



Type: Book Chapter

The Narrative of Zosimus (History of the Rechabites) and the Book of Mormon

Author(s): John W. Welch

Source: *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*

Editor(s): Noel B. Reynolds

Published: Provo, UT; Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies,
1997

Page(s): 323–374



The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) existed as a California non-profit corporation from 1979 until about 2006, when it was allowed to go into involuntary liquidation, at which time copyrights held by FARMS and its authors and/or editors reverted back to their original author and/or editors. This chapter is archived by permission of author John W. Welch and editor Noel B. Reynolds.

CHAPTER 13

THE NARRATIVE OF ZOSIMUS (HISTORY OF THE RECHABITES) AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

John W. Welch

This article demonstrates and discusses certain similarities between texts in 1 Nephi in the Book of Mormon and a little-known document entitled “The Narrative of Zosimus.”¹ The Narrative’s core material, or “early Jewish stratum,” was written originally in Hebrew and appears to be at least as old as the time of Christ and may be much older.² There is no evidence that any knowledge about the Narrative of Zosimus existed in any English-speaking land prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon.

Accounting for the similarities between these texts is intriguing and complicated. In a religious context, the parallels between the two writings may be explained as deriving from a common source of revelation or religious experience. Academically, the parallels are an intellectual challenge with no definite resolution. Even though I cannot account for these parallels in all respects, their mere existence tends

John W. Welch is professor of law at Brigham Young University and editor-in-chief of BYU Studies.

to support claims of ancient Near Eastern origins for Book of Mormon authorship.

This article briefly describes the textual history and the contents of the Narrative of Zosimus and then shows certain similarities between the Book of Mormon and the Narrative. The approach followed here is not exhaustive. For example, the Narrative of Zosimus contains rich imagery of the tree of life; it is also a good example of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic literature. On points such as these, the Book of Mormon and the Narrative of Zosimus should be further compared to each other, as well as with the extensive bodies of symbolic and apocalyptic Judeo-Christian literatures. While those further studies will have to wait for another day, less-ambitious undertakings will suffice for present purposes.

Background and Overview

While no one knows who Zosimus was, if he even existed, or what the name Zosimus means or where it may have come from,³ the ancient narrative that bears this name records traditions about a righteous people who left Jerusalem at the time of the prophet Jeremiah. They were led by God to an ideal land across the ocean. Based on those two connections alone, the text is of obvious interest to students of the Book of Mormon, which relates a similar history.

James H. Charlesworth has compiled the most complete published bibliography and has made a thorough study of this long-neglected narrative.⁴ He concludes that its most ancient portion was written somewhere in Judea, that it was originally written in Hebrew, and that "it would be unwise to ignore the possibility that this oldest section is a Jewish work that predates the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70."⁵ How long before A.D. 70 this early material was actually

written down is difficult to tell. The traditions underlying many sections in the Narrative of Zosimus undoubtedly go back even further.

Not only are the sources behind this intriguing composition very ancient, but judging by the number of copies of it that have now been located in some of Europe's oldest museums and libraries,⁶ the work must have been fairly well-known in the early centuries of Christianity, at least in certain areas away from the main control centers. Texts of the Narrative have survived in Slavonic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Karshuni, Arabic, and Greek.⁷ A comparison of these texts makes it apparent that over the years, the basic Hebrew core suffered many editorial changes and additions. In the later Ethiopic materials, for example, Zosimus is linked with Alexander the Great (who was said to have conquered all the world and thus must have visited these people across the sea).⁸ Such variations from text to text require us to separate carefully the earlier original materials from the subsequent accretions. Several theories have been advanced attempting to identify which Jewish or other religious groups may have had a hand in transmitting and shaping the versions of this document that have survived, but none of these efforts have been deemed entirely satisfactory or successful.⁹

Perhaps due as much to these changes as to a failure to recognize the significance of its basic core, the Narrative was unjustifiably rejected in later orthodox Christian circles. In the Canon of Nicephorous (dated around A.D. 850), the Narrative of Zosimus was placed among certain apocryphal works that were to be discarded. Soon afterwards, the small book fell into disuse.

The first known reappearance in modern times of the Narrative of Zosimus was its translation into Russian from an Old Church Slavonic text in the 1870s, almost fifty years

after the translation of the Book of Mormon into English. The first critical Greek text of the Narrative was published in England in the late nineteenth century by J. R. Robinson, followed shortly by its first translation into English, which appeared in volume 10 (supplemental volume) of M. R. James's series entitled *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Both James's and Charlesworth's translations will be used in this article.

General and particular elements of the Narrative are similar to the early sections of the Book of Mormon. Consider the following overview. According to the Narrative of Zosimus, a righteous man named Zosimus, dwelling in a cave in a desert, prays to the Lord and obtains spiritual passage to a land of blessedness. In order to arrive at this land of promise, Zosimus must wander in the wilderness without knowing where he is being led. He is pushed to the point of exhaustion but attains his destination by constant prayer and divine intervention. Zosimus at length arrives at the bank of an unfathomable river of water covered by an impenetrable cloud of darkness. Catching the branches of a tree, Zosimus is transported across the water where he sits beneath a beautiful tree, eating its fruit and drinking of the life-sustaining water that flows from its roots. Zosimus is then met by an angelic escort, who asks him what he wants, shows him a vision in which he thinks he beholds the Son of God, and ultimately introduces him to a group of righteous sons of God. These elders tell Zosimus of their history and instruct him in their ways of righteousness. Their history is "engraved" upon soft stone plates.¹⁰ The Narrative explains how the group of sons, led by their father, escaped the destruction of Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah and how, as a nation, they survived the scattering of Israel. They were allowed to occupy their otherworldly land of paradise and abundance only because of their righteousness. Their religion is based upon prayer and chastity, and they receive

knowledge of the wickedness of the outside world by revelation. Notwithstanding the wickedness of the people at Jerusalem, Zosimus rejoices when he is shown a book in which he learns that mercy will be extended to the inhabitants there.

