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Nephite Uses and Interpretations of Zenos

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Noel B. Reynolds

Zenos's allegory of the olive tree, which Jacob copied from the brass plates onto the small plates, was used as a source by several Book of Mormon prophets. Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and Alma quote or paraphrase passages from Zenos or his allegory in describing their own visions, prophecies, and teachings. In studying these borrowings, we can be completely certain of few conclusions; but we can find many probable connections to Zenos's writings in Nephite prophecy, all of which attest to his importance among the Nephites.

Words of Zenos are most obviously detected in the following Book of Mormon texts: 1 Nephi 19:8–17; 22:15–17, 23–26; 2 Nephi 2:30; Jacob 5:2–77; Alma 33:3–18; 34:7; Helaman 8:18–19; 15:10–13; 3 Nephi 10:14–16. These texts deal with such main themes as God's covenant with his people, the House of Israel; his remembrance of that covenant, preserving his people wherever they may be; the general wickedness of people who will reject God and the testimony of Jesus Christ through pride, hatred, and unbelief; the scattering of branches of Israel to the four quarters of the earth; the existence of a choice, remote land; the recovery or gathering of Israel, the first last and the last first; the joy and fruitfulness of the righteous; and the suffering,

grief, and destruction of the wicked, especially by fire. Book of Mormon prophets apparently borrowed words and phrases relevant to these themes not only from the allegory, which concerns Israel as a nation, but also from the other writings attributable to Zenos that deal explicitly with the individual's relationship to God and the atonement of Jesus Christ.

The general pattern of Nephite reliance on Zenos seems to have been established early. His language and phraseology show up repeatedly in the writings of Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob, including passages that have not previously been linked to Zenos. The following study attempts to identify many places where these Book of Mormon prophets appear to have been influenced by the earlier writings of Zenos. Whenever a later Book of Mormon prophet uses words or phrases prominent in the writings of Zenos, I shall presume that a possibility exists that the later writer was conscious of or influenced by the earlier Zenos text.

LEHI

Lehi's indebtedness to Zenos is most obvious in two texts: in his prophecies about the House of Israel and his final blessings to his posterity.

The earliest use of Zenos's allegory in the Book of Mormon is by Lehi. After telling his sons about his vision of the tree of life, "he spake unto them concerning the Jews" (1 Nephi 10:2). To illustrate his prophecy about the Jews and Gentiles, Lehi uses language from Zenos's allegory. When he teaches his sons that the Jews would dwindle in unbelief, he says that the house of Israel "should be compared like unto an olive-tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered" (1 Nephi 10:12). To explain that the house of Israel would later be gathered together again,

he says that “the natural branches of the olive-tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in” (verse 14). Lehi connects the breaking off of the branches to dwindling in unbelief and interprets the scattering of the branches in Zenos’s allegory to mean, in part, 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” (verse 13). He interprets the grafting of the natural branches back into the olive tree as regaining knowledge of Christ: “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” (verse 14). These themes reappear in later Nephite interpretation of Zenos.

In his final teachings to his sons in 2 Nephi 1–4, Lehi interprets Zenos’s allegory further, and his interpretation is significantly shaped by his own revelations. The allegory tells of one branch of the olive tree being planted in “a good spot of ground” (Jacob 5:25, 43) “which was choice unto me above all other parts of the land of my vineyard” (Jacob 5:43). Apparently the Nephites understood this passage to refer to themselves (see 1 Nephi 12). Lehi’s interpretation of Zenos’s reference to “this good spot of ground . . . choice . . . above all other parts” was influenced by his own revelation that “the Lord God has covenanted this land” to him. For him it is not only “a land which is choice above all other lands” but also “a land of promise” and “a land for the inheritance of my seed” (2 Nephi 1:5). Furthermore, it is consecrated to be “a land of liberty” to those who serve the Lord or to be cursed “if iniquity shall abound” (2 Nephi 1:7). These attributes of the land that were revealed to Lehi give more concrete meaning to Zenos’s description

“choice.” This concept appears also in the writings of Nephi (1 Nephi 13:30), for the first time the Lord spoke to Nephi he promised to lead him to a “land of promise,” which would be “choice above all other lands” (1 Nephi 2:20). Apparently, the choiceness of the land predated the scattering of Israel, for the Lord used the same language in leading the Jaredites there (Ether 1:38), and in his abridgment of the Jaredite record, Moroni repeats it seven times (Ether 1:42; 2:7, 10, 15; 9:20; 10:28; 13:2).

Zenos’s allegory also emphasizes that this branch of Israel was hidden in the last of “the nethermost parts of the vineyard” (Jacob 5:13, 14). Lehi explains this sense of isolation further by announcing that “there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord” (2 Nephi 1:6) and that in the Lord’s wisdom “this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations” (2 Nephi 1:8). Zenos emphasized the Lord’s role in taking the broken branches of his olive to these nethermost parts of the vineyard, and Lehi adds the idea that Nephi in particular had “been an instrument in the hands of God, in bringing us forth into the land of promise” (2 Nephi 1:24).

