradise ("orchard") of God. Those trees that do not respond produce bitter fruit. Also note the role played by the "laborers" and the "faithfulness of the servants." There is a further tie to Lehi's vision in that, like the brilliantly white fruit of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:11), the fruits of the trees in the ode "were shining."

The pseudepigraphic work known as the *Psalms of Solomon* contains a similar destruction of "the Lord's paradise," wherein "the trees of life are his devoted ones. Their planting is firmly rooted forever; they shall not be uprooted as long as the heavens shall last, For Israel is the portion and inheritance of God."⁷⁴ The verses that follow contrast the fate of the disobedient, whose "inheritance is Hades, and darkness and destruction." Again, we are reminded that, in Lehi's vision (1 Nephi 8:32; 15:26–30), the disobedient are lost in the gulf, evidently akin to Hades in this passage.⁷⁵

The likening of humans to trees planted by the Lord is also found in *4 Ezra*, where we read that "not all that were planted will take root; so all those who have been sown in the world will not be saved."⁷⁶ In the same work, we find the following passage:

So I considered my world, and behold, it was lost, and my earth, and behold it was in peril because of the devices of those who had come into it. And I saw and spared some with great difficulty, and saved for myself one grape out of a cluster,⁷⁷ and one plant out of a great forest. So let the multitude perish, which has been born in vain, but let my grape and my plant be saved, and my plant because with much labor I have perfected them.⁷⁸

The “great labor” invested in the plant that was spared reminds us of Zenos’s description of the diligent labor in the vineyard.⁷⁹ Despite this intense care, in most versions of the parable some of the trees or branches fail to produce fruit.

THE FATE OF UNFRUITFUL TREES

Jesus compared people to trees, calling their deeds “fruit” (Matthew 12:33). He declared that the trees that failed to produce good fruit would be cut down and cast into the fire.⁸⁰ On one occasion, to illustrate his point, he cursed an unfruitful fig tree and it withered (Matthew 21:18–20; Mark 11:12–14, 20–21). This act was probably intended to establish Christ’s divine nature, since the tree parables were, by then, well known, and people would have been aware that God is the master of the vineyard of Israel.

Alma, perhaps citing an earlier scripture, taught:

Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely; Yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire— For behold, the time is at hand that whosoever bringeth forth not good fruit, or whosoever doeth not the works of righteousness, the same shall have cause to wail and mourn. (Alma 5:34–36.)⁸¹

One of the more well-known descriptions of the unfruitful tree is found in Luke 13:6–9:

A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

The parable of the unfruitful fig tree shares several features with the Zenos parable: the fruit tree is planted in a vineyard; it fails to produce as expected; the owner works with a servant; he plans to nourish the tree and, if it does not bear fruit, cut it down. In the Luke 13 account, the master of the vineyard had “come seeking fruit” for three years, just as in the Zenos parable he paid three visits to the vineyard. Some of the wording is identical to that found in Jacob. “Why cumbereth it the ground?” is the question asked in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon stories (Luke 13:7; Jacob 5:9, 30, 44, 49, 66). To save the tree, the owner plans to “dig about it, and dung it” (Luke 13:8; Jacob 5:5, 47, 64).

THE LOFTINESS OF THE BRANCHES

In the Zenos parable, the servant attributes the unfruitfulness of the olive trees to “the loftiness of [the] vineyard” (Jacob 5:48). The “wild branches,” representing the Gentiles, had “overrun the roots” of the main tree (Jacob 5:37). This loftiness may symbolize pride—the problem that prompted Paul to write the parable of the grafted branches to the Roman saints (Romans 11:18) and of which Jacob spoke in Jacob 2:12–22.

In the the pseudepigraphic book of *4 Baruch*, trees are spoken of in terms similar to those found in Jacob 5:

And the tree of life which is planted in the middle of Paradise will cause all the uncultivated trees to bear fruit, and they will grow and sprout. And the trees that had (already) sprouted and boasted and said, "We raised our top to the air," he will cause them to wither together with the loftiness of their branches. And the firmly rooted tree will cause them to be judged!⁸²

Here, as in Jacob 5, the tree of life, when joined with "uncultivated" or wild trees, causes the latter to bear fruit. In both passages, their "loftiness" results in damage to the trees (cf. Jacob 5:48).

A similar theme is found in Daniel 4:10–26, in which the Babylonian king is compared to "a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven" (Daniel 4:10–11, 20). Though the tree produced much fruit (Daniel 4:12), an angel commanded, "Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit" (Daniel 4:14, 23). The stump and roots alone remained (Daniel 4:15, 23, 26).

THE FATE OF NATIONS

In the Bible, the fate of nations is often compared to trees and other plants that are destroyed by invading armies or natural catastrophes.⁸³ For example, in Isaiah 16:7–14, Moab is compared to a vine, whose "principal plants" (leaders?) have been "broken down" (Isaiah 16:8). The stretching out of the branches "over the sea" (Isaiah 16:8) is found in other prophecies about scattered nations. The Moabites who escape destruction are termed a "remnant," as in other biblical and Book of Mormon passages. In

this prophecy, it is the Lord who cares for the vine, watering it with his tears (Isaiah 16:9). Note the reference to the vine and the vineyard (Isaiah 16:9–10). Jeremiah also used the branch analogy in reference to Moab, saying, “O vine of Sibmah, . . . thy plants are gone over the sea, . . . the spoiler is fallen upon thy summer fruits and upon thy vintage” (Jeremiah 48:32–33).⁸⁴

Isaiah terms the Assyrians a “rod” in the hand of God (Isaiah 10:5, 15) that shall be burned as thorns and briars by a fire that “shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field. . . . And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few” (Isaiah 10:16–19). Describing the Assyrian invasion of Judah, he prophesied that the Lord “shall lop the bough . . . and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron” (Isaiah 10:33–34).⁸⁵

Ezekiel, perhaps following Isaiah’s example, warned the king of Egypt not to become like “the Assyrian [who] was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches . . . and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs,” rendered great by the “rivers running round about his plants” (Ezekiel 31:3–5, 7). “All the trees of Eden, that were in the garden of God, envied him” (Ezekiel 31:9), but his height and the thickness of his branches were his undoing (Ezekiel 31:10). Other nations “have cut him off, and . . . his branches are fallen, and his boughs are broken” (Ezekiel 31:12).