The many parallels between the early chapters of the Book of Mormon and this Narrative typically require little elaboration:

- Dwelling in the desert (1 Nephi 2:4)
- Being led by prayer and faith (1 Nephi 1:5; 11:3; 16:29)
- Wandering through a dark and dreary waste (1 Nephi 8:7)
- Being caught away to the bank of a river (1 Nephi 8:13)
- Crossing to the other side of a river or abyss and passing through a great mist (1 Nephi 8:32)
- Coming to a tree whose fruit is most sweet above all other fruit (1 Nephi 8:11)
- Eating from the tree, which also gave forth a fountain of living waters (1 Nephi 11:25)
- Being greeted by an escort (1 Nephi 11:2–3)
- Being interrogated as to desires (1 Nephi 11:2)
- Beholding a vision of the Son of God or of those like sons of God (1 Nephi 1:6; 11:29)
- Keeping records on soft plates or tablets (1 Nephi 3:24; 9:1–6)
- Recording the history of a group of people who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah (1 Nephi 1:4; 7:14)
- Being led to a land of promise and of great abundance because of righteousness (1 Nephi 18:25)

- Practicing constant prayer (Alma 34:21–27)
- Keeping high standards of chastity and piety (Jacob 2:25–28)
- Receiving revelations concerning the wickedness of the people of Jerusalem and the Old World (1 Nephi 10:11)
- Obtaining assurances of the mercy to be extended to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the world who repent and enter into covenants with God (1 Nephi 1:14; 10:3)

For a reader to appreciate and evaluate the similar characteristics of these two writings, a detailed examination of both is required. The extensive parallels existing between them may substantiate the great antiquity of both.

Detailed Comparison

On the following pages, the full text of Charlesworth's translation of the Narrative of Zosimus, or the History of the Rechabites, is first reprinted, section by section, in order to give an easy general overview of each passage.¹¹ Then James's translation is shown in the left-hand column, and corresponding passages from the Book of Mormon that comprise possible parallels are arranged on the right. Not all the proposed parallels are equally meritorious, but they have been included in the interest of completeness; other parallels can undoubtedly also be suggested. The passages from the Book of Mormon are not always found in the same order as their parallels in the Narrative of Zosimus, and in those cases the strength of the noncontextual parallels must be reduced. Overall, however, the cumulative force of these parallels strikes this author as substantial.

The translations of the Narrative of Zosimus used here follow the Syriac (Charlesworth) and the Greek (James)

texts. Although the Narrative was not originally written in Syriac or Greek, these texts appear to be close translations of early materials and are representative of the overall tradition.¹² Some sections of the Narrative that are identifiable as later additions have been bracketed or omitted.¹³

Most of the passages from the Book of Mormon come from 1 Nephi 1, 8, and 11, where Lehi's influence is strongest. Among the Nephite writers, Lehi most closely typifies the world of Judea within which milieu the Narrative of Zosimus was produced. Lehi's visions also relate in genre to the visionary styles and motifs of the Narrative of Zosimus. No effort has been made to separate the writings of Lehi in these chapters from the writings of Nephi, since no direct connection is made between any Book of Mormon individual and the person who wrote the Narrative of Zosimus. After each quoted section are brief comments. General conclusions follow. Unless otherwise noted, all Book of Mormon references are to verses found in 1 Nephi.

Chapter One

1 [Syriac] There was a certain amazing and virtuous man, who while dwelling in the desert for forty years did not eat bread, did not drink wine, and did not see the face of a mortal. His name was Zosimus; and he earnestly was entreating God by night and by day to show him where he had translated the Blessed Ones, the sons of Jonadab, who were taken away from worldly life in the days of Jeremiah the prophet, and where God had made them dwell.

And when the Lord saw the self-humiliation of this blessed one, Zosimus, for the sake of these Blessed Ones, then God heard his prayer and granted his request. And on one of the days while he was praying, a voice came to him and an angel came toward him and said to him, "Zosimus, O man of God, I have been sent to you from the height of heaven to guide you and to show you the

way so that you may journey and see these Blessed Ones as you petitioned the Lord. However, do not boast in your mind thinking thus, 'Behold for forty years bread I have not eaten, and wine I have not drunk, and the faces of men I have not seen but only the face of angels'; now approach."

Zosimus (Greek)

1 Nephi

Ch. 1. About that time there was

1:4. In that same year [the first year of the reign of Zedekiah] there came many prophets.

in the desert a certain man named Zosimus, [who for forty years ate no bread, and drank no wine, and saw not the face of man.]

2:4. And . . . he [Lehi] departed *into the wilderness*.

This man *was entreating God* that he

1:5. Lehi, as he went forth *prayed unto the Lord*, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people.

might see the way of life of the blessed,

11:3. And I said: I desire to behold the things which my father saw.

and behold an *angel* of the Lord was sent saying to him, Zosimus,

8:5. And he [an *angel*] came and stood before me.

man of God, behold I am sent by *the Most High, the God of all*, to tell thee that thou *shalt journey* to the blessed, but shall not dwell with them.

11:6. The Spirit cried with a loud voice, saying: Hosanna to the Lord, *the most high God; for he is God over all the earth, yea, even above all*. . . . Because thou believest . . . *thou shalt behold* the things which thou hast desired.

[But exalt not thy heart, saying, For forty years I have not eaten bread, for the word of God is more than bread, and the spirit of God is more than wine. And

Zosimus (Greek)

1 Nephi

as for thy saying, I have not seen the face of man, behold the face of the great king is nigh thee.]

Zosimus said, *I know that the Lord can do whatsoever he will.* The angel said to him, Know this also, that thou art not worthy of one of their delights, but arise and set out.

11:1. And believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me . . .

3:7. I, Nephi, said . . . *I know that the Lord* giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may *accomplish the thing* which he commandeth them.

Comments on Chapter One

The vision of Zosimus begins as he prays that he might be shown the way of life of blessedness. An angel appears and announces that his prayer will be answered. This is similar to Nephi's prayer that he might be shown the things his father, Lehi, had seen; the vision of Lehi was conducted initially by an angelic escort (1 Nephi 8:5–7) and Nephi's prayer was also answered by an angel who appeared to him and announced that his request would be granted (1 Nephi 11:6) because of his belief in the Son of the most high God. Zosimus also confirms his faith in the Lord before his vision can commence. Particularly noteworthy is the nearly identical name the angel uses for the Lord in the Greek account and in the Book of Mormon: "The Most High God of [over] All."

There may also be meaningful analogues between the desert setting of the history of Lehi and that of the Narrative. Lehi and Nephi could well have seen their own departure into the wilderness as a symbol of righteousness,¹⁵ just as the Narrative employs dwelling in the desert to show the

unworldliness of Zosimus (compare 1 Nephi 17:23–44). The initial time reference in Zosimus is too obscure to be of consequence.