Lehi elaborates the implications of the Lord’s promise to all those he will bring out of the land of Jerusalem, using insights from Zenos’s prophecies. If they will keep his commandments, they will “prosper upon the face of this land” and “dwell safely forever” (2 Nephi 1:9). But “when the time comes that they shall dwindle in unbelief” and “reject . . . the true Messiah,” especially after “knowing the great and marvelous works of the Lord,” the just judgments of God will rest upon them, and they will “be scattered and smitten” (2 Nephi 1:10–11; cf. Jacob’s words in 2 Nephi 9:27 and 10:20). Lehi further expresses his fears that for “the hardness of [their] hearts” they will be “cut off and

destroyed” or that “a cursing will come upon [them]” and they will suffer famine and sword and be hated (2 Nephi 1:17–18). The alternate cycles of productive growth and pruning of the Zenos allegory are reflected in the rule Lehi cited as governing the Lord’s relationship to this branch of Israel: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence” (2 Nephi 1:20; cf. 1 Nephi 2:20).

When Lehi blesses the posterity of Laman and Lemuel, he promises them that the Lord “will not suffer that [they] shall perish” (2 Nephi 4:7). In this blessing, Lehi outlines how the Lord will fulfill Zenos’s prophecy that he would not immediately pluck off and burn “the other part of the tree [that] has brought forth wild fruit” (Jacob 5:25–27) but would let it grow wild even until it overcomes and displaces the good branch. Eventually, this remaining branch will not be destroyed, but will be grafted back into the natural tree, that is, restored to the knowledge of the covenants of Israel and the true Messiah (Jacob 5:56).

Finally, Lehi interprets prophecies of Joseph in Egypt in terms identical to those of the Zenos allegory, suggesting the possibility that Joseph had received these same revelations and that his insights on the brass plates may have guided Lehi and Nephi in their interpretations of Zenos. For “Joseph truly saw our day,” how “the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel . . . which was to be broken off” (2 Nephi 3:4–5). Nevertheless, because of the Lord’s covenant, he would remember to manifest the Messiah to them in the latter days (2 Nephi 3:3–5). Again, Lehi (through Joseph) makes specific use of the prophecies of Zenos.

NEPHI

Nephi discusses the olive allegory when his brothers complain, "We cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken concerning the natural branches of the olive-tree" (1 Nephi 15:7). Nephi had received his own version of Lehi's vision, and he uses this understanding to provide an interpretation of the allegory (1 Nephi 15:8–19). He prefaces his explanation of the allegory of the olive tree by asking his brothers, "How is it that ye will perish, because of the hardness of your hearts?" (1 Nephi 15:10). Then he tells them that the alternative the Lord offers to perishing is knowledge of these truths, which comes to those who do not harden their hearts, but ask the Lord in faith with diligence in keeping the commandments (1 Nephi 15:11). Nephi then explains the olive tree allegory as a representation of this basic concept.

Just as Lehi had done, Nephi explains the breaking off and scattering of the natural branches both in terms of their own experience—"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)—and as the dwindling of the Jews in unbelief (1 Nephi 15:13). Then, when the gospel is brought to the remnant of their seed by the Gentiles, "they shall know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer" (1 Nephi 15:14) with the result that "they shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive-tree, into the true olive-tree" (1 Nephi 15:16).

In Nephi's explanation, restored knowledge is the key to being grafted back into the true olive tree: their descendants ("the remnant of our seed") will know "that they are of the house of Israel," and "that they are the covenant people of the Lord." "Then shall they know and come to the

knowledge of” their forefathers, their Redeemer, and the gospel of their Redeemer and the “very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved” (1 Nephi 15:14). Forms of the word *know* occur six times in verse 14.

The conflict between hardness of heart and faith in the Lord echoes other aspects of Zenos’s allegory, with particular application to Lehi’s seed. The natural branch planted in the good spot of ground became a tree with two parts, one producing tame fruit, the other producing wild fruit (Jacob 5:25). Over time, the wild part overcame the tame, which withered and died (Jacob 5:40). The Lord’s servant offers an explanation: “Is it not the loftiness of thy vineyard?” The branches “grew faster than the strength of the roots, taking strength unto themselves” (Jacob 5:48). In Nephi’s vision the angel gave a similar explanation of this development, if the problems of loftiness can be compared to the large and spacious building, which was “the vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men” (1 Nephi 12:18).

Once restored, the remnant of Lehi’s seed will “receive the strength and nourishment from the true vine” and “come unto the true fold of God” (1 Nephi 15:15). Centuries later Alma, Amulek, and other priests began to have general success in establishing the church of Christ. Describing their success, Mormon appears to have drawn on Nephi’s interpretation of Zenos: “The Lord did pour out his Spirit . . . [t]hat they might not . . . go on to destruction, but that they might receive the word with joy, and as a branch grafted into the true vine, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord their God” (Alma 16:16–17).

Nephi joins two metaphors together when, on the one hand, he speaks of being grafted “into the true olive-tree” (1 Nephi 15:16) and speaks of coming “unto the true fold”

(1 Nephi 15:15). It may be that Zenos referred to Israel also as sheep that were scattered and needed to be gathered into the true fold (1 Nephi 22:25; Helaman 15:13), as others did (see Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 23, 31, and 50). Nephi may also be referring to Zenos's language when he tells his brothers in 1 Nephi 22:25 that the Lord "gathereth his children from the four quarters of the earth," which echoes words Nephi attributes to Zenos in 1 Nephi 19:16. Samuel the Lamanite likewise picks up this reference to sheep in his address to the Nephites; he uses it in the same sense as Nephi and explicitly in the context of a reference to Zenos and his prophecies (Helaman 15:11, 13; cf. Alma 5:39, 60).