Similar imagery is used to describe the annihilation of the wicked at Christ’s second coming. Malachi wrote of this destruction of the last days:

For behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither

root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings. (Malachi 4:1–2.)

In this passage, the wicked are burned, leaving “neither root nor branch,” while the sun provides life and health to the righteous (as it does to trees).

This last great destruction is also described in harvest terms in Revelation 14:14–20, where we read that “the earth was reaped” (Revelation 14:16). John overheard one of the angels declaring, “Gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God” (Revelation 14:18–19). But when “the winepress was trodden . . . blood came out of the winepress,” indicating that the vine is a metaphor for human beings.

THE SCATTERING AND GATHERING OF ISRAEL

In one of the earliest passages comparing Israel to trees, the prophet Balaam said of Israel, “As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river’s side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters” (Numbers 24:6–7). Throughout the Old Testament, Israel is compared to a tree or vine whose scattered branches will be gathered back to their homeland and replanted. We shall examine some of the major passages here.

Early Prophets

A passage attributed to Moses but obviously written after the captivity of Israel declares that, because the

Israelites turned from God, "the Lord rooted them out of their land in anger, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 29:28).

The theme of "uprooting" Israel continues in other biblical works. The Lord reputedly told Solomon that if the people turned from him, "then will I pluck them up by their roots out of my land which I have given them" (2 Chronicles 7:20). The prophet Ahijah declared that "the Lord shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river" (1 Kings 14:15).

Isaiah

The prophet Isaiah compared Israel to a tree more often than any other Bible writer. The context was typically a prophetic discussion of the scattering and gathering of Israel. If, as critics have suggested, Jacob 5 was borrowed from the Bible, it is much more likely that it relied on Isaiah than on the Epistle to the Romans or on Luke 13. If, on the other hand, the Zenos parable is authentic, then it is likely that Isaiah borrowed from that parable or that they both borrowed from a common source.

In one of Isaiah's earliest statements, he described Judah as being made desolate by foreign invaders, its cities "burned with fire." Jerusalem would be "left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers," with but "a very small remnant" left (Isaiah 1:7-9). "In that day," he wrote, "shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel" (Isaiah 4:2). Though often applied by commentators to the Messiah, this passage

evidently refers to those Israelites not taken captive or who return from captivity.

Speaking of the future scattering of Israel, Isaiah wrote, "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves; so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof" (Isaiah 6:13).

Describing the forthcoming Assyrian invasion of 701 B.C., the prophet wrote that the Lord would cause the burning of thorns, briars, and the forest (Isaiah 10:16–19). "The Lord of hosts shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron" (Isaiah 10:33–34). This prophecy is immediately followed by his description of the rod, the stem, the branch, and the root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1–10), and of the regathering of Israel.

In a later writing, he advised the inhabitants to "sow . . . and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof," declaring that a remnant of Judah would escape and "again take root downward, and bear fruit upward" (Isaiah 37:30–32; cf. 2 Kings 19:29–31).

In a prophecy directed against Damascus, Isaiah spoke of the fate of both the Syrian and the Israelite capitals (Isaiah 17:1–11). He likened the "remnant" to "gleaning grapes" and olives left on the tree after the harvest "in the top of the uppermost bough . . . in the outmost fruitful branches."⁸⁶ Israel's cities, he declared, would "be as a forsaken bough, and an uppermost branch." Israel would "plant pleasant plants and . . . set it with strange slips." The Hebrew word rendered "set" means to "sow" (for example, seeds), while the word translated "slips" refers to pruned branches. It would appear that Isaiah, like Zenos, was

speaking of grafting of foreign branches into the “pleasant plants.”

In Isaiah 24:1–13, the prophet spoke of the scattering of the people and the destruction of the city (evidently Jerusalem). The inhabitants, he said, “are burned, and few men left. The new wine mourneth, the vine languisheth.” He compares the situation to “the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done.”

Isaiah 27:2–11 begins with words similar to those found at the beginning of Isaiah 5, which was discussed above. In this passage, it is the Lord himself who cares for and waters the vineyard and burns the briars and thorns. The vineyard clearly represents Israel: “He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” (Isaiah 27:6). Implied in this statement is that Israel has been scattered abroad, and some parts of the nation destroyed: “They shall be broken off: the women come, and set them on fire” (Isaiah 27:11). A later passage in Isaiah 60:21 calls the people of Israel “the branch of my planting, the work of my hands,” and indicates that they will return to their land.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah was Isaiah’s spiritual successor as the prophet of the exile. Isaiah had foreseen the captivity and subsequent gathering of both Israel and Judah, the Assyrian conquest of Israel took place in his day. A century later, Jeremiah repeated the Lord’s message that Judah would be taken captive and later regathered, and then was an eye-witness to that captivity.

The Lord told Jeremiah, “I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to

plant" (Jeremiah 1:10).⁸⁷ Similar wording is used in a later passage by the same prophet:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the Lord. (Jeremiah 31:27–28.)⁸⁸

The Lord explained to Jeremiah (2:1–17) that Israel was "the firstfruits of his increase." He declared, "I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination." The statement resembles Zenos's declaration that the vineyard had become "corrupted" (Jacob 5:47) and that the lord of the vineyard was concerned about the unfruitful trees that cumbered his vineyard (Jacob 5:49). The Jeremiah passage also speaks of the cities being burned and of the Lord being the "fountain of living waters" referred to above. In Jeremiah 2:21, the Lord declared to Israel, "I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?" The idea is identical to the one we noted earlier in Isaiah 5:1–7. In Jeremiah 6:8–9, the Lord threatened to make Jerusalem "desolate, a land not inhabited. . . . They shall thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine: turn back thine hand as a grapegatherer into the baskets."