Chapter Two

2 [Syriac] Then I left the cave, and traveled with the angel for forty days. I arrived at a certain place wearied and fatigued, and I collapsed from my exhaustion; afterward I prayed to God for three days. And a certain animal came and carried me away and traveled beneath me for many days until it reached the great ocean. And when I saw the great sea I was amazed at its vastness and wondered what I would do. And immediately a voice came to me, saying, "O man of God, never has a man proceeded farther or passed beyond me; merely perceive this and understand it." And I looked and saw in the midst of the sea something like a dense bulwark of cloud suspended upon the sea; and the top of the cloud extended to the height of heaven. And I thought that perhaps the Blessed Ones were in the midst of it, because I heard a voice from the midst of the cloud which said, "Father Zosimus." Then realizing my misconception I praised and gave thanks to God, to him who makes mute natures to speak, to him who makes everything easy.

Zosimus (Greek)

2. And I, Zosimus, issuing from my cave with God *leading* me, set out *not knowing* which way I went,

and after I had *travelled* forty days

my *spirit* grew faint and my body failed, and *being exhausted*

1 Nephi

8:7. As I *followed* him I beheld myself that I was in a *dark and dreary waste*.

8:8. And after I had *traveled* for the space of many hours in darkness . . .

1:7. He cast himself upon his bed, *being overcome with the Spirit*.

Zosimus (Greek)

1 Nephi

I sat down, and continued *praying* in that place for three days.

[And, behold, there came a beast from the desert, whose name is the camel, and placing its knees on the ground, it received me upon its neck and went into the desert and set me down. There there was much howling of wild beasts, and gnashing of teeth, and deadly poison. And becoming afraid, I prayed to the Lord]

and there came in that place a great earthquake with noise, and a storm of wind blew and *lifted me* from the earth, and *exalted me* on its wing,

and I was *praying* and journeying

till it set me upon a *place*

beside a *river*, and the name of the river is Eumeles. And behold when I desired to cross the river, some one cried as if from the water, saying, Zosimus, man of God, *thou canst not pass through me*, for no man can divide *my waters*: but look up from the waters to the heaven.

8:8. I began to *pray* unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me.

11:1. As I sat pondering in mine heart I was *caught away* in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an *exceedingly high* mountain, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had before set my foot.

8:9. And . . . after I had *prayed* unto the Lord

I beheld a *large and spacious field*.

8:13. And as I cast my eyes round, about . . . I beheld a *river of water*.

8:32. And . . . *many were drowned* in the *depths* of the fountain.

Zosimus (Greek)

And looking up I saw a *wall of cloud* stretching from the waters to the heaven, and the cloud said, Zosimus, man of God, through me no bird *passes out of this world*, not breath of wind, nor the sun itself,

nor can the *tempter* in this world pass through me [the wall of cloud].

1 Nephi

8:23. And it came to pass that there arose a *mist of darkenss*; yea, even an exceeding great *mist of darkness*, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path *did lose their way*, that they wandered off and were lost.

12:17. And the mists of darkness are the *temptations of the devil*, which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men.

Comments on Chapter Two

Zosimus's vision progresses as he follows God's direction, not knowing where he is being led, until he is exhausted from travel. After extended prayer, he is caught away to a place beside a river or great ocean, which turns out to be a cloudy and watery barrier between this world and paradise, or the land of blessedness. This parallels the visions and experiences of Lehi (compare 1 Nephi 2:5–6; 8:13). Lehi, too, follows his divine escort but soon finds himself lost in darkness (1 Nephi 8:7–8). He, too, is apparently disoriented and weary from his many hours of travel when he pleads for mercy. In the Syriac, three days of prayer are mentioned; in Lehi's account, three days of travel are involved (1 Nephi 2:6). Lehi then finds himself amazed in a large field beside a river, which also constitutes a cloudy, watery barrier between the proud and wicked world and those who partake of the fruit of the tree of life, the most conspicuous item in the paradisiacal landscape.

Amid the similarities, two slight differences between the accounts in the Narrative and those of the Book of Mormon are worth noting. First, for Zosimus the wall of cloud is

not equated with the tempter; rather, it is a barrier keeping even the devil from the paradise beyond. For Nephi, however, the mists over the river are the temptations themselves created by the devil to keep the children of men outside that paradise. The principle in both cases is similar: no evil may enter paradise. But in Lehi's merciful and open-minded perspective, multitudes press toward the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:30), and many reach that goal. In his account, Zosimus alone reaches the other bank. Thus, for Lehi the mists are not as impenetrable as the wall of cloud is for Zosimus. Second, Lehi is already on the paradise side of the river when he first notices the river, while Zosimus still must cross the river when he encounters it. How Lehi reaches paradise is not explained, except by the statement that he arrived there because of the Lord's mercies (1 Nephi 8:8). This is consistent with Lehi's report that he passed through these obstacles for many hours "in darkness" (1 Nephi 8:8), wherein he would not have observed anything along the way.

Chapter Three

3 [Syriac] And then I prayed to the Lord to deal with me as it pleases his will. And suddenly two luxuriant and very stately trees, larger than any I had ever seen, appeared on the shore of the sea. And then one of the trees bent itself down and I securely grasped its branches. And it stretched out toward the height of heaven and lifted me up and carried me in its summit until the cloud was beneath me. And also that other tree bent itself down toward it; and the one from here curved its summit and held me out to the one which was from the other side. And descending, it dropped me in the midst of it. And thus by God's guidance I passed over the great ocean and the cloud. And I rested in that place for three days, while the praise of God did not cease from my mouth. Then I arose and traveled through the land that was in the midst of the

sea; it was pleasant and beautiful and filled with luxuriant trees, which were bearing pleasant and fragrant fruits. It was like a large and vast island, without a mountain or hill, adorned with flowers and filled with many and delightful pleasures.

Zosimus (Greek)

3. And I was astonished at these words, and at the voice that spake these things to me.

And as I prayed, behold two *trees* sprang up out of the earth,

fair and beautiful, laden with fragrant fruits.

And the tree on this side bent down and received me on its top, and was lifted up exceedingly above the middle of the river, and the other tree *met me and received me in its branches* and bending down set me on the ground; and both trees were lifted up and set me away from the river on the other side. [In that place I rested three days, and arising again.]

I went forward, whither I knew not, and that place was filled with much fragrance, and there was *no mountain* on either hand, but the *place was level* and flowery, all crowned with garlands, and all the land was beautiful.

1 Nephi

8:10. And it came to pass that I beheld a *tree*, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.

8:11. [The fruit thereof] was *most sweet, above all* that I had ever before tasted . . . [and] *white*, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.

8:19, 24. And I beheld a rod of iron, and it extended along the bank of the river, and led [from the head of the fountain] to the tree by which I stood. . . . I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught *hold of the end of the rod of iron*; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.

8:9, 20. And it came to pass after I had prayed unto the Lord I beheld a *large and spacious* field . . . as if it had been a world.