In his vision, Nephi "beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended . . . upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth" (1 Nephi 14:14) and that "at that day, the work of the Father shall commence, in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants, which he hath made to his people who are of the house of Israel" (1 Nephi 14:17). Later he explains that Lehi's speech about the olive tree referred to "all the house of Israel" and pointed "to the covenant which should be fulfilled in the latter days," which "the Lord made to our father Abraham" that in his seed "shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed" (1 Nephi 15:18; cf. Genesis 12:3). From this point on in the Book of Mormon, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant to Israel is linked to Nephite interpretations of Zenos's allegory.

Nephi used other excerpts from Zenos to discuss his prophetic world view (in 1 Nephi 19), which suggests that Zenos may also have seen some of the things Nephi and Lehi had seen. The focus on the Abrahamic covenant is one example. Nephi quotes Zenos on this topic as follows: "Nevertheless, when that day cometh, saith the prophet,

that they no more turn aside their hearts against the Holy One of Israel, then will he remember the covenants which he made to their fathers. . . . Yea, and all the earth shall see the salvation of the Lord, saith the prophet" (1 Nephi 19:15–17). It is interesting to see how Isaiah seems to have picked up this statement from Zenos and recast it in connection with the metaphor of the Lord baring his holy arm: "The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Isaiah 52:10).

Abinadi quotes Isaiah's version of this metaphor twice in his sermon (Mosiah 12:24; 15:31), but immediately backs it up with a near quotation of Zenos (Mosiah 16:1), which would make great sense if he knew Zenos to be the source of Isaiah's metaphor. The second half of Zenos's formulation, that "every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall be blessed" (1 Nephi 19:17), is repeated frequently in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 5:18; 11:36; 13:40; 14:11; 22:28; 2 Nephi 26:13; 30:8; Mosiah 3:13, 20; 15:28; 16:1; 27:25; Alma 9:20; 37:4; 45:16; 3 Nephi 26:4; 28:29). These passages all refer to that last great grafting described in the olive allegory when the gospel will be taken to all peoples and the Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled.

As noted above, Nephi explicitly attributes to Zenos the idea that the Lord will eventually gather all people of the house of Israel "from the four quarters of the earth" (1 Nephi 19:16). Book of Mormon writers use this formulation repeatedly. Nephi writes, possibly using excerpts from more of Zenos, "And he gathereth his children from the four quarters of the earth" (1 Nephi 22:25). Jacob teaches that they will "be gathered in . . . from the four parts of the earth" (2 Nephi 10:8; cf. 3 Nephi 5:24, 26; 16:5; and Ether 13:11). While references to the four parts of the earth may be

common to other ancient writings, the Book of Mormon, following Zenos, consistently uses the phrase in reference to this last gathering.

Nephi also uses Zenos's language to describe events at the time of the crucifixion of Christ. In his vision Nephi had seen

a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof. And it came to pass after I saw these things, I saw the vapor of darkness, that it passed from off the face of the earth. (1 Nephi 12:4–5.)

Writing later about the crucifixion, Nephi quotes Zenos who similarly spoke of

three days of darkness which should be a sign given of his death unto those who should inhabit the isles of the sea, . . . who are of the house of Israel. For thus spake the prophet: The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel at that day . . . with the thunderings and the lightnings of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness, and by the opening of the earth, and by mountains which shall be carried up. And all these things must surely come, saith the prophet Zenos. And the rocks of the earth must rend. (1 Nephi 19:10–12.)

Two concepts are given independently to Nephi in his vision and by Zenos in his allegory. First, the angel quotes the Lamb of God, saying, "Blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day; . . . they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting king-

dom of the Lamb" (1 Nephi 13:37). Similarly, Zenos writes of those who serve in the Lord's vineyard in that final restoration: "And blessed art thou; for because ye have been diligent in laboring with me in my vineyard and have kept my commandments, . . . ye shall have joy with me" (Jacob 5:75). Jacob repeats the same point (Jacob 6:3), and Mormon invokes this concept to comment on the enormous good accomplished by Ammon and his fellow missionaries when he says, "And thus we see the great call of diligence of men to labor in the vineyards of the Lord" (Alma 28:14).

Second is the construction made famous in the New Testament that emphasizes that the roles of Jews and Gentiles would be reversed. The angel told Nephi that the Lamb would manifest himself first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, but in the end to the Gentiles first, and last to the Jews, so that "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last" (1 Nephi 13:42). Similarly, speaking of the last effort to save his vineyard, the Lord commands his servants in Zenos's parable as they prune the vineyard for the last time to "begin at the last that they may be first, and that the first may be last" and to dig about the trees, "the first and the last; and the last and the first, that all may be nourished once again for the last time" (Jacob 5:63). While the Book of Mormon also includes one example of Isaiah's use of *first* and *last* to refer to the Lord (cf. Isaiah 48:12 [1 Nephi 20:12] to Alma 11:39), all other examples of these words in the Book of Mormon follow the sense of the olive allegory.

It may also be worth noting that Nephi incorporates notions from other Zenos quotations in the passages where he interprets the olive allegory. Zenos's prophecy that Israel would despise the Holy One of Israel and would in turn "be hated among all nations" (1 Nephi 19:14) shows up when Nephi tells his brothers that the Lord "shall be rejected of

the Jews, or of the house of Israel" (1 Nephi 15:17) and that Israel "shall be scattered among all nations and shall be hated of all men" (1 Nephi 22:5).

