



Type: Book Chapter

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## Prophets in the Wilderness

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Source: *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed.

Published: Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for  
Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1988

Page(s): 264–290

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# 10

## Prophets in the Wilderness

### The Desert Sectaries

It is only in our own generation that we have begun to realize the enormous importance in Judaism and Christianity of the people who flee to the desert. They are not merely a few fanatical dissenters, "outcasts of the people" (*paritzim*)—they are the Chosen People itself, *das wanderne Gottesvolk*, a persecuted minority ever moving apart from a once-holy nation that has become corrupted with the things of the world, to preserve the old covenants in their purity and await further light from heaven.<sup>1</sup> This is a main theme of the Book of Mormon as we are now beginning to realize it is of the Old and New Testaments. The people of the Testaments are the poor and outcast of the world who await the coming of the Messiah, and such were the Nephites.

The main idea is implemented in a particular way. The beliefs and practices that meet us in the Dead Sea Scrolls go back to a much earlier period than that of the sectaries of Qumran, and continue on down for many centuries after them. They are the same procedures and practices that meet us in the Book of Mormon.<sup>2</sup>

### A Recapitulation

Since it is normal procedure to list parallels between Qumran and this or that book or society, and since the significance of such parallels is greatly enhanced by their

cumulative effect, the following list needs no apology or explanation.

(1) First of all, the Book of Mormon opens with a group of pious separatists from Jerusalem moving into the refuge of the Judaeian wilderness in the hopes of making a permanent settlement where they could live their religion in its purity free from the persecution of "the Jews at Jerusalem." This we pointed out in *Lehi in the Desert* before the publication of any of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The parallel needs no comment. (2) These people, like those at Qumran, have a passion for writing and reading which seems to be a long-standing family tradition; they make records of everything, and (3) they know of an ancient tradition of the sealing up and burying of holy books in time of danger, to come forth "in their purity" at a later time. (4) They themselves engage in the practice, in which they even employ for their most valuable records copper and gold sheets on which they laboriously engrave their message in a cramped and abbreviated script. (5) Both peoples apply all the scriptures to themselves in a special way and never tire of presenting and discussing "proof-texts." (6) Both societies held a peculiarly "open-ended" view of scriptures and revelation and knew of no canon of the Old Testament but accepted some of the "Apocrypha" as inspired writings. This attitude appears commonplace today, but we must remember that it has been quite alien to conventional Christianity and Jewish thinking and has been the one aspect of the Book of Mormon which has been most loudly denounced and ridiculed for over a century.

(7) In both the Book of Mormon and the Dead Sea Scrolls, the peculiar and until now quite unfamiliar concept of a "church of anticipation" is very conspicuous. (8) The religious communities in both hemispheres strove to keep the Law of Moses in all its perfection and were cool towards "the Jews in Jerusalem," who they felt had been false to the covenant by their worldliness. (9) They felt themselves



Al Raqim ruins

in both cases to be the real Elect of God, the true Israel, chosen to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. (10) Specifically, they both think of themselves as Israel in the wilderness and consciously preserve the camp life of the desert. (11) Both have suffered persecution and expect to suffer more, being repeatedly required to seek refuge by moving from one place to another. (12) Both societies are under the leadership of inspired men (designated in both traditions as “stars”)—prophets and martyrs (13) whose main message is the coming of the Messiah and (14) whose exhortation is to “righteousness” and repentance—Israel must turn away from her sins and return to the covenant. (15) In both cases a sign of the return to the covenant and to purity was baptism with water.

(16) Both societies were headed by twelve chiefs from whom were chosen a special presidency of three,<sup>3</sup> and (17) both were formed into groups of fifty for instructional and administrative purposes, each group being under the direction of a priest (Mosiah 18:18), (18) for in both societies the old priesthood was still respected and the leaders had to be legitimate priests. (19) In both societies the chief priest or leader of the whole church traveled about among the congregations giving instructions and exhortations. (20) Both societies were secret and exclusive but would admit to membership anyone in Israel who sought to live the covenant in righteousness.<sup>4</sup> (21) Both societies were strict observers of the Sabbath, but set aside another day of the week for their special meetings. (22) Those who joined either group were required to share their earthly wealth with all their fellow members, and (23) though both groups were hierarchical and strictly authoritarian, a feeling of perfect equality prevailed.<sup>5</sup> (24) All devoted their lives to religious activity (study, preaching, discussion, prayer, and the singing and composing of hymns) and to physical labor, even the leaders working for their own support. (25) The headquarters of the societies seem to have looked remark-

ably alike: both were at special watering places in the desert with sheltering clumps of trees. (26) Since Alma's church shared all things in common, they probably had communal meals, like the Essenes. When Alma says to his followers: "Come unto me and . . . ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely" (Alma 5:34), it was plainly imagery that his hearers understood.

(27) As strict observers of the Law of Moses, both groups respected the Temple and anticipated its perfect restoration. One of the first things Nephi's community did when they went out by themselves was to build a replica of the Temple. Such an idea has been thought utterly preposterous by the critics until the discovery in the present century of other Jewish colonies in distant lands building just such duplicates of the Temple. (28) Both groups, unlike the Jews at Jerusalem, regarded the Law of Moses only as a preparation, albeit an indispensable preparation, for more light to come, it "pointing their minds forward" to a fuller revelation of salvation.