Comments on Chapter Three

Zosimus crosses the river or ocean and passes through the wall of cloud by “securely grasping” a branch of the tree (in the Syriac) or by being lifted up in the branches of one tree and handed over to the tree on the opposite bank (in the Greek). In 1 Nephi, those who were not members of Lehi’s family hold onto the rod of iron, which enables them to avoid the hazards of the mists of darkness and of the river and to arrive safely at the tree of life. In both cases, man cannot make this passage without help.

For Zosimus, beholding the fruit of the tree epitomizes his arrival at the land of the blessed. For Lehi, the fruit symbolizes the love of God and is “desirable to make one happy” (1 Nephi 8:10; the word for “blessed” used in the ancient texts also means “happy”). In the Greek version, the fruit is “fair” (compare “white”) and “fragrant” (compare “sweet,” 1 Nephi 8:11). Once at the tree, both Lehi and Zosimus describe the paradise around them as large and flat (Greek) or vast (Syriac), emphasizing the all-important presence of the tree of life in the middle of the “large and spacious field” (1 Nephi 8:9).

Chapter Four

4 [Syriac] While observing the beauty of that land, I approached a little ways and saw a certain naked man, who was seated. And I was afraid because of his appearance, but said, “Peace to you, my brother.” Then he replied and said, “Come in peace; and joy be with you for I know that you are a man of God, otherwise you would not have been allowed to enter here.”

Zosimus (Greek)

1 Nephi

4. And I saw there a *naked man* sitting, and said in myself, 11:11. I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for I beheld that

Zosimus (Greek)

Surely this is not the tempter. And I remembered the voice of the cloud that it said to me, Not even the tempter in this world passes through me. And thus taking courage I said to him, Hail, brother. And he answering said to me, The grace of my God be with thee.

Again I said to him, Tell me, man of God, who thou art? He answered and said to me, *Who art thou* rather? And I answered and told him all concerning myself, and that I had prayed to God and he had brought me into that place.

He answered and said to me, I also know that *thou art a man of God, for if not, thou couldst not have passed* through the cloud and the river and the air. For the breadth of the river is about thirty thousand paces, and the cloud reaches to heaven, and the *depth of the river to the abyss.*

Comments on Chapter Four

In this chapter, Zosimus discovers a man, who appeared at first to be naked, sitting beside him. (Later, Zosimus will learn that this exalted being only appears naked to mortals because of the purity of his garments.) After assuring himself that this man is not the tempter, Zosimus engages him in polite conversation. This is somewhat comparable to Nephi's account where he also directly encounters a being in the form of a man. After assuring himself that this is the Spirit of the Lord, Nephi and the messenger converse with

1 Nephi

he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another.

11:2–3. And the Spirit said unto me: Behold, *what desirest thou?* And I said: I desire to behold the things which my father saw.

15:27–29. The water . . . was filthiness; . . . it was an *awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God.* . . . It was a representation of that awful hell.

one another as men normally do, as did Zosimus and his escort. In addition, Lehi mentions the white robe of the personage who leads him into the dark and dreary waste (1 Nephi 8:5), relating to Zosimus's emphasis on the purity of his escort's garments.

In both records, the attendant questions or comments to the traveler. In the Narrative of Zosimus, the question initially asked or implied is who Zosimus is, perhaps again reflecting the esoteric character of the Narrative. The initial question to Nephi is simply, What do you want? Nephi manifests no hesitancy about his own worthiness or who he is, as Zosimus does here and later in the sixth chapter. Rather, Nephi approaches the visionary experience directly as a matter of firmly knowing and diligently seeking what one wants (1 Nephi 10:19).

Finally, in the Greek text of the Narrative of Zosimus, further descriptions of the cloudy and watery barrier are given. The barrier is wide and an abyss, and the cloud reaches heaven. Although the Book of Mormon does not indicate the height of the mist of darkness, it is called "an exceedingly great mist" (1 Nephi 8:23). Likewise, although in Lehi's vision the river does not always appear wide (especially where the people on the other side can be seen), Nephi describes it as "a great and terrible gulf" (1 Nephi 12:18; 15:28). In all cases, the river or ocean functions as a demarcation between the righteous saints and the worldly sinners.

Chapter Five (Syriac Five and Six)

5 [Syriac] And again he asked me, "Have you come from the world of vanity?" Then I said to him, "In truth I come from the world of vanity in order to see all of you. However, tell me, why are you naked?" But he said to me, "You are he who is naked, and

you do not discern that your garment is corrupted, but my own garment is not corrupted. If you wish to see me, however, come, gaze toward the height of heaven." And while gazing above I saw his face to be like the face of an angel. And my eyes were dimmed from fear; and I fell upon the land.

6 [Syriac] And then he approached me and grasped me by my hands, and raised me up upon my feet. And he said to me, "Do not fear; for I am one of the Blessed Ones, whom you have earnestly desired to visit. But come with me and I shall take you to the holy Blessed Ones, my brothers. And traveling with me, holding my hands, he asked me concerning the world and all that is in it. And then he brought me to the assembly of the Blessed Ones. And after watching them I fell to the land and worshiped them. It was the assembly of elect ones, comprising both splendid youths and honorable holy ones. And when these Blessed Ones saw me, they greatly marveled and asked each other simultaneously, "My brothers, has the end of the world arrived and consequently a man was able to come here?" And all of them rose up and prayed and petitioned the Lord to inform them of the reason for my incursion among them.

And God heard their prayer; and I watched and behold two angels descended from heaven, stood before the assembly of the Blessed Ones, and said to them, "The end has not yet arrived; do not be afraid by the coming of this man who is among you. He will remain among you for seven days. Write out for him and inform him about all of God's providence respecting you, and that he visits with you; however, that man shall soon go out from you, and return to his place rejoicing." And after the angels said these things to them, they ascended to heaven.

Zosimus (Greek)

5. And having ended this discourse the man spoke again, Hast thou come hither out of the *vanity of the world?*

1 Nephi

8:26. On the other side of the river of water . . .
11:36. I saw . . . the *pride of the world.*

Zosimus (Greek)

1 Nephi

I said to him, Wherefore art thou naked? He said, How knowest thou that I am naked? Thou wearest skins of the cattle of the earth, that decay together with thy body, but look up to the height of heaven and behold of what nature my clothing is.

And looking up into heaven I saw his face as the face of an angel,

and his clothing as lightning, which passes from the east to the west,

and I was greatly afraid, thinking that it was the son of God,

and trembled, falling upon the ground.

And giving me his hand he raised me up, saying, Arise, I also am one of the blessed. Come with me, *that I may lead thee to the elders.*

And laying hold of my hand he walked about with me and led me toward a certain crowd, and there were in that crowd

11:14. And it came to pass that I saw the *heavens* open; and an *angel* came down and stood before me.