The allegory of the olive tree uses the distinctive phrase "according to his own will and pleasure" (Jacob 5:14). Zenos uses the phrase to signal the Lord's independence of action relative to his servant and all others. Given Nephi's recent explanation of the allegory to his brothers (1 Nephi 15), it would appear to be with intentional irony that Laman turns this phrase against Nephi, accusing him of thinking "to make himself a king and a ruler over us, that he may do with us according to his will and pleasure" (1 Nephi 16:38). The rhetorical power of this accusation stems from this borrowing to make a negative judgment against Nephi, as Nephi himself had borrowed from it earlier to criticize Laman (1 Nephi 15:10). Throughout the Book of Mormon, writers invoke this phrase or its variants in one of these two ways—to signal the independence of deity in his goodness and power (2 Nephi 10:22; 25:22; Mosiah 7:33) or to show the arrogance of self-seeking men (Alma 4:8; 12:31; 17:20).

Nephi's Use of Zenos and Isaiah

First Nephi 19 contains Nephi's reflections on the process of making his record. After reviewing the technical aspects of that process, he talks about the record's purpose, "that perhaps I might persuade [my people] that they would remember the Lord their Redeemer" (1 Nephi 19:18). Nephi then turns to prophecies about the coming Christ, which he heard personally from the angel, and then briefly to prophecies from the brass plates, including an extensive quotation from Zenos (1 Nephi 19:10–17). This leads Nephi to address all the house of Israel who might read his record (1 Nephi 19:19) and to compare himself to the "prophets of

old" (19:20), who had also been shown all things (1 Nephi 19:21) concerning "those who are at Jerusalem" (1 Nephi 19:20). Nephi specifically reads to them from the books of Moses and Isaiah (19:23) and copies two chapters of Isaiah into his own record (1 Nephi 20 and 21). This movement from Zenos to Isaiah repeats the pattern of chapter 15. In both cases, having used Zenos to predict the rejection of the Messiah and the scattering of the Jews, Nephi cites Isaiah "concerning the restoration of the Jews" (1 Nephi 15:20) that they and all Israel "may have hope" (1 Nephi 19:24).

Nephi's brothers then ask him the meaning of what he has read (1 Nephi 22:1). Nephi summarizes what he intends them to see in his readings, providing us with his interpretations. While the tendency is to read this as a summary of the immediately preceding Isaiah passage, this only works well for verse 6, which speaks of Israel finally being "nursed by the Gentiles" and the Lord setting the Gentiles "up for a standard" (1 Nephi 22:6; cf. 1 Nephi 21:22–23). The rest derives mostly from the Zenos materials or Nephi's own vision: that the house of Israel will "be scattered upon all the face of the earth, and also among all nations," and "to and fro upon the isles of the sea," that they will harden their hearts against the Lord and then "be hated of all men," and that they will be restored in the last days because of the covenants of the Lord with their fathers. These points are more fully explained in the Zenos materials and only mentioned in part by Isaiah.

These passages raise a number of issues about the relationship of Zenos and Isaiah and the way their writings are used by Nephi and other Book of Mormon writers. While this is too large a topic to be treated systematically in this paper, the present study has led me to the provisional conclusion that Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob rely directly on Zenos

for support and illumination of their own revelations, and that they typically bring in Isaiah as an additional witness, but not for primary explanation. As Nephi later observes, the words of Isaiah “are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy” (2 Nephi 25:4). Because Isaiah appears to be aware of many of the concepts they draw from Zenos, but often tends to use them cryptically, as if his audience already knows how they fit together, we might reasonably conclude that Zenos preceded and influenced Isaiah, and that the Nephite prophets saw it that way. Thus, they see Isaiah like themselves, a beneficiary of Zenos’s prophecies and revelations who uses Zenos as they do, to help warn that portion of a rebellious Israel they have been called to teach. If this is correct, then it might be argued that Zenos is “the prophet” referred to in 1 Nephi 19:12–17; 22:2, 15, 17, and 23. Certainly most of the points summarized in the ten verses that follow that reference (1 Nephi 22:3–12) are taken from Zenos.

The Psalms of Nephi and Zenos

Alma makes clear use of a prayer written by Zenos (Alma 33:3–11) as he works with the people in Antionum, as will be discussed later. What has not been noticed is that this passage from Zenos appears to have provided some of the inspiration for the so-called “Psalm of Nephi” (2 Nephi 4:17–35), written centuries earlier by Nephi and recorded in his small plates.

While Alma quotes Zenos’s prayer as proof that Zenos knew about the Son of God and to convince the people of Antionum they could worship outside their synagogues, Nephi appears to have applied the sentiments and language of the prayer to his own trying circumstances, finding in Zenos’s words a source of encouragement and faith

in the face of hostility and affliction. Nephi ends his psalm with a prayer of approximately the same length and in a style similar to Zenos's prayer text. In their respective texts, Zenos uses the invocation "O God" or "O Lord" five times; Nephi six. Nephi begins his psalm by recognizing the Lord's great goodness in showing him "his great and marvelous works" (2 Nephi 4:17) in answer to Nephi's prayer (see 1 Nephi 11); Zenos also begins by acknowledging God's mercy in hearing his prayers (Alma 33:4). Zenos lists the many places in which the Lord heard his prayers, citing first an occasion when he was in the wilderness; Nephi lists many occasions when he received blessings from God in response to his cry and "mighty prayer," citing first how God supported him and led him through his "afflictions in the wilderness" (2 Nephi 4:20). Zenos ends by emphasizing that because the Lord did hear him in his afflictions, he will continue to cry to him "in all mine afflictions" (Alma 33:11); furthermore, Zenos asserts generally that God is "merciful unto [his] children when they cry unto [him]" (Alma 33:8); Nephi knows that "God will give liberally to him that asketh" (2 Nephi 4:35). Zenos believes the Lord listened to his prayer "because of mine afflictions and my sincerity" (Alma 33:11); Nephi expects to be blessed "because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite" (2 Nephi 4:32).