(29) Doctrinally, a fundamental teaching of both societies was the idea of a divine plan laid down in the heavens at the foundation of the world, each individual having a claim or "lot" in the knowledge and the fruits of the plan. (30) Historically this plan is unfolded apocalyptically in a series of dispensations, each divine visitation being followed by the apostasy and punishment of the people, necessitating a later restoration of the covenant. (31) This restoration is brought about through the righteous Remnant, the few who remain faithful in Israel and continue to look for the Messiah and the signs of his coming. (32) The series of visitations and "ends" will be consummated with a final destruction of the wicked by fire.

(33) Meanwhile, all men are being tested: both teachings lay great stress on the dualistic nature of this time of probation in which there "must needs be . . . an opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11). (34) In this and other things

both bodies of scripture show a peculiar affinity for the writings of John. (35) Both groups persistently designate themselves as "the poor," emphasizing thereby their position as outcasts. This is strikingly illustrated in the Book of Mormon in an episode from the mission of Alma: When a large crowd gathered on a hillside outside a certain city to hear Alma preach, one of their leaders told Alma that these people were largely social outcasts, "for they are despised of all men because of their poverty, yea, and more especially by our priests; for they have cast us out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands; and they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty; and we have no place to worship our God; and behold, what shall we do?" (Alma 32:5). It is among such people that Alma gathers recruits for his society, meeting with total rebuff at the hands of the upper classes and the priests.

The arresting point here is that a number of recent studies reach the conclusion that the mysterious demise of the Mayan civilization was brought about by just such exclusion of the masses from participation in the life of the great religious centers. The Mayan cities were not "cities in our sense of the word," we are told, but "ritual centres, where the people gathered for festivals but where nobody lived. Priests and nobility resided on the outskirts, the people in scattered settlements."<sup>6</sup> There came a time when "one by one the great ceremonial centres . . . were deserted. In some the end came so quickly that buildings were left half-finished." And yet "the peasants appear to have remained in their homes." What could have happened? "The most logical explanation," writes J.E.S. Thompson, "is that the old cooperation of peasant and hierarchy broke down, and that the peasant revolted and drove out or massacred the small ruling class of priest-nobles and their immediate followers."<sup>7</sup> In the end the poor took their revenge on the haughty priests who excluded them from the ceremonial

places which had been built with the labor of their own hands. This would seem to have been an old pattern of things in the New World, by no means limited to the later Mayas. Alma describes it clearly.

And this brings us to another type of parallel. For after all, there is a good deal of secular information in the Book of Mormon.

### The Tie-up

We have noted that the teachings and expressions of the Dead Sea Scrolls turn up at various times and places all over the Near East, showing that they must be seriously considered in any thorough study of Judaism or Christianity. Since the Scrolls are but "the . . . opening of a . . . tiny window on to the life and customs of a remarkable group of people . . . lost to history,"<sup>8</sup> it is surprising when we look through other windows to find ourselves looking at much the same scene. The phenomenon is explained today by the fact that the Scrolls and other bodies of Jewish and Christian scripture all draw on a common source. Thus, Gilkes notes, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and the Psalms are Jesus' favorite sources, "which appear to have been the favourite reading also at Qumran."<sup>9</sup> The windows actually look out upon the same scene, but from different distances and at different angles. They are mirrors reflecting the same source, as Leaney puts it—offshoots of the same trunk.<sup>10</sup> The Scrolls, says Father Milik, are "essentially [an] authentic development from the Old Testament," with a special brand of piety, oriented toward "intimate union with God and his angels."<sup>11</sup> Each of these statements expresses remarkably well what the Book of Mormon claimed for itself at a time when the idea was considered blasphemous of the mere existence of anything that could be called "an authentic development" of scripture. Today the world possesses a mass of documents that not only vindicate the idea of such writings existing and surviving but make it possible



to put various unclassified writings to the test as they appear. The value of both the Qumran and Nag Hammadi texts is that they are both links in a long chain, not being at either end of it but somewhere in the middle: the connections run forward and back. "There is some evidence," writes F. F. Bruce, "that certain beliefs and practices akin to those maintained at Qumran reappeared in other communities, possibly under the influence of men of Qumran who escaped the destruction."<sup>12</sup> Cullmann sees such a survival in the Mandaeans, and Schoeps in the Ebionites. In the other direction, Qumran itself is such a survival, consciously seeking to preserve the inspired leadership and customs of ancient Israel in the desert; there, as K. Kuhn points out, "we get hold of the fundamental source of John's Gospel, and this source is Palestinian-Jewish," but not the conventional type: "Not, however, Pharisaic-Rabbinic Judaism, but a Palestinian-Jewish pietistic sect of gnostic structure."<sup>13</sup> Like the Coptic texts from Egypt, the designation of these writings as "gnostic" simply serves notice that their real background is still unknown. But it was certainly old. "The Qumran covenanters," writes Bruce, "bound themselves by a new covenant, but it was not so new as they thought; it was a . . . reaffirmation of the old covenant of Moses' day."<sup>14</sup> But no one knew that better than the covenanters themselves, whose opening lines of their Manual of Discipline declare the object of the society to be the carrying out of "all that he had commanded by the hand of Moses and by the hand of his servants the prophets."