8:5. I saw a man, and he was *dressed* in a *white* robe.

1:9. And he beheld that his *luster* was above that of the *sun* at noon-day.

11:7. [And] behold a man descending out of heaven, and him shall ye witness; and after ye have witnessed him ye shall bear record that it is the *Son of God*.

1:6–7. And because of the things which he saw and heard he did quake and *tremble* exceedingly. . . . And he *cast himself upon his bed*.

1:10. And he also saw *twelve others* following him [the Son of God], and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament.

*Zosimus (Greek)**1 Nephi*

elders *like sons of God*, and young men were standing beside the elders.

And as I came near to them, they said, This man has come hither out of the *vanity* of the world; come, let us beseech the Lord and he will reveal to us this mystery. Surely the *end* is not at hand, that the man of *vanity* is come hither?

Then they arose and besought the Lord with one accord, and behold two angels came down from heaven and said, Fear not the man, for God has sent him, that he may remain seven days and learn your ways of life, and then he shall go forth and depart to his own place. The angels of God having said this *ascended into heaven before our eyes*.

11:36. [And] the *pride* of the world . . . fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great. . . . Thus shall be the *destruction* of [the wicked].

11:12. And I looked as if to look upon him, and I saw him not; for he had *gone from before my presence*.

Comments on Chapter Five (Syriac Five and Six)

In all these accounts, clothing readily distinguishes the righteous from the wicked. In Zosimus, the attendant points out how vain the world is, wearing clothes of skins, which decay with the body, whereas the blessed wear the radiant garments as bright as lightning. In 1 Nephi, the pride of the people in the great and spacious building is specifically associated with their exceedingly fine but foolish dress. Zosimus is next asked by his newfound escort to look up into the sky to observe the elements from which his clothes were made. Seeing his face as angelic and his clothes as lightning, Zosimus becomes afraid, thinking he is in the presence of the Son of God. The escort, however, assures

Zosimus that he is just one of the blessed and leads Zosimus to the elders, who also resemble sons of God. The elders are at first skeptical, but they receive Zosimus when two angels vouch for him.

Parallels between this transitional section in the Narrative of Zosimus and passages in the Book of Mormon are of moderate importance. Visions of the divine usually come in brightness and with trembling, so the similar accounts of Lehi's and Nephi's visions are not singular in this regard but are nevertheless interesting. More remarkably, Lehi beholds a group of followers whose "brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament" (1 Nephi 1:10), like the Son of God (1 Nephi 1:9). And Lehi receives a book from one of them (1 Nephi 1:11), just as Zosimus will receive a book from the elders, also said to be "like the sons of God," to whom he has been introduced. In the case of Lehi, however, further angelic attestation is not required before Lehi is presented with the book of Jerusalem's calamities. In Nephi's case, however, the Spirit turns the task of conducting the vision over to an angel, who continues the instruction after the Spirit exits (1 Nephi 11:12, 14).

Chapter Six (Syriac Seven)

7 [Syriac] Then the Blessed Ones rejoiced, and received me in peace. And the holy ones, the Blessed Ones, delivered me to an attendant. And the holy ones said to him, "Keep him, this our brother, with you for seven days." And the holy attendant received me, and brought me to his tent, and I sat with him under these fair trees. And in his presence I took delight in the delight of his prayers. For that place is like the Paradise of God and these Blessed Ones are like Adam and Eve before they sinned. They fast from the ninth hour until the ninth; and then they eat what they need from the fruits of these trees; for water which is sweet and delightful as honey flows from the roots of the trees. And each

one drinks what he needs. And immediately they stop eating; from the ninth hour on they live alone.

When these families of these Blessed Ones heard what was happening on my account, and when they were told by their brothers, "Behold, a certain man has come from the world of vanity," then they began to be disturbed and all of the fair families of the Blessed Ones came persistently in order to see the phenomenon, since amazement possessed them because of me. And they incessantly questioned me concerning this world, and I repeatedly told them. From the weariness, duration, and pain of the manner of questioning, my soul quivered and I was unable to speak, because neither by night nor by day did they leave me alone to rest. And I asked that attendant and said to him, "I ask you, O Blessed One, do me a kindness; if they come to you and question you concerning me, tell them, 'He is not here,' so that I may rest; because my soul is greatly harassed." And that holy attendant, when he heard this request from me, cried out in a loud voice saying, "O My Blessed Fathers, misfortune is counted to me on this day. Behold, I am almost like Adam in Paradise; for he through the advice of Eve transgressed the commandment. And this man through his evil advice, which he reveals by asking something that would cause me to sin, said to me, 'Lie, and say to your companions that I am not here.' Cast out this man from here so that he shall not implant lies in our place of captivity."

And many noble elders and spiritual youths, who were like angels of heaven, assembled, formed an assembly, and said to me, "O man of sin, go, exit from among us. We do not know how you prepared yourself so that you were able to come among us; perhaps you wish to deceive us as the Evil One deceived our father Adam." However, I, miserable Zosimus, fell upon my face before them, and with mournful tears entreated them earnestly and said, "Have mercy upon me, O Blessed Ones; and forgive me my offense, O Earthly Angels." And after I entreated them earnestly and abundantly, with difficulty they had mercy upon me. And all of them became very silent, and after a short time they said to me, "Tell us, our brother, all of those things which

transpired so that you were able to visit us; be at rest and do not fear." Then I told them the entire story, in what manner I requested God, "Show me your place." Then the elders responded to me, "And now, our beloved, since God has answered you and you have seen us and our place, what do you wish?" Then I said to them, "I beg you from your blessedness to write for me the history of how your entrance here was possible, so that your history may be a good introduction and a beautiful example for everyone who wishes to be guided by the fear of God."

Zosimus (Greek)

6. Then the elders of the blessed gave me over to one of the attendants, saying, Keep him for seven days. So the attendant receiving me led me to

his cave, and we sat under a tree *partaking of food*. For from the sixth hour even to the sixth, then we ate, and the *water came out from the root of the tree sweeter than honey*, and we drank our fill, and again the water sank down into its place.

And all the country of those there heard of me, that there had come thither a man out of the vanity of the world, and all the country was stirred up, and they came to see me because it seemed strange to them. Therefore they were asking me all things and I was answering them, and *I became faint in spirit and in body*, and besought the man of God that served me, and said, I beseech thee, brother, if any come to see me, tell them He is not here, so that I may rest a little.

1 Nephi

8:11. And it came to pass that I did go forth and *partake* of the fruit thereof.