The most obvious similarity between the two texts is the emphasis on the help each writer sought in dealing with "[his] enemies." Nephi carries the problem to a higher level by also praying for help against the "enemy of [his] soul," who tempts him and destroys his peace, the "evil one" who seeks a place in his heart (2 Nephi 4:27–28), referring to this "enemy" three times.¹ While neither writer names these enemies directly, we get a clear picture that Nephi's enemies included his own brothers who "did seek to take away [his]

life" (2 Nephi 5:1–2), and Nephi reports that the Lord "confounded [his] enemies" (2 Nephi 4:22). While we have no background information about Zenos, it is possible that he had a somewhat different experience than Nephi. The Lord answered Zenos's prayer by turning his enemies to him (Alma 33:4). Zenos states that he had been "cast out" and "despised" by his enemies, and that upon hearing his cries the Lord was angry with them and did "visit them in [his] anger with speedy destruction" (Alma 33:10). Given the extreme difficulties Nephi had suffered with his own brothers, it is easy to see how this verse from Zenos might have attracted his close attention.

Finally, both Nephi and Zenos make direct reference to the Atonement of Christ and the joy they can find through it. Zenos explains God's mercy in terms of the Son and recognizes that it is "because of [God's] Son" that "[God has] turned [his] judgments away from [him]" (Alma 33:11). Nephi asks himself why he should be depressed or feel such sorrow when "the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men hath visited men in so much mercy" (2 Nephi 4:26; cf. 1 Nephi 11:16–25). Both end their prayers by announcing the joy they receive from the Lord's mercy to them in their afflictions. Zenos says, "In thee is my joy" (Alma 33:11), while Nephi enjoins his heart to rejoice and cry to the Lord, saying, "My soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation" (2 Nephi 4:30).

Nephi's Conclusions

After inserting many more chapters of Isaiah, Nephi assembles a long summary of prophecies and teachings for his descendants (2 Nephi 25–30). This is at least the fourth time Nephi has undertaken this exercise, and it follows his familiar pattern. In this summary, we find Nephi drawing

on the same sources, but in a way that tends to emphasize his own visions and, to some extent, the prophecies of Isaiah. Still, some of the distinctive Zenos material shows up, especially in its interpreted forms, in what is a simplified and homogenized product. Some phrases from Zenos appear for the first time and in ways that show they have been fully incorporated into Nephi's own normal speech.

Nephi begins again by referring to the recurring destruction of the Jews because of their iniquities and the hardening of their hearts (2 Nephi 25:9–10). Nephi knows they will be carried captive and restored to the land of their inheritance. When the Only Begotten manifests himself to them, they will reject him, because of the hardness of their hearts, and crucify him. For this the Jews will be “scattered among all nations and scourged by other nations until they come “to believe in Christ” (2 Nephi 25:11–16). The Lord will eventually restore his words to them to convince “them of the true Messiah, who was rejected by them.” The writings of Nephi and others' will be preserved and handed down, so that the seed of Joseph should “never perish . . . according to the will and pleasure of God” (2 Nephi 25:18, 21–22).

Nephi gives a specific account of what will happen when the Messiah comes to the Nephites. His appearance will be preceded by calamities marking his death, as described by Zenos (2 Nephi 26:3–6; cf. 1 Nephi 19:10–12). Even though three righteous generations will result from his visit, the fourth will “yield to the devil” and go down to destruction. Nephi describes his personal response to this by using the words that Zenos attributes to the Lord each time he had to destroy the corrupt branches: “This grieveth my soul” (2 Nephi 26:11; cf. Jacob 5:7, 11, 13, 32, 46–47, 51,

and 66). But even after they “have dwindled in unbelief,” the Lord will not forget them (2 Nephi 26:15–16).

Chapter 29 records a revelation that Nephi seems almost to be receiving at the moment he is writing. This revelation begins with, but develops much further, familiar concepts and phrases from both Isaiah and Zenos. Nephi prophesies that the Lord will “remember [his] covenants” and will send the words of the Nephite prophets “to the ends of the earth, for a standard unto my people, which are of the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 29:1–2). The Gentiles do not appreciate God’s “ancient covenant people,” the Jews, who have given them the Bible. Rather they have cursed and hated them. The Lord asks the Gentiles if there are not more nations than one. He created all men; he remembers those on the isles of the sea; and he will bring his word forth to “all the nations of the earth” (2 Nephi 29:4–7). The Lord speaks “according to his own pleasure,” and his “work is not yet finished.” And finally, his people, “which are of the house of Israel, shall be gathered home unto the lands of their possessions,” and he will show the world that he “covenanted with Abraham that [he] would remember his seed forever” (2 Nephi 29:9, 14).