We need not discuss the various points of resemblance between the New Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls, every one of which has been warmly defended by some experts and just as warmly disputed by others. They include such things as the presence in both communities – Christian and pre-Christian – of a hierarchal organization including a council of twelve and its presidency of three, the belief

in continuing revelation and the leadership of inspired prophetic men, the idea of the restoration of the covenant to the elect of Israel, the dualistic doctrine of the world as a place of probation in which all are confronted by both good and evil and obliged to make a choice, common rites and ordinances such as baptism and a sacramental meal, common ideas about the expected Messiah, common usages and expressions such as reference to the community as "the poor," a peculiar way of interpreting the scriptures and applying all the past history of Israel to their own experiences.<sup>15</sup>

The points of *difference*, on the other hand, are harder to find and easier to explain, since they almost invariably rest on the individual scholar's interpretation of what Christianity *should* be; the principal items are the differing attitudes of the two societies to the priesthood, the contrast between the "once-for-all" baptism of the Christians and the washings of the Essenes, the difference between the behavior of John the Baptist and the Qumran sectaries, the different attitudes towards sinners in the two churches, and above all the concept of the Messiah as one who is to come at Qumran but for the Christians has already arrived.<sup>16</sup> These objections to linking the New Testament with the Scrolls all rest on the basic fallacy that we know all there is to know about both societies, whereas the very purpose of studying the Scrolls is to learn more about both. But aside from that, the main points of difference between the pre-Christian and the early Christian societies in the Old World are precisely the same points of difference that appear in the Book of Mormon between the church as it was before the coming of Christ and as it was after.

### The Mandaeans

There is a tantalizing parallel between the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Book of Mormon in the strange sect of the Mandaeans. This ancient society, rem-

nants of which still survive, traces its origin back to Jerusalem, whence they are said to have migrated first into the desert of Judaea, where they flourished as a typical "baptist" sect for a while (they always display special devotion to John the Baptist).<sup>17</sup> After that they migrated to Harran and then to southern Mesopotamia, where a handful of them still practice rites, especially baptism, and teach secret doctrines that are at once Jewish and Christian, with a rich Iranian mixture.<sup>18</sup> Their departure from Judaea has been placed in the time of Isaiah, that is, even before the time of Lehi.<sup>19</sup> Inevitably their teachings were "sucked into the Gnostic whirlpool" and became exceedingly hard to disentangle,<sup>20</sup> since they "reflect theosophic theories held by certain gnostic groups scattered throughout the Middle East."<sup>21</sup> It is typical of the Mandaeans that though "entirely independent of Christian influence, they kept Sunday as a holy day."<sup>22</sup> Their practices look so very Christian that Alfred Loisy could write that Mandaism cannot be understood without reference to Christianity.<sup>23</sup>

Of particular interest is the great concern the Mandaeans have always had for the preparing and preservation of sacred writings. These were "wrapped in white cloths and kept in a box, often a metal box," according to E. S. Drower.<sup>24</sup> One thinks at once of the practices at Qumran and among some of our Southwest Indians.<sup>25</sup>

There is one important difference with Qumran, however, for the Mandaean texts were never written on parchment, but only "on papyrus, metal, and stone," with special preference for metal: "The reason for using metal sheets," Drower explains, "is that they can be purified by immersion in running water before use." Lead is used because it is cheap, but where it is available copper and even silver is used. These writings are kept very secret "because they contain mysteries that should not be shown to alien eyes." Hence it is not surprising that "during times of stress and danger, the Mandaeans 'buried the books,' and this has

been done, according to them, many times."<sup>26</sup> Thus it would seem that the Mandaeans, among the most conservative people on earth, have preserved a tradition of record-keeping that exactly matches the Nephite practices so fully described in the Book of Mormon.

And here is another strange coincidence. It is the Mandaeans who have preserved the tradition of Ram and his brother Rud, two righteous men whose language was not confounded at the time of the Tower, and who led a migration to the east and were never heard of again. Speculation has it that Ram went back to the original site of the Garden of Eden, where he spent his days writing down a history of the follies of mankind. Robert Eisler readily recognized in Ram the name of Jared.<sup>27</sup> One Mandaean tradition makes Ram and Rud man and wife by way of explaining how they were able to found "a race of mankind."<sup>28</sup> It is only to be expected that many conflicting stories should spring up about these two. Today as never before scholars are diligently searching for the kernels of historic truth that lie at the core of what has heretofore been considered purely fictitious, legendary material. It is well known that the Mandaeans through the centuries have picked up a good deal of Persian and Babylonian lore. Since Jared and his brother loudly advertised their intended expedition, inviting sundry friends to accompany them (Ether 1:41), they may have made enough of an impression to leave behind them an enduring memory of their departure.