Jeremiah spoke of Judah as "a green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit," planted by the Lord himself who, because of his people's sins, "hath kindled fire upon it, and the branches of it are broken." Other nations want to "destroy the tree with the fruit thereof" (Jeremiah 11:16–19). Through

Jeremiah, the Lord also threatened to punish Israel: "According to the fruit of your doings, . . . I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof, and it shall devour all things round about" (Jeremiah 21:14).

Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah who had been taken captive to Babylon eleven years before the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. The exile was uppermost in his mind and in his writings.

In Ezekiel 15:1–8, the Lord compared the inhabitants of Jerusalem to a useless "vine tree . . . a branch which is among the trees of the forest," which "is cast into the fire for fuel" and burned. "As the vine tree among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem . . . and fire shall devour them . . . and I will make the land desolate."

Ezekiel also used the branch in a parable recorded in Ezekiel 17:1–24, which is one of the closest Old Testament parallels to the parable in Jacob 5:

A great eagle . . . took the highest branch of the cedar: he cropped off the top of his young twigs, and carried it into a land of traffic. . . . He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field; he placed it by great waters, and set it as a willow tree. And it grew, and became a spreading vine . . . whose branches turned toward him, and the roots thereof were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs. . . . There was also another great eagle . . . and, behold, this vine did bend her roots toward him, and shot forth her branches toward him, that he might water it by the furrows of her plantation. It was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine. (Ezekiel 17:3–8.)

The branch carried away and planted in good land by the first eagle parallels the story of the lord of the vineyard in the Zenos parable, who planted at least one of the branches in a good plot of ground (Jacob 5:25, 43). If the first eagle is the Lord, the second is evidently a pagan god (perhaps Baal) to whose worship the people had turned. The consequence of this action is that he shall "pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it wither" (Ezekiel 17:9-10).

Ezekiel continues the story by relating the parable to the exile of Jewish leaders by the king of Babylon, who "hath also taken the mighty of the land" (Ezekiel 17:13). The Jewish king, he informs us, had broken his covenant, in consequence of which

I will bring him to Babylon . . . and they that remain shall be scattered toward all winds. . . . I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar. . . . And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. (Ezekiel 17:20-24.)

The "highest branch" and the "high mountain" of Israel reminds us of the "loftiness of the vineyard" in Jacob 5:48. Similar thoughts are expressed in this passage from Ezekiel 19:10-14:

Thy mother is like a vine in thy blood, planted by the waters: she was fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters. And she had strong rods for the sceptres of them that bare rule, and her stature was exalted among the thick branches, and she appeared in her height with

the multitude of her branches. But she was plucked up in fury, she was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up her fruit: her strong rods were broken and withered; the fire consumed them. And now she is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty ground. And fire is gone out of a rod of her branches, which hath devoured her fruit, so that she hath no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule. This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.

Though the branch is taken from the cedar tree, as in Ezekiel 17, after it is “planted . . . in a fruitful field . . . [as] a willow tree,” it is called “a spreading vine,” with roots and branches. The “good soil” in which it was planted is reminiscent of the “good spot of ground” in the Zenos parable (Jacob 5:25, 43), while the “dry and thirsty ground” parallels the “poor spot of ground” of Jacob 5:21–23. In both passages, the destruction of the tree/vine is contemplated. In the Ezekiel account, its fruit is dried up by the wind and fire consumes the branches. The transplanted branches evidently represent the king of Judah, along with the princes and “the mighty of the land,” taken captive to Babylon, “planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty ground.” The remaining branches, like Israel, are “scattered toward all winds.” The use of such terms as “fruitful” and “full of branches” further tie the passage to Jacob 5.

Though the tree suffers much in Ezekiel’s prophecy, he later noted that, after Israel is gathered in the last days, the Lord would “raise up for them a plant of renown” (Ezekiel 34:29). The term “plants of renown” is used in Doctrine and Covenants 124:61 in reference to the leaders of the Church.

The Minor Prophets

Some of the minor biblical prophets also speak of trees, branches, and vines in terms resembling the Zenos parable. For example, Joel 1:5–12 speaks of invaders who have

destroyed the vine and the fig tree of the Lord's land, which may symbolize the people of Israel. There is specific mention of new wine (product of the vine) and of oil (product of the olive tree). Other fruit trees are also said to be withered. The land devoured by fire becomes "a desolate wilderness" (Joel 2:3), and the invading army is compared to a fire (Joel 2:5). But the invaders will be driven "into a land barren and desolate" (Joel 2:20), while Israel's pastures will return and there will be plenty of wheat, wine, and oil (Joel 2:23–24).

The prophet Hosea recorded, "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time" (Hosea 9:10). He also compared Ephraim, the leading tribe in the kingdom of Israel, to a plant whose "root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit. . . . My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him; and they shall be wanderers among the nations. Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself" (Hosea 9:16–10:1). He further spoke of "the goodness of his land," again reminding us of Jacob 5:25, 43.

Hosea also wrote that Israel would be taken captive to Assyria (Hosea 11:5). "And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels" (Hosea 11:6). Again, the branches appear to represent people.

The prophet Nahum (2:1–6), described what appears to be the Assyrian invasion, in which Israel's "vine branches" have been marred and its "fir trees . . . terribly shaken." The reference seems to be the people of the land.