Nephi explains that the Gentiles can become part of the house of Israel. In Zenos this is the grafting in of the wild branches. Nephi says, “As many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off,” for the Lord will only covenant “with them that repent and believe in his Son” (2 Nephi 30:2). The gospel of Jesus Christ will come forth to the Gentiles and then to the remnant of Lehi, through the book Nephi has described. Thus will they be “restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their

fathers." They will rejoice and become a "delightful people." And the scattered Jews will also begin to believe in Christ and be gathered and become a "delightful people" (2 Nephi 30:5–7). The emphasis on delightful people reminds us of the Lord's delight or joy in the precious natural fruit (which these believing Israelites are) in Zenos's allegory (Jacob 5:71, 75). The connection is picked up and repeated by Mormon who prays that his brethren "may once again come to the knowledge of God, yea, the redemption of Christ; that they may once again be a delightful people" (Words of Mormon 1:8).

Nephi foresees that the Lord will "commence his work among all nations, kindreds, tongues and people." At the end, the Lord will "cause a great division among the people, and the wicked will he destroy; and he will spare his people, yea, even if it so be that he must destroy the wicked by fire" (2 Nephi 30:8, 10). This is a paraphrase of the final verse of the allegory of the olive tree (Jacob 5:77). At that day, Nephi informs us, "Satan shall have power over the hearts of the children of men no more" (2 Nephi 30:18), another point taken from Zenos (1 Nephi 22:15, 26).

JACOB

Nephi introduces Jacob first as a teacher and interpreter of Isaiah. Jacob's sermon recorded in 2 Nephi 6–10 reiterates the verses of Isaiah 49 that Nephi had also used, along with references to Zenos (see Isaiah 49:22–26; 1 Nephi 22:6; 2 Nephi 6:6–7). Like Nephi, Jacob supplements his account of the prophecies from the brass plates with insights drawn from his own visions, for the Lord showed Jacob the captivity and eventual return of those who were at Jerusalem, as well as his own future ministry and crucifixion (2 Nephi 6:8–9).

Jacob's vision, like Nephi's before him, is reported in wording that may be associated with Zenos. "After they have hardened their hearts" they will be "smitten and afflicted." Because of the prayers of the faithful, they will not be allowed to perish but will be scattered, smitten, and hated. But in the end, the Lord will be merciful so that "when they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer," they will be gathered, and "the Lord God "will fulfill his covenants" to them (2 Nephi 6:10–12). Jacob completes this summary in mostly Isaianic terms and then quotes two chapters of Isaiah (50:1–52:2). Again we see the pattern established by Nephi in which Isaiah is invoked as an additional witness and illuminator of prophecies based on Zenos and the Nephite prophets' own visions.

After the Isaiah reading, Jacob again returns to concepts that he may have found in Zenos. Because of "the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel," they will "be restored to the true church and fold of God." In a distinctive formulation that recalls the plurality of "the nethermost parts of [the Lord's] vineyard," Jacob interprets those covenants to mean that all Israel will "be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance" and will "be established in all their lands of promise" (2 Nephi 9:1–2). At the end of the sermon, Jacob reiterates the themes of the Lord's covenants and mercy, the promise that their seed should never be utterly destroyed, but that in the future they would "become a righteous branch unto the house of Israel" (2 Nephi 9:53).

The next chapter continues Jacob's speech on the main themes of the covenant history and future of the house of Israel, which Zenos also addressed, as well as more specifically their own "righteous branch" (2 Nephi 10:1). Jacob has been shown that many of their descendants would perish

“because of unbelief.” But many will be restored by coming to “the true knowledge of their Redeemer” (2 Nephi 10:2). Although after the crucifixion they will suffer famines, pestilences, and bloodshed, and those not destroyed will “be scattered among all nations” (2 Nephi 10:6), when they come to believe in Christ, God will restore them to the lands of their inheritance, according to his covenant “with their fathers” (2 Nephi 10:7–8). Like Nephi, Jacob emphasizes the prominent role to be played by the Gentiles who “shall be great in the eyes” of God in carrying gathered Israel “in from their long dispersion” to “the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 10:8; cf. 1 Nephi 15:13–14, 17). In closing his sermon, Jacob recognizes that this is a “choice land” and that they have been led there by the Lord. It is an isle of the sea, and (as in Zenos, see 1 Nephi 19:16) there are others of “our brethren” that are scattered upon the isles of the sea. The Lord remembers all “who have been broken off” because he has led them “away from time to time from the house of Israel, according to his will and pleasure” (2 Nephi 10:19–22; cf. Jacob 5:14).

When Jacob presents the allegory itself in Jacob 4–6, what begins as an explanation of the present record (Jacob 4:1) turns quickly into a testimony of the coming of Christ and a warning to Jacob’s people to be humble and receptive to this truth. Jacob encountered a great deal of opposition from some who thought the law of Moses was all they needed (Jacob 4:5; 7:6–7). It appears that part of his problem was that the writings of the Jews are not as plain in this regard as the revelations he, Nephi, and Lehi had received (Jacob 4:14), so he undertakes to explain scripturally how the Jews who do not accept the revelations about Christ will stumble and fall. He refers to Isaiah’s statements that the Lord would be a stone of stumbling to both houses of Israel,

as they would fail to see him as their only sure foundation (Isaiah 8:14; 28:16). Following the pattern we have seen earlier, Jacob looks to Zenos for the explanation of things stated too cryptically or mysteriously in Isaiah (Jacob 4:18). The teachings of Zenos come naturally to mind as Jacob speaks of “the perfect knowledge of [Christ]” as the means by which one can benefit from the Atonement and also speaks of the expectation that the Jews “will reject the stone upon which they might build” (Jacob 4:12, 15), and as he urges the people to come to Christ that they might qualify to “be presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God” (Jacob 4:11). That Jacob is drawing on Zenos at this point is dramatically emphasized by his insertion into his own brief record of Zenos’s entire olive allegory (Jacob 5).