### The Deepening Mystery

The Mandaeans are just another of the new enigmas that baffle the student of early Christianity, but they offer a good illustration of the sort of thing we are up against. For example, Rudolph Bultmann believes that the Gospel of John is actually adapted from certain pre-Christian teachings, a full-blown gospel, in fact, of which the Mandaean writings are a true representative.<sup>29</sup> In identifying John's

writings as a pre-Christian myth, however, Bultmann never asks himself how it comes about that these wholesale borrowings are accompanied by John's solemn repeated asseverations that he can bear personal testimony to the literal reality of all he reports. Something is badly out of focus.

By the middle of the present century scholars had found so much of the New Testament in widely scattered writings that seemed to be definitely *older* than the New Testament, that they were forced to posit the existence of a great pre-Christian "Gnostic" church flourishing all over the Near East about the time of Christ. It was this church, it was argued, that supplied the later Christians with many of their basic concepts. But if there was such a church, what was its name? Where was it headquartered? Where were its shrines? How was it organized? Who were its leaders, saints, and martyrs? How did it happen that the very strictest of Jewish and Christian sects did not hesitate to borrow all their main ideas from these pagans without a word of protest from anybody? How were the Jewish sectaries and early Christians able to insist that everything they taught came to them strictly through the proper sources, with never a dissenter or outsider to challenge the claim? If Christian scholars cling to their impossible pre-Christian Gnostic Church in spite of everything, it is because the alternative is so alarming.

For if the teachings of the first Christians were, as they insisted, authentically and completely their own and not borrowed from anybody, then the presence of those same teachings among other and older societies in the East can only mean that there were people in the world in pre-Christian times who had a much fuller knowledge of the gospel than anyone until now had dreamed possible. This is what the Book of Mormon teaches us to expect. The world it describes differs from the picture painted by conventional ancient history in being more free and lively in its cultural exchanges and hence characterized by a general overall

sameness between the various groups involved. The variety and the sameness are equally surprising in the ancient world and equally characteristic of the Book of Mormon scene.

Just as the ancient cultural and religious scene was drastically changed about 600 B.C., so it was again suddenly and radically altered in the fourth century A.D. In each case it was as if a curtain had been dropped and the whole stage removed from our view. With the systematic and careful wiping out of every trace of the old religion by the doctors of the Jews and Christians,<sup>30</sup> all memory of the great prophets and teachers of the Messianic message was diligently removed from the record: "They despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand" (Jacob 4:14). The Book of Mormon has a good deal to say about the line of Messianic prophets whose work and whose very names were to be forgotten for centuries.

### The Forgotten Prophets

Who were these forgotten prophets? Not long ago a scholar in Italy observed to this writer that if Lehi had been a real prophet living in Jerusalem, there should certainly be some record of him available. But Lehi barely began his activity before he had to leave town, and according to his account the place was swarming with prophets at the time. The Lachish Letters, written in the time of Lehi and discovered in 1938, now confirm this picture; one of them, Number 6, complains that the prophets of doom were undermining the morale of the people in town and country.<sup>31</sup> Lehi was one of those prophets of doom. "Our father Lehi was driven out of Jerusalem because he testified of these things," wrote Nephi long after (Helaman 8:22). The teachings for which he was driven out, Nephi explains, were the very teachings for which other prophets had been driven out ages before: "And now I would that ye should

know, that even since the days of Abraham there have been many prophets that have testified of these things; yea, behold, the prophet Zenos did testify boldly; for the which he was slain. And behold, also Zenock, and also Ezias, and also Isaiah, and Jeremiah; . . . and now we know that Jerusalem was destroyed according to the words of Jeremiah [they had learned the news from the Mulekites]. O then, why not the Son of God come, according to his prophecy?" (Helaman 8:19-20). It was the double teaching of the destruction of the wicked of Israel and the coming of the Messiah that got all these men into trouble, including Lehi, Zenos, Zenock, and Ezias, all heretofore unknown prophets. Lehi was not the first to be chased out of Jerusalem and not the last. Today the Scrolls can tell us about that. They, too, mention forgotten prophets, driven out of Jerusalem because they denounced its wicked inhabitants and foretold the coming of the Messiah.

One of these was the now famous Teacher of Righteousness. Of him Father Danielou writes: "Between the great prophets of the Old Testament and John the Baptist he emerges as a new link, . . . one of the great figures of Israel's prophetic tradition. It is amazing that he remained so unknown for so long. Now that he is known the question arises as to what we are to do about this knowledge. . . . Why does not this message, then, form part of inspired Scripture?"<sup>32</sup> The last question was prompted by the fact, pointed out by Danielou, that the prophet in question indubitably prophesied the coming of the Messiah many years before the event. So here we have a major prophet foretelling the coming of Christ but completely lost to the Christian and Jewish worlds.

It has often been pointed out that the scribes and pharisees of the New Testament, the legitimate descendants of "the Jews at Jerusalem" whom Nephi so often takes to task, after they had sought the death of the Lord and the apostles, also determined to eradicate every trace of Jewish apoca-

lyptic thought as well.<sup>33</sup> That is a main reason why the line of Messianic prophets disappeared.