Pseudepigraphic Works

Extracanonial books have also employed the tree imagery found in the parable of Zenos. *Fourth Ezra*, speaking of the election and scattering of Israel, declares:

O sovereign Lord, from every forest of the earth, and from all its trees you have chosen one vine . . . and from all the flowers of the world you have chosen for yourself one lily.⁸⁹ . . . And now, O Lord, why have you given over the one to the many, and dishonored the root beyond the others, and scattered your only one among the many?⁹⁰

A similar question is asked in the Greek version of the *Apocalypse of Baruch*: "Lord, why have you set fire to your vineyard and laid it waste?"⁹¹ The idea of burning the vineyard is found in the Zenos parable (Jacob 5:77).

The *Zadokite Fragment* compares Israelites returning from Babylon to a "root which had been planted of old, allowing it once more to possess the land and to grow fat in the richness of its soil." Like the lord of the vineyard in Zenos's parable, the Lord "took care of them and brought [them] to blossom."⁹² Similarly, *Jubilees* reports God's intention to gather Israel "from the midst of all the nations" and to "transplant them as a righteous plant."⁹³

The Ethiopic book of *1 Enoch* contains a number of passages resembling the parable of Zenos. In chapter 10, we read of the wicked being "bound together," evidently like sheaves; "they will burn and die."⁹⁴ But "the plant of righteousness and truth will appear forever and he will plant joy. And then the righteous ones will escape. . . . And in those days the whole earth will be worked in righteousness, all of her planted with trees, and will find blessing. And they shall plant pleasant trees upon her—vines."⁹⁵

The passage goes on to speak of the wine and oil that will result from the vines and olives and speaks of the earth being cleansed "from all injustice" as the Lord removes from it the wicked.⁹⁶

In chapter 24–25, Enoch is shown a very fragrant and beautiful tree, which Michael then explains to him is the

tree of life, reserved for the righteous in the last days.⁹⁷ He is then shown the future Jerusalem, “a blessed place, shaded with branches which live and bloom from a tree that was cut.”⁹⁸ These branches are very much like the branches in the Zenos parable. Continuing his spiritual journey, Enoch visits trees in different parts of the world,⁹⁹ much like the servant of the vineyard in Jacob 5 visits the branches he planted in various parts of the vineyard.

In *1 Enoch* 93:2, Enoch tells his children about the “plant of truth,” who is evidently Abraham or his descendant Christ, both of whom are alluded to in subsequent verses:

Then after the completion of the third week a (certain) man shall be elected as the plant of righteous judgment, and after him one (other) shall emerge as the eternal plant of righteousness . . . the sixth week . . . at its completion, the house of the kingdom shall be burnt with fire; and therein the whole clan of the chosen root shall be dispersed . . . the seventh week. . . . At its completion, there shall be elected the elect ones of righteousness from the eternal plant of righteousness.¹⁰⁰

As in the Zenos parable, the plant (the “clan of the chosen root”) is dispersed.

THE TREE OF LIFE

In the pseudepigraphic book of *4 Ezra*, after speaking of the scattering of Israel among the nations (*4 Ezra* 2:7), the Lord promised to “give them the kingdom of Jerusalem” and “the tree of life shall give them fragrant perfume.”¹⁰¹ This ties the return from scattering to Lehi’s vision as well as to the parable of Zenos.

The concept is paralleled in Revelation 2:7 (cf. Revelation 22:14), where we read that the righteous gathering in

Jerusalem in the last days will eat of the fruit of the tree of life. Later in the same book we read:

And he shewed me a pure river of water¹⁰² of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1–2.)

The twelve kinds of fruit, one each month, are evidently symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel.¹⁰³ John had just written of the heavenly Jerusalem come to earth (Revelation 21:10) that its wall had twelve gates (Revelation 21:21) named after the twelve tribes of Israel (Revelation 21:12), measured 12,000 furlongs in either direction (21:16), was 144 cubits (12 x 12) high (Revelation 21:17), and having foundations decorated with twelve kinds of precious stones (Revelation 21:19–20). The fact that the leaves of the tree of life are said to be “for the healing of the nations” (cf. Ezekiel 47:12) reminds us of God’s promise that the nations of the world would be blessed through Abraham’s seed (Genesis 12:3; 22:18). Paul understood this seed to be Christ (Galatians 3:16), through whom we, by adoption, can be “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).

CONCLUSIONS

I have no doubt that this study has not exhausted all ancient texts bearing a resemblance to the Zenos parable found in Jacob 5. Nevertheless, the corpus dealt with here leads me to conclude that a large number of other documents have borrowed from Zenos. Some of these have used the Zenos material for ends other than those intended by its

original author. In some few cases, the material makes less sense in its new context; this lends additional support to the idea that it was borrowed from elsewhere.

Critics of the Book of Mormon will undoubtedly continue to maintain that Joseph Smith invented the Zenos parable by borrowing elements from the Bible. Three facts make me think otherwise. The most obvious is the vast array of biblical texts from which he would have had to derive these elements. After more than forty years of studying the Bible, I needed the help of a computer to find some of the passages. I doubt that Joseph Smith could have had very many of these passages at his command.

The second point is the fact that different Bible passages have combinations of elements found in Jacob 5. The variety of these combinations is so complex that I suspect that no two of the texts share all elements with any of the others except with the Zenos parable.

Finally, we have the fact that a number of pseudepigraphic works (only a few of them discussed herein), like the various biblical passages, contain elements found in Zenos's olive tree parable, with the same variety of combinations seen in the Bible. Indeed, some of them have elements of Jacob 5 that are not found in any of the Bible passages. Since Joseph Smith did not have access to these pseudepigraphic books, we conclude that the authors of those works had direct or indirect access to the Zenos parable.¹⁰⁴

Notes

1. See one of the more recent critiques in Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990), and my review of that work in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 3 (1991): 188–230.