In chapter 4, Jacob teaches that people should “seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand” (Jacob 4:10). The doctrine appears to be the same as the Lord’s injunction to his servant in the olive allegory when he says, “Counsel me not; I knew that it was a poor spot of ground; wherefore, I said unto thee, I have nourished it this long time, and thou beholdest that it hath brought forth much fruit” (Jacob 5:22).²

After reading the full allegory to his brethren, Jacob turns immediately to an extended interpretation in the form of a prophecy of his own (Jacob 6:1). Unlike the more historically oriented interpretations of Lehi and Nephi, Jacob moves directly to the implications for individuals. Jacob notes first how blessed those will be who labor diligently in the vineyard and how cursed are those who will be cast out. The world is the vineyard, and it “will be burned with fire.” For Jacob, the mercy of God is evidenced in the way he remembers the house of Israel, both roots and branches, all who “will not harden their hearts shall be saved in the

kingdom of God" (Jacob 6:3–4). The allegory is a parable of salvation for individuals as well as for peoples. Thus, Jacob calls individuals to repent and come to God: "Hear his voice," and "harden not your hearts" (Jacob 6:5–6). Using the language of the allegory, Jacob identifies the nourishment given to the tree as "the good word of God" and reminds his hearers that if they bring forth evil fruit, they will "be hewn down and cast into the fire." To reject that nourishment is to "reject the words of the prophets . . . concerning Christ." It is to "deny the good word of Christ, and the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost." The burning awaiting those who do this is "that lake of fire and brimstone," which is "endless torment" (Jacob 6:7–10).

At the end of Zenos's allegory the bad fruit is "cast away into its own place" (Jacob 5:77). Jacob emphasizes the magnitude of this penalty upon wicked individuals by saying, "How cursed are they who shall be cast out into their own place" (Jacob 6:3). He then clarifies that because "justice cannot be denied," these offenders "must go away into that lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever, which lake of fire and brimstone is endless torment" (Jacob 6:10). This notion is paralleled in the revelation of John (Revelation 19:20; 20:14–15, 20) and in the writings of Nephi, who saw the same revelation (1 Nephi 14:24–27) and used the same phrase when he said of the wicked that "they must go into the place prepared for them, even a lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment" (2 Nephi 28:23). Thus it may well be that Nephi was the source of this language for Book of Mormon peoples (1 Nephi 14:24–28; cf. Jacob 3:11, Mosiah 2:37–39; Alma 12:17; 14:14). Alternatively, Zenos might also have been a source.

BENJAMIN

King Benjamin is a prophet who about four hundred years later used some of the same language as that used by Zenos, Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob. The influence of Zenos is present here, but fainter. The prophetic words of the angel to Benjamin echo Zenos and his Nephite interpreters: "The time shall come when the knowledge of a Savior shall spread throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people" (Mosiah 3:20). Echoing Jacob, Benjamin warns his people that if they transgress and "withdraw [them]selves from the Spirit of the Lord" they cannot be "blessed, prospered, and preserved" (Mosiah 2:36; cf. Jacob 6:8). Turning again to the fate of the wicked, he says they "are consigned to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations," a state of "endless torment" that "is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever" (Mosiah 3:25, 27). Benjamin shows his people the consequences of having "come to a knowledge of the goodness of God," which will bring them salvation if they continue in faith to the end of their lives (Mosiah 4:5, 6). With this knowledge they cannot dwindle in unbelief but rather will "believe in God; believe that he is, . . . and again, believe that [they] must repent" (Mosiah 4:9–10).

ALMA

While Alma sometimes borrows from Zenos directly, even quoting from the brass plates, his sermons are not as dominated by Zenos's prophecies and allegory as are those of Nephi and Jacob. He concludes his great Zarahemla sermon, however, with images from Zenos's allegory, with the warning that "every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire, . . . even an

unquenchable fire" (Alma 5:52, 56). This is his warning to the Nephites who are "puffed up in the pride of [their] hearts" (Alma 5:53). In his final appeal to the people of Zarahemla, he explains how the Nephites have received the "tidings of great joy" in plainness "in all parts of our vineyard," and that it has been declared among all the Lord's people "that are scattered abroad upon the face of the earth" (Alma 13:22–23).

Describing the mission of Alma and Amulek, Mormon draws even more directly on Zenos, explaining how the Lord prepared the hearts and minds of the people by pouring his Spirit out on them, "that they might not be unbelieving, and go on to destruction, but that they might receive the word with joy, and as a branch be grafted into the true vine" (Alma 16:16–17). Ammon rejoices that God "has been mindful of this people, who are a branch of the tree of Israel, and has been lost from its body in a strange land" (Alma 26:36; cf. Alma 13:23).