To judge by the Dead Sea Scrolls, these prophets were closely associated with the priestly line of Zadok—"the priests who remain true to the covenant"—which was also suppressed.<sup>34</sup> An important name in the Zadokite tradition was that of Enos, another vanished prophet; one of the first Nephite prophets also had that name.<sup>35</sup> Is the Zenes or Zenos, some fragments of whose words were first published in 1893, the same as our Book of Mormon Zenos?<sup>36</sup> At least the names can now be confirmed, as also the existence of a suppressed line of prophets and the fact that very great prophets have actually disappeared from sight because of their Messianic teachings. Let us take the case of Zenos.

### **The Story of Zenos**

The 33rd chapter of Alma seems to include an entire hymn by Zenos. It begins:

"Thou art merciful, O God, for thou hast heard my prayer, even when I was in the wilderness" (Alma 33:4). He starts with a cry of thanksgiving, as the Thanksgiving Hymns of the Scrolls do, and immediately lets us know that he has spent some time in the desert calling upon God. He mingles his praise with autobiographical material exactly as the author of said Hymns does, as he continues:

"Yea, thou wast merciful when I prayed concerning those who were mine enemies, and thou didst turn them to me" (Alma 33:4). This takes us right into the thick of things: Zenos has had enemies, but he has been able by his piety to overcome their opposition and "turn them" again to him, the expression implying that they had been his followers before. Next we learn that Zenos was a farmer or at least engaged in the agricultural pursuits characteristic of the sectarians of the desert:

"Yea, O God, and thou wast merciful unto me when I



did cry unto thee in my field" (Alma 33:5). By now it is fairly certain that we are dealing with a poem, each section beginning, as in the Thanksgiving Hymns, with the same repeated utterance of thanks: "Thou wast merciful unto me, O God!" Zenos continues:

" . . . again, O God, when I did turn to my house thou didst hear me in my prayer" (Alma 33:6). Either Zenos is returning to his house from the field or (more probably) is returning from his stay in the wilderness; since he is speaking of his life's crises, this would seem to indicate that after the trouble was over the prophet went back home for a time. But soon he is on the move again:

"Yea, O God, thou hast been merciful unto me, and heard my cries in the midst of thy congregations" (Alma 33:9). The word "congregations" occurs only twice in the King James Bible, both times also in solemn hymns of praise.<sup>37</sup> What are the "congregations" in whose midst Zenos spent his time? In contrast to the Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls are simply full of "congregations" (half a dozen words being translated that way), referring to various communities of saints (they use that word "saints" a lot, too) who have sought to live the Law in its purity by retreating from Jerusalem and forming independent congregations in the wilderness. Since it would appear from Alma 33:4 that it was "in the wilderness" that the showdown took place which ended in turning his enemies back into his followers, and since he could only visit congregations in the plural by moving about away from home, it would seem that Zenos was a leader among those societies of Jews which had practiced the custom of occasional settlement in the desert ever since the days of Joshua. For Zenos there was more trouble ahead:

"Yea, and thou hast also heard me when I have been cast out and have been despised by mine enemies" (Alma 33:10). He is now discredited, despised, and thrown out—but not for long!

“Yea, thou didst hear my cries, and wast angry with mine enemies, and thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction” (Alma 33:10). These are serious doings indeed. The tables are completely turned; the opposition is not only discomfited but also completely overthrown, apparently by force of arms, as frequently happened to the societies in the desert. So the hymn concludes on a joyful note:

“I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son” (Alma 33:11). But that is not the end of the story, which we must seek in Helaman 8:19: “The prophet Zenos did testify boldly; for the which he was slain.”

### **The Story of an Unnamed Prophet**

And now let us compare the ups and downs of Zenos’s career with the vicissitudes of the unnamed writer of the Thanksgiving Hymns, who in Hymn H or No. 8 includes in the framework of a song of thanksgiving a brief sketch of his own affairs, exactly as Zenos does:

“I thank thee, O God, that thou hast illuminated my countenance by thy covenant. . . . But those who have led thy people astray, those false prophets, with their many words and their flatteries, . . . I was despised by them, they esteemed me as nothing, while thou didst manifest thy power in me.”<sup>38</sup> From the provenance of the document it is probable that this, too, took place in the wilderness; the false prophets are described in terms only too familiar to readers of the Book of Mormon, and their business here, as in Zenos’s story, is to lead away the saints. “Despised” is the very word used by Zenos in a like situation – “cast out and . . . despised” – and thus our poet continues:

“For I was cast out of my country like a bird from its nest; and all my friends and followers were turned away from me, and considered me no more than a vessel that

has passed its usefulness. While those lying teachers and vain seers who formed against me a combination of the Devil, perverted the Law which thou hast engraved on my heart against their flattering words to thy people."<sup>39</sup> Just so, Zenos's followers were turned against him. In Hymn J or No. 10 the Qumran poet likewise tells us: "I had become . . . a symbol of strife and discord unto my friends . . . an object of murmuring and criticism to all those whom I had gathered. . . . All spoke evil of me, with a perverse tongue, they who had been members of my congregation. . . . Because of the secret which Thou hast hidden in me, they took false reports to those seeking to make trouble."<sup>40</sup>