11:25. I beheld . . . the *fountain of living waters*, or . . . the *tree of life*; which waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God.

8:25. And after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about *as if they were ashamed*.

Zosimus (Greek)

And the man of God cried out saying, *Woe is me, that the story of Adam is summed up in me, for Satan deceived him through Eve, and this man by his flattery desires to make me a liar while he is here. Take me away from hence, for I shall flee from the place. For behold he wishes to sow in me seeds of the world of vanity. And all the multitude and the elders rose up against me, and said, Depart from us, man; we know not whence thou art come to us.*

But I *lamented* with great lamentation, and my senses left me, and I cried out to the elders, saying, *Forgive me, my lords, and the elders stilled them and made quietness. Then I related to them all from the beginning till that time, and said, I besought the Lord to come to you, and he deemed me worthy.*

And the elders said, *And now what wilt thou we should do to thee? I said to them, I desire to learn of you your way of life.*

1 Nephi

[2 Nephi 2:18. Wherefore, he (Satan) said unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies . . .]

[2 Nephi 2:19. And after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit they were driven out.]

8:36–37. [And Lehi] *exceedingly feared* for Laman and Lemuel. . . . And he did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent, . . . that perhaps the Lord would be *merciful* to them, and not cast them off.

11:2–3. And the Spirit said unto me: Behold, *what desirest thou?* And I said: *I desire to behold the things which my father saw.*

Comments on Chapter Six (Syriac Seven)

At this point Zosimus goes with his attendants to a garden paradise where he dwells in a tent (Syriac) and eats and drinks from one of the trees for seven days. It is significant that this tree provides both food and drink, all the nourishment the blessed need. Although the Book of Mormon text is a bit ambiguous about the source of the fluid, it appears

that Nephi likewise identifies the tree of life with *both* fruit-bearing and water-giving functions. Both functions are mentioned together (“to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life”) and both are expressly and separately equated with the same phrase, “the love of God” (1 Nephi 11:25). It is remarkable that all these texts contain this unusual tree-fountain combination—where the root of the tree itself is also a fountain and not just a tree growing beside a body of water—since this imagery is rare.

A multitude gathers to inspect and question the newcomer. In Zosimus, this righteous multitude wearies the traveler so that he wishes they would not bother him. In 1 Nephi, the wicked multitude in the great and spacious building fulfills a similar role, making those who come to the tree feel uncomfortable and prone to fall away. In Zosimus, the sin is committed by the traveler, who perpetrates a lie. In Lehi, the sin is committed by those who become ashamed and fall into forbidden paths.

Both Zosimus accounts refer to the story of Adam, and both emphasize the role of lies and flattery in the encounter with Satan in the Garden of Eden. But the connections with the Book of Mormon are not of much consequence, even though the story of Adam and Eve is one of the few Old Testament motifs receiving substantial theological attention in statements attributable to Lehi, since Lehi’s remarks about Adam arise in a completely different context and are not far removed from the Genesis account known also to the writer of the Narrative of Zosimus.

For his sin, Zosimus is almost expelled from the land of blessedness. He laments, however, and quickly seeks and receives pardon from the elders. Then Zosimus reviews with them all that had happened up to that time. Lehi also is keenly sensitive to the consequences of sin. Although he does not lament any of his own sins nor fear his own

expulsion, he fears deeply for his two eldest sons and desperately hopes they will receive forgiveness and not be excluded from the area around the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:36). Lehi himself pleads for and depends upon “mercy” to avoid God’s judgments on his sons and to prevent their being cast off (1 Nephi 1:14; 8:37).

Having thus established his worthiness and his identity, Zosimus is now ready to answer the question, “What do you want?” Like Nephi (1 Nephi 11:2–3), Zosimus says he wants the vision to continue and desires to learn the way of eternal life.

Chapters Seven to Nine (Syriac Eight to Ten)

8 [Syriac] And they took tablets of stone and wrote on them as follows: Hear, all of you who are in the world of vanity, and perceive all the providence which has occurred after this manner; we are called the sons of Rechab, we are from you; and behold we departed from your world to this place in which we are today. For in that time when Jeremiah, the prophet, announced and prophesied the ravaging and devastation of Jerusalem because of the sins of the sons of Israel, then behold shortly thereafter the destroyer came to ravage and slay them. Then Jeremiah, the prophet, rent his garments and was clothed in sackcloth, and sprinkled dust upon his head. And he showed to the common folk the way of goodness; and urged them to return to the Lord.

Then our father Jonadab, the son of Rechab, heard how the prophet charged, “Do not eat bread, and do not drink wine until the Lord hears your petition.” And our father said to us, “We must not eat bread and we must not drink wine; and we must not put on a garment. We must obey his word.” And we said to him, “We will do all that you have charged us.” And then we removed the garments from our bodies, and did not eat bread, and did not drink wine, and lamented with a great lamentation. And we of-

ferred prayers to God. And he accepted our petitions. And he turned back from his fierce anger.

9 [Syriac] And after King Josiah died, another king ruled after him. And when he assembled together all the people of the Jews, some men spoke to him because of us: "There is here a family which is from us but they do not act like us; and they are naked and neither eat bread nor drink wine." Then the king dismissed them; and he summoned us. And when we came in before him, the king asked us, "Who are you and from which family are you?" Then we answered him, "We are from this your people, and from the city Jerusalem; and we are sons of Jonadab, the son of Rechab. And when Jeremiah, the prophet, in the days of the king who was before you, exhorted the common folk to repent, our father heard the word of the prophet and warned and charged us not to eat bread, drink wine, be anxious again about garments, or dwell in houses. And God heard his prayer. And he removed his anger from the city. And we loved him with all our soul and girded ourselves with his kindness. And this his love was pleasing in our eyes so that in this way we shall be leisurely naked all our days."

10 [Syriac] And the king said to us, "You are doing well; but now mix with your people, and put on your garments, and eat bread, and drink wine, and forsake the Lord. And behold you will be obedient sons of our kingdom." But we answered the king, "We shall never break our promises to God; and we shall not cease from obeying the covenant with him forever." And the king raged against us and charged that all of us be imprisoned in prison; and while we were imprisoned we kept vigil by prayer before God.

On the first night, a brilliant light shone upon us; and angels of God in glorious form appeared to us. And they led all of us out from prison, and placed us in the air that is above the land, and brought us to this place in which you now see us, and allowed us to dwell in it. And our virtuous wives, who with us had surrendered themselves to God, now abide separately among us in this land, while remaining as we do in a fast and prayer and praise to

God. And after the angels of God brought us and placed us in this place in the midst of the water of this great sea, God commanded and the waters rose up from the deep abyss and encircled this place. And by the command of God a cloud became a bulwark above the water and rose up as far as heaven.