In his mission to the Zoramites, Alma turns extensively to Zenos as a source of his teachings. Not only does he quote the prayer of Zenos to show how people can pray without access to a synagogue (Alma 33:2–11), he goes on to point out that Zenos was a witness of "the Son of God" through whom redemption would come (Alma 33:13–14; 34:7). But perhaps Alma's most impressive use of Zenos is in Alma's allegory of the seed and tree of life (Alma 32:28–43). In this passage, Alma adapts language that appears to come from Zenos to create an allegory of individual salvation. That Alma follows his analogy with the long quotation from Zenos on the subject of prayer reinforces the relationship of his allegory in Alma 32 to Zenos's. Alma invites his hearers to plant the word as a seed in their hearts and not to "cast it out by [their] unbelief" (Alma

32:28). The sprouting and growing of the seed then gives the experimenter knowledge that it is good (verses 33–35). As it grows one must “nourish it with great care” and not let it wither away so that it must be plucked up and cast out (verses 37–38). But if one will “nourish the word” with “great diligence” he will be able to harvest the fruit, “which is most precious” (verses 33–42).

SAMUEL

In prophesying to the Nephites, the Lamanite prophet Samuel explicitly cites Zenos “concerning the restoration of our brethren, the Lamanites, again to the knowledge of the truth” (Helaman 15:11). For “even if they should dwindle in unbelief,” he says, the Lord will “prolong their days.” “In the latter times the promises of the Lord” will be extended to them. And even though they are “scattered abroad,” the Lord will be merciful to them. All this is “according to the prophecy” that they will again “be brought to the true knowledge, which is the knowledge of their Redeemer, and their great and true shepherd, and be numbered among his sheep.” Just as Lehi had blessed this people as a whole, because their dwindling in unbelief was caused by the traditions of their fathers, Samuel promises that the Lord “will not utterly destroy them” (Helaman 15:12–16).

MORMON AND MORONI

The language and concepts of Zenos were remembered and used by Book of Mormon writers down to the end of Nephite history. Mormon’s final appeal to the future descendants of the Lamanites is couched at least partially in language that was similar to that of Zenos. Mormon informs them that they are a “remnant of the house of Israel” (Mormon 7:1), that they must repent and “come to

the knowledge of [their] fathers," and "believe in Jesus Christ." Through Mormon's record they will come to know that they "are a remnant of the seed of Jacob," and that they "are numbered among the people of the first covenant." Believing in Christ will be the first step in preparing them to be in good standing at the day of judgment (Mormon 7:4–10).

Moroni's report of the prophecy of Ether also bears the signs of Zenos's influence on Nephite writers. Moroni noted particularly that Ether saw his land as a land choice "above all other lands" (Ether 13:2). Furthermore, Ether had seen that the seed of Joseph would be brought to this land "that they should perish not." Eventually the blessings of the New Jerusalem would come to "the remnant of the seed of Joseph, who were of the house of Israel." And the rest of Israel who "were scattered and gathered" from "the four quarters of the earth" would partake in the fulfillment of "the covenant which God made with their father, Abraham," bringing to pass the scripture that says, "there are they who were first, who shall be last; and there are they who were last, who shall be first" (Ether 13:7–12).³

CONCLUSIONS

It is inherent in this kind of study, because of assumptions that must be made in linking texts, that few conclusions can be reached beyond doubt. Assuming that Zenos was a prophet to Israel before the time of Isaiah and that his writings were available to the Nephites in the brass plates, we can find many probable connections to those writings in Nephite prophecy. The general pattern of Nephite reliance on Zenos seems to have been established early, as Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob borrowed language and images from Zenos in expressing their own revelations. The language

and phraseology of these interpretations are found repeatedly in the writings of Nephite prophets and appear to be textually dependent on these early passages. The early Nephite prophets also seem to view Isaiah as doing the same thing: They assumed Zenos as a basic, shared text and used Isaiah's references to Zenos's prophecies as further witnesses of their own revelations and interpretations of Zenos. Though quite tentative, it is easiest to make sense of the relationships between these materials by assuming that Zenos was prior to and known by Isaiah.

Nephite use of Zenos was not limited to the olive allegory but included other Zenos sources as well. While the olive allegory treats the house of Israel as an entity that bears fruit for the Lord, other Zenos references focus more on the individual who can inherit the precious fruit of the tree of life, which is eternal life, as also appears in the tree of life allegories of Lehi, Nephi, and Alma. Although Nephite reliance on Zenos is most extensive in the earliest generation, echoes continue down to the end of Nephite prophecy.

Notes

1. Zenos may well have been the prophet that Nephi had earlier quoted to show that "the time speedily cometh that Satan shall have no more power over the hearts of the children of men" (1 Nephi 22:15, 26).

2. However, because the wording Jacob uses to develop the concept (Jacob 5:8–10) is so similar to Paul's treatment of the same subject (Romans 11:33–36) in conjunction with his own reflections on the olive allegory (Romans 11:14–25), one is led to wonder whether both might not be drawing on a more extended statement by Zenos not preserved in either the Bible or the Book of Mormon. Both passages refer to the creation, to the greatness of God's *wisdom* and the fact that his *ways* are not known to man, and that God's judgments or the depths of his mysteries are *unsearchable*. While there are some similarities between Romans 11 and some of Isaiah's references to the counsel of the Lord (see especially Isaiah 11:2 and 28:9), none of these

reflect the broad similarities found in the comparison with Jacob, again, in double connection with the Zenos allegory.

3. It is worth noting in passing that the vision of Enoch revealed to Joseph Smith may provide a source older than both Zenos and the Jaredite records, which would link some key Zenos phrases to the New Jerusalem (see Moses 7:62).