The second time, it will be recalled, Zenos did not win his enemies back, but instead they suffered violent destruction—they were the implacables. The Qumran poet's enemies met a like fate: "For thou, O God, dost scorn the machinations of the evil one. . . . They were caught in their own schemes, they who led the people away from thy covenant."<sup>41</sup>

Like Zenos, our hero confronts them boldly: "As for me, since I lean on thee, I shall arise and confront those who despise me. . . . For thou didst show me thy power at day-break, and didst not cover with shame the faces of those who supported me, who joined together in thy covenant and hearkened to my voice . . . in the congregation of the saints. Thou shalt make their cause to triumph forever."<sup>42</sup>

As he heard the prayer of Zenos "in the midst of thy congregations," so God hearkened to the voice of this poet "in the congregation of the saints." The situations of the two men are remarkably alike: It is the same story of inspiration and mighty prayer, opposition, expulsion, humiliation, and ultimate triumph, and all in the wilderness and in the midst of the congregations.

As told in the Habakkuk Commentary of the Dead Sea

Scrolls, the mysterious and much-discussed "Teacher of Righteousness" experiences much the same vicissitudes. First of all we are told that the Teacher of Righteousness had been attacked by the wicked and that the people had been turned against him by the man of lies who led them astray from the covenant;<sup>43</sup> then we learn that the man of lies brought false charges against the righteous teacher in a general conference, and was supported by a faction who refused to come to the teacher's defense.<sup>44</sup>

Then we hear of a wicked priest who at first seemed to be a man of integrity but later became greedy and unscrupulous in acquiring wealth,<sup>45</sup> and then turned against the commandments of God and as a result suffered from a horrible disease.<sup>46</sup> It was this priest, we are next told, who persecuted the righteous teacher and delivered him into the hands of his enemies.<sup>47</sup>

Next we learn that the teacher of lies set up his own religious community by trickery and deceit<sup>48</sup> and that the wicked priest pursued the Teacher of Righteousness to the place where he had fled for refuge, apparently in the desert, and there at the meeting of a community on the Day of Atonement used his authority to try to take control of the meeting and confound the teacher.<sup>49</sup>

The next passage tells of the overthrow of the wicked priest and his ultimate disgrace, but more as a prediction and a hope than a fact: "His loss is greater than his gain; . . . the cup of the wrath of God will overcome him."<sup>50</sup> Finally, we learn that the headquarters of the wicked priest was Jerusalem, "the City," where he defiled the temple and plundered the poor.<sup>51</sup>

Whether or not the teacher of righteousness (as has been maintained) was the author of the Thanksgiving Hymns, we are obviously dealing with a situation characteristic of religious sectaries with their bitter feuding between factions and leaders.<sup>52</sup> But though Zenos plainly has much in common with these two leaders, there is one thing that brings

him even closer to the writer of the Hymns. This is his Parable of the Olive Tree.

### The Parable of the Olive Tree

It is Jacob, whose parents had spent most of their days in Jerusalem, and who thought of himself simply as an exile from that place (Jacob 7:26), who quotes the long Parable of the Olive Tree at length from the writings of Zenos: "Behold, my brethren, do ye not remember to have read the words of the prophet Zenos?" (Jacob 5:1). Let the reader peruse this long account in Jacob chapters 5 and 6, and then consider Hymn 10 (also called Hymn 0) of the Thanksgiving Hymns from Qumran:

"I thank thee, O Lord, that thou hast placed me as [or in] a fountain of running water in a desert place, . . . irrigating a garden [or orchard] in the desert, where . . . stand planted for thy glory alone, the trees that never die, . . . putting forth branches that never wither, taking root before they blossom, reaching out their roots to the stream . . . of living waters."<sup>53</sup>

So far, the general image of the well-watered trees represents the righteous in the desert of the world. Then, more specifically, God's law is described as a special tree, an abused and battered stump, against which the other trees vaunt their superiority, "for they spread far and wide in the vineyard, though their roots do not seek the waters of the stream [i.e., the water of life], while the tree which was planted in truth and is destined to bring to flower branches of holiness keeps its secret hidden and sealed, unesteemed and unnoticed."<sup>54</sup> What better figure for Israel among the nations than that of the tree destined to bear fruit, but for the present a damaged stump among the proud but fruitless "fir, the pine, and the cypress?"<sup>55</sup>

God has kept the fruit of the tree, we are told next, in secret reserve as long as Israel "did not believe in the wellspring of life," though the tree remained alive. The

image is familiar from some of the earliest Christian writings,<sup>56</sup> and Zenos, who significantly gives *no* explanation of his parable any more than our hymn writer does, has the Lord say:

“Behold, for a long time will I lay up of the fruit of my vineyard unto mine own self against the season, which speedily cometh” (Jacob 5:76).

On the other hand, says the hymn, “the trees of the wicked shall be felled [or hewn down] . . . and fire shall go forth, and they shall wither.”<sup>57</sup> Compare this with Jacob: “And the bad [shall] be hewn down and cast into the fire” (Jacob 5:66).