2. Here are the known Old Testament quotes in Romans 11. Those marked with * are attributed by Paul to an unnamed source ("the

scriptures," "that which is written," etc.). Those marked with ** are correctly attributed by Paul to the author or source:

- verses 3–4* = 1 Kings 19:14 (10), 18
- verse 8* = Isaiah 29:10 and 6:8
- verses 9–10** = Psalm 69:22–23
- verse 25 is an allusion to Proverbs 26:12 (cf. Proverbs 3:7)
- verses 26–27* = Isaiah 59:20–21
- verse 33 = Isaiah 40:28 (cf. Psalm 145:3)
- verse 34 = Isaiah 40:13

Some of verse 16, though not a quote, may be related to Numbers 15:18–21 or Leviticus 19:23–24. It begins the analogy of the grafting of the branches (verses 16–24). If we count these as borrowing from Zenos's parable, then 53% of the verses in Romans 11 derives from earlier sources. This compares favorably with the statistics for chapters 9 and 10 (45% and 57%, respectively). Here is the correspondence list from those chapters:

- 9:7 = Genesis 21:2
- 9:9* = Genesis 18:10 (14)
- 9:12* = Genesis 25:23
- 9:13* = Malachi 1:2–3
- 9:14 is an allusion to Psalm 92:15
- 9:25** = Exodus 33:19
- 9:17* = Exodus 9:16
- 9:18 = Exodus 33:19
- 9:20–21 evidently draws from Job 9:12, Isaiah 45:9 (cf. 29:16) or Jeremiah 18:6
- 9:25–26** = Hosea 2:23 (quoted also in Zechariah 13:4)
- 9:27–28** = Isaiah 10:22–23
- 9:29** = Isaiah 1:9
- 9:32 is an allusion to Malachi 2:8
- 9:33* = Isaiah 28:16 (cf. Psalm 118:22–23; Isaiah 8:14–15; Matthew 21:42–44; Acts 4:10–11)
- 10:5** = Leviticus 18:5 (cf. Numbers 4:19; Deuteronomy 4:1)
- 10:6–8* = Deuteronomy 30:12–14
- 10:11 = Isaiah 28:16b
- 10:13 = Joel 2:32 (Joel 2:28–32 is cited in Acts 2:17–21)
- 10:15* = Isaiah 52:7 (also Nahum 1:15)
- 10:16** = Isaiah 53:1
- 10:18 = Psalm 19:4
- 10:19** = Deuteronomy 32:21
- 10:20–21** = Isaiah 65:1–2

It is clear that Paul drew very heavily on previous writers in these

chapters, although it is unknown how many of these passages would have been recognized by Paul's audience in Rome. Indeed, Romans 11:33–36 is so self-contained that I suspect that it is an extract from a now-lost text.

3. This fact will undoubtedly be cited by critics as further evidence that Joseph Smith borrowed from Romans 11. But the weight of the evidence is against this idea.

4. Blindness is a feature of Lehi's vision of the tree of life, discussed below.

5. They are also discussed in the articles by David Seely and John Welch in this volume.

6. The alternative to this view is that Joseph Smith borrowed bits and pieces from a very large corpus of biblical and pseudepigraphic texts (some of the latter unknown in his day) to create a remarkably coherent text. To me, this seems as miraculous as translating from plates using a stone!

7. In this respect, we note that other Book of Mormon passages indicate that the Jews will begin to believe in Christ at the time they are gathered (2 Nephi 6:11; 9:2; 10:7; 25:16–17; 30:4–7). This shows that the tree represented both Christ and the land or people of Israel.

8. Nibley noted that, in the third-century Christian document, the *Pistis Sophia*, Jesus and Melchizedek are said to "have issued forth from the pure and perfect (unmixed) light of the First Tree" and that Jesus "comes forth first from the pure light of the First Tree." Hugh W. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 276.

9. This is reflected in the Book of Mormon idea that the Israelites will gather to their lands when they begin to accept Christ (2 Nephi 30:3–7; 3 Nephi 5:20–26).

10. In Galatians 3:16, 29, Paul considered Jesus to be the true seed through whom the nations would be blessed by adoption into Israel, hence the concept of the grafted branches in his epistle to the Romans 11:16–24.

11. See my article "Olive Oil: Symbol of the Holy Ghost" in this volume.

12. Hugh W. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, vol. 7 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 189–91.

13. Christ used the same imagery when speaking of the mustard seed in Matthew 13:31–32 (Mark 4:30–32; Luke 13:18–19; cf. Matthew 17:20). It is interesting that in Matthew and Mark, this appears just after the parables of the sower and the wheat and tares (Matthew

13:18–30; Mark 4:14–20, 26–29), while in Luke, it appears in the same chapter as the story of the fig tree in the vineyard (Luke 13:6–9), which so resembles parts of Zenos’s parable.

14. Jacob 5:3–5, 11–12, 20, 22–25, 27–28, 31, 34, 58, 62, 71, 75–76; cf. Jacob’s comments in Jacob 6:2, 7.

15. In other verses, the branches are cast into the fire (Jacob 5:7, 26, 37, 42, 45–47, 49).

16. Alma had begun his discussion with the words “If ye can no more than desire to believe” (Alma 32:27). His discussion of fruit may have prompted his companion, Amulek, to tell the same audience to “bring fruit unto repentance” (Alma 34:30).

17. This was revealed to Nephi immediately after he had asked about the meaning of the tree and had been shown the birth of Christ in response (1 Nephi 11:10–20).

18. This is the chapter in which the tree of life plays such a prominent role, as discussed elsewhere in this article. See Revelation 22:1–2, 11–12, 14, 17, 19–21. In Revelation 5:5, “the Lion of the tribe of Juda” is identified as “the Root of David.”

19. It is significant that while the fall took place in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), the redemption came in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Christ conquered spiritual death (John 18:1), and in the garden with the tomb, where Christ conquered temporal death (John 18:41). Similarly, an early pseudepigraphic work noted that while the effects of the tree of knowledge brought about the fall, the cross of Christ (traditionally made of olive wood) overcame those effects (Nicodemus 18:9–10). See also the essay by Truman G. Madsen in this volume.