Zosimus (Greek)

7. And they *rejoiced with great joy,*

And taking up *tables of stone* they wrote on them with their nails, thus, hear, ye sons of men, Hear ye us who are become blessed, that we also are of you;

for when the prophet *Jeremiah* proclaimed that the *city of Jerusalem should be delivered* into the hands of the *destroyers,*

he rent his garments, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and sprinkled dust upon his head, and took earth upon his bed, and told all *people to turn from their wicked way.*

And our *father* Rechab, the son of Aminadab, heard him and said to us, Ye sons and daughters of Rechab, hearken to your

1 Nephi

11:6. The Spirit cried with a *loud voice,* saying, Hosanna to the Lord.

1:11. And they came down . . . and the first came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a *book,* and bade him that he should read.

19:1. I did make *plates of ore* that I might engraven upon them the record of my people.

1:4. There came many prophets [including *Jeremiah*], prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great *city Jerusalem must be destroyed.* [Cf. 7:14; 5:13.]

1:13. . . . It should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and many should be *carried away captive into Babylon.*

1:4. There came many prophets, prophesying unto the *people* that they must *repent.*

2:2–4. the Lord commanded my *father,* even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness. . . .

Zosimus (Greek)

father, and put off your garments from your body, and drink no vessel of wine, and eat no bread from the fire, and drink not strong drink and honey until the Lord hear your entreaty.

And we said, All that he has *commanded* us we shall *do and hearken*.

So we cast away our clothing from our bodies, and we ate no bread from the fire, and drank no vessel of wine nor honey nor strong drink, and *we lamented* with a great lamentation and *besought the Lord*, and he heard our prayer and turned away his anger from the city of Jerusalem, *and there came to the city of Jerusalem mercy from the Lord, and he pitied its people, and turned away his deadly anger*.

8. And after these things the king of the city of Jerusalem died, and there arose another king. And *all the people gathered to him and informed him concerning us*, and said, There are certain of thy people, who have changed their way from us. Therefore the king summoned them, and asked them wherefore they had done this; and he sent for us and asked, Who are ye and of what worship and of what country? And we said to

1 Nephi

And he left his house, and the land of his inheritance, and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things.

3:7. I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will *go and do* the things which the Lord hath *commanded*.

1:5–6, 14. [And he] *prayed* unto the Lord, *yea, even with all his heart*, in behalf of his people. . . . And he saw and *heard* much; and . . . he did exclaim . . . : Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and *thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth*; and, because thou art *merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!*

1:20. *And when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him, . . . and they also sought his life.*

*Zosimus (Greek)**1 Nephi*

him, We are the sons of thy servant, and our father is Rechab the son of Jonadab, and when Jeremiah the prophet preached in the days of thy father the king, he proclaimed death to the city of Jerusalem, saying, Yet three days and all the city shall be put to death. And the king thy father hearing this repented of his sins, and issued a command to all to turn aside from their wicked way. And our father thy servant hearing it charged us, saying, Drink no vessel of wine, and eat no bread from the fire, until the Lord shall hear your entreaty. And we hearkened to the commandment of our father, and made naked our bodies, we drank no wine and ate no bread, and we prayed to the Lord for the city of Jerusalem, and the Lord pitied his people and turned away his anger, and we saw it and our soul was rejoiced, and we said, It is good for us to be so.

9. And the king said to us, Ye have done well. Now therefore mingle with my people, and eat bread and drink wine, and glorify your Lord, and ye shall be serving God and the king. But we said, We will not *disobey God*.

Then the king was enraged and *set us in prison*, and we passed that night there.

2:3. He was *obedient* unto the word of the Lord, wherefore he did as the Lord commanded him.

7:14. And Jeremiah have they cast into *prison*.

Zosimus (Greek)

1 Nephi

And behold a light shone in the building, and an angel uncovered the prison and laid hold of the crowns of our heads, and took us out of the prison, and set us beside the water of the river,

and said to us, *Whithersoever the water goes, go ye also.*

And we travelled with the water and with the angel. When therefore he had brought us to this place, the river was dried up and the water was swallowed up by the abyss, and he made a wall round this country, and there came a wall of cloud, and shadowed above the water;

and he did not scatter us over all the earth, but gave to us this country.

2:6. When he had traveled three days in the wilderness, he pitched his tent in a valley *by the side of a river of water.*

17:8. And . . . the Lord spake unto me, saying: . . . I may carry [thee] *across these waters. . . .*

18:8. We did put forth into the sea and were *driven forth before the wind* towards the *promised land.*

[Jacob 7:26. Our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a *lonesome* and a solemn people, wanderers, *cast out* from Jerusalem.]

[2 Nephi 3:5. . . . *A branch which was to be broken off.*]

10:13. Wherefore, he said it must needs be that we should be led with one accord into the *land of promise*, unto the fulfilling of the word of the Lord, that we should be *scattered upon all the face of the earth.*

[Cf. 1 Nephi 18:23; 3 Nephi 15:15.]

**Comments on Chapters Seven to Nine
(Syriac Eight to Ten)**

The next three chapters in the Narrative of Zosimus contain the story of a small group of people who were saved from the ravages of an unrepentant king and of Babylon

during the ministry of the prophet Jeremiah (compare Jeremiah 35:1–19). According to the Ethiopic version of this narrative, the prophet Jeremiah himself “leads out of Jerusalem all those who are righteous and keep the law,” with their wives and children, who are “carried by an angel to an island where they dwell in perfect happiness: and here God makes known to them the destiny of Israel.”¹⁶ Such accounts of Zosimus are remarkably similar to the overall story of 1 Nephi, and little comment is likely required. Notice, in particular, references to (1) the use of soft plates in both records, (2) impending destruction, (3) the need for repentance, (4) the righteous prophet or father who leads the group away, (5) the obedience and sacrifice of the righteous followers, (6) the deliverance by an angel (compare 1 Nephi 3:29), and (7) the journey across the sea to the land of promise in relation to the scattering of Israel. Each of these elements and others are common to all these accounts.

Chapters 7 through 9 of the Narrative constitute its centerpiece and oldest literary stratum. Stylistically and probably historically, this section seems to predate the rest of the Narrative,¹⁷ and so it is not unreasonable to believe that the historical roots of the traditions preserved here are very ancient indeed.