It is not only the main tree that survives, however, for in the end, as in Zenos’s story, “the orchard which I have planted shall bloom fair for ever, . . . its trees planted in line of the sun.”<sup>58</sup> Note the proper technical concern as well as the happy ending. The Lord tells how, “if I relax my hand, it [the tree] becomes like a [heath in the desert], and its stocks like nettles, . . . like briars and brambles; . . . its leaves fade before the heat; it is not exposed to water. It suffers mishap and disease and becomes a [target] for all manner of blight.”<sup>59</sup> Just so, in Zenos’s account, dire consequences followed an interval of inactivity, representing, of course, the time of Israel’s distress: “And it came to pass that a long time had passed away, and the Lord of the vineyard said, . . . Come, let us . . . labor again in the vineyard, . . . and behold all sorts of fruit did cumber the tree. . . . And there [was] none of it which [was] good. . . . It profiteth me nothing” (Jacob 5:29-32).

To restore the tree the Lord of the garden must work with a will: “When I apply my hand to dig the furrows thereof,” says the Thanksgiving Hymns, “its roots strike even on granite, its stocks are firm-grounded in the earth.”<sup>60</sup> Through Zenos the Lord commands: “Dig about the trees, both old and young, the first and the last. . . . Prepare the way for them, that they may grow” (Jacob 5:63-64). And

when this is done, "the natural branches began to grow and thrive exceedingly; . . . and they did keep the root . . . thereof equal, according to the strength thereof" (Jacob 5:73).

Special care was taken to "pluck from the tree those branches whose fruit is most bitter"<sup>61</sup> (Jacob 5:52, 57, 65). In our hymn the poet complains that what he has planted has turned to bitterness, and in another of the Thanksgiving Hymns, it is the tree of the wicked that bears bitter fruit: "In their every thought is a root which blossoms to wormwood and gall."<sup>62</sup> The tree referred to here can only be an olive.

The reader can amuse himself by working out the parallels at great length and detail. Here we have two men who write exactly the same sort of poetry including a hymn of praise in the same peculiar way, an autobiographical sketch in which they suffer the identical vicissitudes under identical conditions, and the same two men develop an elaborate parable having to do with a tree and an orchard or garden which they leave to others to explain. If they are the same person, the discrepancies between their accounts can be readily explained by the time gap between the Book of Mormon version and the much later Qumran version. We must remember that the Dead Sea Scrolls are full of old writings, centuries older than the manuscripts containing them, even though these are the oldest known.

The Zadok after whom the community name themselves may have been traced back as far as the Jebusite Zadok of the time of David; that shows how old their traditions are.<sup>63</sup> We have even suggested elsewhere that the Zenock of the Book of Mormon may have been Zadok, for not only could the "n" and the "d" have been easily confused by a scribe, but the common Arabic designation for the sectarians of the desert as "Zandokites" shows that the two could be used together.<sup>64</sup>

All of this, of course, is simply speculation.

## Zenos – Zenez?

What can be behind the coincidence of the names Zenos and Zenez? What we propose here is not to present a solution but to suggest an interesting problem.

Twelve times the Book of Mormon names the prophet Zenos, next to Isaiah the most conspicuous Old World prophetic figure in the book. The people of Lehi had brought his writings with them from Jerusalem, and they were evidently popular, for preachers living hundreds of years apart enjoin the Nephites to remember what they have read of his words (Alma 33:3; cf. Jacob 5:1). How, one wonders, could an important prophet like Zenos, if he ever existed, have simply dropped out of sight without leaving a trace of himself in the Bible or anywhere else? That, as we have seen, is just the question that is being asked today about certain prophets now rediscovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In 1893 M. R. James published Greek and Latin versions of an ancient text entitled "The Vision of Zenez the Father of Gothoniel."<sup>65</sup> Since the father of Othniel in the Bible is Kenaz and not Zenez, James translates the title "The Vision of Kenaz," though the name which appears in some manuscripts is Zenez, and James confesses himself at a loss to explain how C or K could have been "corrupted into Z" – but there it is. The text itself he finds to be "as puzzling a document as one could well wish for," its "meaning, source, date and purpose" completely eluding him; "for at first sight there seems to be no corner of apocryphal literature into which we can fit this odd fragment, so completely without context or connexions does it come before us." For one thing, it is much older than other Apocrypha: "Thus, the Vision of Kenaz would help to attest the existence of the prophetic spirit in the dark times of the Judges." Kenaz himself is one of a mysterious prophetic line: his elder brother was Caleb, "on whom the Spirit of the Lord had rested, and who is known to have figured as a seer in



the Assumption of Moses." Long since James wrote that, we have learned that the Assumption of Moses was a familiar writing to the Qumran people, who associate themselves with this prophetic line. Also Othniel, the son of Kenaz, prophesied by the Spirit of the Lord. According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (*s.v. Kenaz*), Kenaz was not the father but rather the ancestor of Othniel; but a grandson of Caleb was also a Kenaz as was a grandson of Esau. The confusion is typical, but it is not necessarily confusing: after all, family names repeat themselves in any age.

Already in 1893 James notes that "the language and cast of thought" in Zenez "strongly resembles that of 4 Esdras," and are even closer to "the diction and thought of Ezekiel." Today this can be taken as definitely indicating that the Vision of Zenez is old and Jewish and not, as James suggests among other possibilities, "merely a medieval attempt at imitating Old Testament prophecy."