20. This covenant of obedience is part of the sacramental prayer found in Moroni 4:3 and D&C 20:77.

21. For an in-depth study, see chapter 3, “The Vineyard, the Grape, and the Tree of Life,” in Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). The Syriac material discussed here was drawn from Murray’s book. For other Syriac sources, see Stephen D. Ricks, “Olive Culture in the Second Temple Era and Early Rabbinic Period,” in this volume.

22. Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* VI, 244:13–20, in Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 109.

23. Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* XIV, 680:13–16, 22–24, in *ibid.*, 105–106.

24. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 108.

25. Ephrem, *On Virginit*y, in *ibid.*, 112.

26. Ephrem, *On the Nativity* 8, 8–9, in *ibid.*, 102.

27. Ephrem, *On the Nativity* 18, 21–22, in *ibid.*, 102–3.

28. In *ibid.*, 129. Cf. *4 Baruch* 9:16–17, where the trees in the Garden of Eden are said to be people, some of whom are made fruitful by their proximity to the tree of life. Augustine took the account of the Garden of Eden to be allegorical, with the garden representing the Church, the fruit-bearing trees the saints (and the fruit their works), the tree of life Christ, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil being free choice (Augustine, *The City of God* XIII, 21).

29. Cf. Deuteronomy 29:18; 32:32–33; Judges 5:14; Job 14:1–12; Song of Solomon 2:3; Isaiah 9:14–19; 14:8, 19, 29–30; 19:15; 25:5; Daniel 11:7. Cf. also Matthew 13:21, 26–30 (Mark 4:17–20). In the pseudepigraphic *Similitude of Hermas*, people are compared to an elm and a vine (chapter 2) and to trees, of which the barren were burned (chapters 3–4). Also see Hermas's vision of the rods in chapter 8.

30. *Pseudo-Philo* 25:3, in James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 2:335.

31. *Pseudo-Philo* 25:5 (citing Deuteronomy 29:18), in *ibid.*, 335. The King James Version, referring to Israelites who apostatize, speaks of "a root that beareth gall and wormwood." Hebrews 12:15 alludes to the same passage in terming apostates the "root of bitterness."

32. *Pseudo-Philo* 26:1–5, in *ibid.*, 2:335. Cf. Ignatius's *Epistle to the Trallians* 11, where he warned of the "evil offshoots [of Satan] which produce death-bearing fruit," not being "the planting of the Father," whose fruits "would be incorruptible" because they sprang from the cross of Christ. See A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, vol. 1 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1885), 71. In his *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 3, in *ibid.*, 80, Ignatius wrote, "Keep yourselves from those evil plants which Jesus Christ does not tend, because they are not the plantings of the Father." The Zenos parable hints that someone—possibly Satan—may have corrupted the trees of the vineyard (Jacob 5:47). Cf. the "enemy" who sowed tares in the wheat field (Matthew 13:25).

33. James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:364.

34. Joseph Smith blessed his father "as an olive tree, whose branches are bowed down with much fruit" (HC 1:466). He used almost identical wording in blessing his second counselor, Frederick G. Williams (HC 1:444). Of his first counselor, Sidney Rigdon, he wrote, "he shall bring forth much fruit, even as the vine of the choice grape" (HC 1:443).

35. In the same Psalm, the righteous man is contrasted with the

ungodly, who “shall perish” (Psalm 1:4–6). Note the use of the expression “rivers of water” (Psalm 1:1), found also in Lehi’s vision of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:13; 15:26). In the pseudepigraphic *Epistle of Barnabas* 11, the Psalms passage is said to presage baptism: “Further, what says He? ‘And there was a river flowing on the right, and from it arose beautiful trees; and whosoever shall eat of them shall live for ever,’ ” after leaving his sins in the river by baptism (in Coxe, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 144). This, too, compares favorably with Lehi’s vision, especially in the fact that the river was filthy (1 Nephi 15:26), perhaps because of the sins washed away in it.

36. In Jeremiah 17:13 (as in Jeremiah 2:13, where the context is similar), the Lord calls himself “the fountain of living waters” (cf. John 4:10), meaning that he nourishes the tree, as in the Zenos parable. Note that Nephi, explaining his father’s vision of the tree of life, termed the river seen by his father “the fountain of living waters” (1 Nephi 11:25).

37. *Ahiqar* 8:26, 30 (Arabic version), in R. H. Charles, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 774–75.

38. Even in Mesopotamian art the tree of life is often depicted with seven branches. It appears thus on Jewish lamps of the Herodian (Roman) period.

39. Because the angel also mentioned Zerubbabel (Zechariah 4:6–10), one has the impression that he was one of these. Zerubbabel, of course, was of the royal line, and hence properly called an “anointed one,” though the Hebrew term employed in this passage is not the usual “Messiah.” The other person represented by the olive tree was likely the high priest, Joshua, who is termed “the branch” (Zechariah 3:8; 6:11–13). Like the king, the high priest was anointed in ancient Israel.

40. According to the TB *Taanit* B I, 103, the olive tree was Othniel, the fig tree Deborah, the vine Gideon, and the bramble Elimelech.

41. Cf. the parallel to this story in *Pseudo-Philo* 37, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:350, where the olive tree is missing but the fire remains.

42. It would be difficult to make a case for Jotham borrowing the idea of the olive tree and the vine from Zenos’s olive tree in the vineyard, since the trees also offered the throne to the fig tree.

43. That Gideon, Jotham’s father, was of Manasseh is clear from Judges 8:15. The Nephites, who were descendants of Manasseh (Alma 10:3; cf. 1 Nephi 5:14), were of the seed of Zenos (3 Nephi 10:16; cf. Helaman 15:11). As Israelites, the Nephites would have

traced their ancestry through the patrilineage; thus, we presume that Zenos was of the tribe of Manasseh.

44. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 283–85. All quotes from the Qumran document known as the *Book of Hymns* used in this article are taken from Theodor H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, 3d ed. (Garden City: Anchor, 1976).