James thought that the whole Zenez or Kenaz episode, which is contained in a longer work mistitled the Pseudo-Philo, was the free invention of a first-century Jewish scribe.<sup>66</sup> But today we know better; as W. Lambert writes, "The authors of ancient cosmologies [such as the Zenez story] were essentially compilers. Their originality was expressed in new combinations of old themes, and in new twists to old ideas. Sheer invention was not part of their craft."<sup>67</sup> The author of the Zenez story was *not* inventing but dragging out a very old tradition that had become encrusted with legend and mixed with other half-forgotten stories. That is typical of apocryphal writings; but the point is that behind all this confusion lies a real historic person: the mix-up regarding his name is a sign both of antiquity and authenticity.

The Zenez fragment begins by telling how "once when the Elders were seated together the Holy indwelling Spirit came to Zenez and he took leave of his senses and began to prophesy." We may pause here to recall how God visited

the Book of Mormon Zenos "in the midst of thy congregations." Like Zenos, Zenez talks like a real prophet: "Hear now ye inhabitants of the earth [or the land]. Even as they who have dwelt therein have prophesied before me, having seen this hour, in the time before the corruption of the earth [land]." Like Zenos, Zenez is conscious of being one of a line of prophets all of whom have testified of the same things (cf. Helaman 8:22); he speaks "that all ye inhabitants therein might know the prophecies according to that which hath been before appointed." Here is the familiar motif of the appointed plan which has been taught to the world by generations of prophets.

Turning to the specific message, Zenez recalls to his hearers' minds the state of things at the creation of the earth; he sees "flames of fire that did not consume and fountains bursting forth from their slumbers when there was as yet no foundations for men to live on." When a foundation at last appears between the upper and lower worlds, a voice tells Zenez, "These are the foundations prepared for men to inhabit for seven thousand years to come." He further sees figures like people "coming out of the light of invisible worlds," and is told that "these are they who shall inhabit" the foundations in the name of Adam. "And it shall come to pass that whenever he [the earthly Adam] shall sin against Me and the fullness of time is come, the spark shall be extinguished and the fountain dried up, and thus will things alternate." This is speaking of the cycles of visitation and apostasy among the children of men, a basic theme in the early Jewish and Christian Apocrypha. "And after Zenez had spoken these things he awoke and his spirit returned to him, and he remembered not what he had said and seen." Then Zenez went forth and preached to the people, saying: "If such is to be the rest [*anapausis* = rest in progress] of the righteous after they have left this life [this shows that much of the vision is missing], it behooves them to die to the things of this cor-

ruptible world [or age], that they may not behold its sins. And after he had said these things Zenez died and slept with his fathers; and the people mourned him for thirty days." He was evidently a famous prophet; but quite forgotten. Seventy years ago James could find no other writing with which to compare this one, but by now the reader should be able to recognize familiar overtones from the Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi writings, *and* the Book of Mormon.

The long account of Cenez-Kenaz-Zenez in the Pseudo-Philo culminates in another prophet's Testament, given on his death-bed to his son Phineas. Phineas reports how the Lord appeared to his father Eleazar in a vision and told him of the apostasy of Israel to come. He comforts him, however, with the knowledge of the divine plan laid down in the pre-existence: "Yet will I (the Lord) remember the time . . . when I said that the world should be . . . and I will plant a great vineyard, . . . and order it and call it by my name, and it shall be mine forever. But when I have done all that I have spoken, nevertheless my planting which is called after me, will not know me, the planter thereof, but will corrupt his fruit. . . . These are the things [says Phineas] which my father commanded me to speak unto the people."<sup>68</sup>

Thus the last words of Eleazar, first made public by his son at the farewell speech of Zenez, are a discourse on the vineyard, telling how God planned even in the pre-existence to plant his great vineyard and call it by his name, and how the vineyard would go to waste and ruin. Zenos, Zenez, and the author of the Thanksgiving Hymns all tell about this vineyard which is so oddly described as an olive-orchard—an apparent confusion now explained as intentional by the murals of Dura Europos. At the very least we may now affirm that there was rumor of a prophet named Zenez or something like that, who flourished long before 600 B.C., and who called Israel to repentance, describing

its vicissitudes in terms of an orchard or vineyard planted and cherished by God.

Could Zenos have been the author of the Thanksgiving Hymns? He could have, but that is not necessary – he could have lived centuries before the Qumran poet and still resemble him very closely. After all, half a dozen Zadoks have been identified, all related and all engaged in the same type of activity. It is a commonplace of the apocryphal writings that two heroes who behave alike become identified in the minds of later generations. Like the religious writings of the Egyptians (to which they have genuine affinity), the documents we have been considering are wholly taken up with types and images rather than with unique historical events and personalities; ancient religious texts operate to a degree which we often fail to appreciate, with interchangeable parts, characters, and names. It is hard for the analytical-minded Westerner to understand what goes on, and a vast amount of ink has been wasted on studies attempting an exclusive pinpointing of this or that character or event in the Dead Sea Scrolls. But for the people who wrote the Scrolls, it was quite possible for John to be an Elijah, or the Teacher of Righteousness, a Messiah.