45. *Thanksgiving Hymn* 10:6, 15–18, in *ibid.*, 168–69.

46. *Thanksgiving Hymn* 10:7, 18, in *ibid.*, 173.

47. *Thanksgiving Hymn* 14:8, 4–27, in *ibid.*, 175–78.

48. *Thanksgiving Hymn* 16:10, 32–34, in *ibid.*, 185.

49. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 280–83.

50. In several other passages, Israel is compared to a rod (Psalm 74:2; Jeremiah 10:16; 51:19). In Isaiah 27:6, we read that Israel is to blossom and bud. There is an obvious reference to Aaron's budding rod here (Numbers 17:1–10).

51. Cf. 3 Baruch 1:2. In the Talmud (TB *Sukkah* 49a), the "choicest vine" of Isaiah 5:2 is the temple, while the tower is its altar. (*Targum Jonathan* expands the text of Isaiah 5:2–5 to make the vineyard Israel, with the Lord's sanctuary and altar for the atonement of sins.) Similarly, in the parable in D&C 101:43–53, Zion (Jackson County, Missouri) is the vineyard, while the unbuilt tower was the temple the Saints had been commanded to construct. (Note mention of the harvest in D&C 101:64–66.) D&C 101 is a follow-on to D&C 97, where we read of the temple (vss. 10–12), the tower (vs. 20), the fruitful tree planted by the Lord in a goodly land by a pure stream and bearing precious fruit (vs. 9), and the destruction of the evil tree by fire (vss. 7, 26).

52. The parable in D&C 101:43–66 (see also 101:100–101) is, in turn, based on Isaiah 5:1–7 and Matthew 21:33–45. Song of Solomon 8:11–13 also appears to be based on the Isaiah passage.

53. This was the understanding of the early Syriac Fathers as well. Ephrem, in explaining the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matthew 21), refers to Psalm 80 and Isaiah. In the latter, he understood the hedge to be the law, the winepress the altar, and the tower the temple, which is close to the Jewish interpretation and the use of the same imagery in D&C 101. Aphrahat tied together such diverse passages as Deuteronomy 32:32; Isaiah 5:3; Jeremiah 2:21; and Ezekiel 15:4–5 (Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* V, 225, 13–232, 2).

54. According to Acts 4:8–12, Jesus is this cornerstone. Cf. Ephesians 2:20.

55. Isaiah may have had the same passage in mind when he wrote Isaiah 28:16. There is another reference to the stumbling stone in

Isaiah 8:14–15 (cited in 2 Nephi 18:14–15). Jeremiah, like Jesus, tied building and planting together in his discussion of Israel (Jeremiah 1:10).

56. See my article, “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990), 2:197-237.

57. Other parts of Zechariah 14 also resemble parts of Psalm 118.

58. Cf. *Jubilees* 1:16–17, where the Lord promises to transplant Israel “as a righteous plant” with “my sanctuary in their midst” (in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:53). The theme is also found in Amos 2:9–10: “Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath. And I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite.” These passages are reminiscent of Jacob 5:44, where the lord of the vineyard speaks of having cut down a previous tree (the Jaredites) “that I might plant this tree [Lehi’s descendants] in the stead thereof.” There is at least a symbolic parallel between Israel being brought into a promised land to inherit the possession of another people and the Nephite colonization in the New World.

59. CD 1.5.7, in Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 3d ed. (London: Penguin, 1990), 83.

60. *Pseudo-Philo* 23:12, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:333.

61. *Pseudo-Philo* 28:4, in *ibid.*, 2:341.

62. *Pseudo-Philo* 28:5, in *ibid.* The shift from comparing the Lord to a husbandman to a shepherd is interesting and finds parallels in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Psalm 80, while calling the Lord the “Shepherd of Israel” (Psalm 80:1), speaks of Israel as a vine brought from Egypt and planted in the promised land (Psalm 80:8). In Psalm 23, where “the Lord is my Shepherd” (Psalm 23:1), anointing oil from the olive tree is introduced (Psalm 23:5). The messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53 compares the Messiah to both a tender plant (Isaiah 53:2) and to a lamb led to the slaughter, while comparing Israel to sheep who have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6–7). Jeremiah also compared Israel to sheep and their leaders to pastors or shepherds, then spoke of the messianic “Branch” (Jeremiah 23:1–5). In another place, he wrote of the wicked being planted, taking root, and producing fruit, then called upon the Lord to slaughter them like sheep (Jeremiah 12:1–3). The Lord responded by saying, “My pastors have destroyed my

vineyard" (Jeremiah 12:10). In the midst of a prophecy about the shepherds of Israel (Ezekiel 34), the prophet Ezekiel noted that gathered Israel was to become a "plant of renown" (Ezekiel 34:29). Isaiah compared the Lord to a shepherd and his people to sheep (Isaiah 40:11) just two verses before one of the passages cited by Paul in Romans 11:34-36, i.e., Isaiah 40:13, 18. In 1 Nephi 15:12-15, the olive branch/vine imagery is commingled with the "true fold of God." In Alma 26:4-7, the fold of God is tied to the harvest in a passage about missionary work. Alma also combined thoughts of the tree of life, corrupt trees, and the shepherd in Alma 5:34-62.

63. See Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:124.

64. 1 Enoch 84:5-6, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:62.

65. *Jubilees* 16:26; in *ibid.*, 2:89. *Jubilees* 16:31 implies that this promise from God is what prompted Abraham to initiate the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles by taking "branches of palm trees and fruit of good trees" and going "around the altar with branches." Abraham told Isaac that God "will raise up from you a righteous plant in all the earth" (*Jubilees* 21:24, in *ibid.*, 2:97).

66. *Apocalypse of Adam* 6:1, in *ibid.*, 1:715.

67. *Odes of Solomon* 38:17-22, in *ibid.*, 2:767-68.

68. *Odes of Solomon* 38:2-5, in *ibid.*, 2:766.

69. *Odes of Solomon* 11:1, in *ibid.*, 2:744.

70. *Odes of Solomon* 11:5-7, in *ibid.* The "rock of truth" is evidently the same rock mentioned by Paul in Romans 11, as discussed above.

71. *Odes of Solomon* 11:11-12, in *ibid.*, 2:745.

72. *Odes of Solomon* 11:13-14, in *ibid.*

73. *Odes of Solomon* 11:16-22, in *ibid.*, 2:745-46.

74. *Psalms of Solomon* 14:1-5, in *ibid.*, 2:663.

75. Cf. 2 Enoch 8:1-7, where Enoch, like Lehi, saw in vision the tree of life, the river, and the valley.

76. 4 Ezra 8:41, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:543.

77. Compare the wording of 4 Ezra 12:42, 44: "For of all the prophets you alone are left to us, like a cluster of grapes from the vintage. . . . Therefore if you forsake us, how much better it would have been for us if we also had been consumed in the burning of Zion" (in *ibid.*, 1:551).

78. 4 Ezra 9:20-22, in *ibid.*, 1:544. Charlesworth notes that the word rendered "forest" here is based on the Syriac, Ethiopic, and Arabic readings, while the Latin reads "tribe." The King James translators, in the apocryphal 2 Esdras, rendered it "people."

79. The word "labor" is used in Jacob 5:29, 61–62, 74; cf. 5:47. The lord of the vineyard instructed his assistant, "Call servants, that we may labor diligently with our might in the vineyard" (Jacob 5:61). The text subsequently notes, "And thus they labored with all diligence" (Jacob 5:74–75). From D&C 39:13, 17, 22—a passage that relies on Jacob 5—the laborers in the vineyard are missionaries, charged with gathering the Lord's people.

80. Matthew 3:10 (Luke 3:9; Alma 5:52; D&C 97:7, 9); 7:16–20 (Luke 6:43–44; 3 Nephi 14:16–20); 12:33.

81. See also Alma 5:37–39, 41, 52, 56–57, 59–60, 62. Alma 5:34 clearly harks back to Lehi's vision of the tree of life as a symbol of Christ, who declared himself to be not only the source of "living water" (John 4:10), but also the "bread of life" (John 6:35). In Alma 32:27–33:1, Alma compares faith to a seed that becomes a tree bearing fruit inside us. His description of that tree in Alma 32:42 is identical to Lehi's description of the tree of life in 1 Nephi 8:10–11.

82. *4 Baruch* 7:16–17, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:424. Similarly, in the Book of the Rolls f-103a, it is the wind from paradise which, touching the trees, ripens their fruits. *Menra* 21 of the *Liber Graduum*, compares Christ to "the Tree of Life, giving life to all things by his fruits" (in Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 129).

83. In some instances, it is not possible to determine if the passage refers to people, e.g., 1 Samuel 18:4–7.

84. The prophet also notes that there is no wine in the winepress. Note the broken staff or rod in Jeremiah 48:17.

85. There follows immediately after this (Isaiah 11:1–10) the prophecy of the rod, the stem, the branch, and the root of Jesse, which was discussed earlier.

86. The Isaiah passage was evidently the inspiration for *4 Ezra* 16:28–31, where it is said of the people of Babylon, Asia, Egypt, and Syria, "For out of a city, ten shall be left; and out of the field two, who have hidden themselves in thick groves and clefts in the rocks. As in an olive orchard three or four olives may be left on every tree, or as when a vineyard is gathered some clusters may be left by those who search carefully through the vineyard; so in those days three or four shall be left by those who search their houses with the sword" (*4 Esdras* 16:28–31, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:558).

87. The prophet was then shown "a rod of an almond tree" (Jeremiah 1:11), perhaps symbolic of Aaron's almond tree rod that blossomed (Numbers 17:8). Significantly, Jeremiah was of the priestly lineage, a descendant of Aaron (Jeremiah 1:1).

88. Note the reference to the sour grapes in Jeremiah 31:29–30 and cf. this passage with Ezekiel 36:8–11.

89. Israel is also termed a lily in Hosea 14:5 and in *Thanksgiving Hymn 16* from Qumran, discussed above; see Gaster, *Dead Sea Scriptures*, 185. Testament of Simeon 6:2 has the patriarch declaring, “my bones will flourish as a rose in Israel and my flesh as a lily in Jacob. . . . Holy ones shall be multiplied from me forever and ever, and their branches shall extend to a great distance” (Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:787).

90. 4 Ezra 5:23–24, 28, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:533.

91. *Apocalypse of Baruch* (Greek) 1:2, in *ibid.*, 1:663.

92. *Zadokite Fragment* 1:5, in Gaster, *Dead Sea Scriptures*, 66.

93. *Jubilees* 1:15–16, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:53.

94. 1 *Enoch* 10:14, in *ibid.*, 1:18.

95. 1 *Enoch* 10:16–17, in *ibid.*

96. 1 *Enoch* [Ethiopic] 10:14, 16–20, in *ibid.*

97. 1 *Enoch* 24:4–25:6 in *ibid.*, 1:26.

98. 1 *Enoch* 26:1, in *ibid.*, 1:26.

99. 1 *Enoch* 28–32, in *ibid.*, 1:27–28.

100. 1 *Enoch* 93:5, 8, 10, in *ibid.*, 1:74.

101. 4 Ezra 2:7, 10–12, in *ibid.*, 1:526–27. The translation in KJV Apocrypha, 2 *Esdras* 2:11, reads, “They shall have the tree of life for an ointment of sweet savor,” implying that it is the olive tree.

102. Lehi also saw a “river of water” in his dream of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:13; 15:26).

103. Cf. the parable of the twelve olive trees in D&C 101:44–45.

104. It remains now for some industrious scholar(s) to examine all of the passages—biblical and non-biblical—that contain elements related to the account in Jacob 5 and to determine, if possible, the transmission sequence of these elements through time.