Chapters Ten and Eleven (Syriac Eleven and Twelve)

11 [Syriac] And according to his will God assembled us on this island and did not scatter us upon the whole land; but God placed us on this holy land. And we are without sins and evil and abominable thoughts. And we are mortals; however, we are purified and spotless, and our souls and bodies are cleansed from all defilement; and we depend upon the hope of our Lord; and our sight is fixed continuously and unceasingly on the light of the future life. And from prayer to God we are not silent by night and

by day, for this offering of praise is our occupation. And God commanded and this land brought forth for us pleasant and splendid trees which are filled with lovely, marvelous, and abundant fruits. And again from the roots of the trees flows sweet and delightful water; and from these fruits and water we take delight and rest and are sustained.

There is not among us vineyards, grain, husbandry, wood, iron, houses, buildings, gold, or silver; and neither stormy weather nor rain is with us; neither snow nor ice. And the sun does not shine upon us, because the cloud, which encircles us like a bulwark, restrains it. And the land in which we are is filled with a glorious light so darkness and night do not enter it. And we possess a shining appearance and dwell in light.

And there are among us men who take wives and once only the man has intercourse with his wife. And then they are set apart from each other and they remain in purity for the remainder of their lives. And the memory of the delight does not arise in the mind of any of us. But they remain all their days as those who grow up in virginity. But the wife conceives and bears two children; one of them is for marriage and the other grows up in virginity. And after this manner we have been commanded by God; and truly after this manner is our custom.

12 [Syriac] But there is among us no one who measures the years. For the sake of those who daily live in purity and holiness, the years of their life shall increase; but the years of sinners shall decrease. And no one among us computes months and years. But we are naked not as you suppose, for we are covered with a covering of glory; and we do not show each other the private parts of our bodies. But we are covered with a stole of glory similar to that which clothed Adam and Eve before they sinned. We are nourished by the fruits of the trees at the ninth hour; not that the hours are distinguished among us, but when the time for our nourishment arrives, the fruits of the trees come among us, although they do not fall by our will. And thus we are nourished from them sufficient to our need. And afterward we drink from the exceedingly good, sweet, and delightful water which comes out to us

from the roots of the trees. And then the water returns and is gathered together in its original place.

We have knowledge about you people who inhabit the world, and how you are. We know the works of the righteous and the works of the wicked, because the angels of God come among us continually and inform us concerning your deeds and the length of your life. We pray for you, petitioning God on your account because we are also from your race and from the sons of Adam. And God set us apart and chose us according to his will; and he brought and placed us in this place in which we are now. And the angels of God dwell with us and they announce to us those things which happen among you; and we rejoice at the good deeds which the upright who are among you do. And we grieve over the sinners and pagans who are in the world; and petition God constantly to restrain his anger concerning you.

To us the holy angels of God announce both the incarnation of the Word of God, who is from the holy virgin, the mother of God, and all those things which he provides and perfects and endures for the sake of the salvation of mortals. And then we worship and acknowledge and glorify him for the sake of the glory of his incarnate life. Then we ask for your love, O people, that you will not be unfaithful when you chance to read this history. Do not surrender to the cruel and merciless ruler, but be shrouded by the secrets which were entrusted to you. And let this history be for you the salvation of your lives. Have regard to us in your hidden thoughts, be imitators of our way of life, pursue peace, cherish the love that is unchangeable, and love purity and holiness. And you will be made perfect in all good things and inherit the kingdom of God.

Zosimus (Greek)

1 Nephi

[Included here are also a few parallels from assorted sections from the books of Jacob, Enos, Alma, and Mormon.]

Zosimus (Greek)

10. Hear, ye sons of men, hear the way of life of the blessed. For God placed us in this *land*, for we are holy but not immortal. For the *earth produces most fragrant fruit*, and *out of the trunks of the trees comes water sweeter than honey*, and these are our food and drink.

We are also *praying night and day*, and this is all our occupation.

Hear, ye sons of men; with us there is no vine, nor ploughed field, nor works of wood or iron, nor have we any house or building, nor fire nor sword, nor *iron wrought or unwrought, nor silver nor gold*, nor air too heavy or too keen.

Neither do any of us take to themselves *wives*, except for so long as to beget two children, and after they have produced two children they withdraw from each other and continue in *chastity*, not knowing that they were ever in the inter-

1 Nephi

18:24–25. We did put all our seeds into the *earth*. . . . They did *grow exceedingly*; wherefore, we were blessed in abundance.

8:11. The fruit thereof . . . was *most sweet, above all* that I ever before tasted.

17:4–5. And we did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even eight years in the wilderness. And we did come to the land which we called Bountiful, because of its much *fruit* and also *wild honey*.

[Alma 34:21. Cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both *morning, midday, and evening*.]

18:25. We did find upon the land of promise, as we journeyed in the wilderness, that there were beasts in the forests of every kind, both the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat and the wild goat, and all manner of wild animals, which were for the use of men. And we did find all manner of *ore*, both of *gold*, and of *silver*, and of *copper*.

[Jacob 2:25–28. Wherefore, thus saith the Lord, I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem, by the power of mine arm, that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph. Wherefore, I the Lord

Zosimus (Greek)

course of marriage, but being in virginity as from the beginning. And the one child remains for marriage, and the other for virginity.

11. And there is no count of *time*, neither weeks nor months nor years, for *all our day is one day*.

In our caves lie the leaves of trees, and this is our couch under the trees.

But we are not naked of body, as ye wrongly imagine, for we have the *garment of immortality* and are not ashamed of each other.

At the sixth hour of every day we eat, for the fruit of the tree falls of itself at the sixth hour, and we eat and drink our fill, and again the water sinks into its place. *We also know you who are there in the world, and who are in sins, and your works,*

for every day the *angels of the Lord come and tell them to us*, and the number of your years.

1 Nephi

God will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old. . . . For there shall not any man among you have save it be one *wife*; and concubines he shall have none; For I, the Lord God, delight in the *chastity* of women.]

[Alma 40:8. *All is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men.*]

12:11. And the angel said unto me: Look! And I looked, and beheld three generations pass away in righteousness; and their *garments were white* even like unto the Lamb of God. And the angel said unto me: These are made white in the blood of the Lamb, because of their faith in him.

[Mormon 8:35–36. Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. . . . And *I know your doing*. . . . Yea, even every one, have become *polluted*.]

[Mormon 8:35. But behold, *Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me*.]

Zosimus (Greek)

1 Nephi

But *we pray for you to the Lord*, because we also are of you and of your race, except that God has chosen us, and has set us in this place without sin.

And the *angels of God* dwell with us every day, and tell us *all things concerning you*,

and we rejoice with the angels over the works of the just, but over the works of sinners we mourn and lament, *praying to the Lord that he may cease from his anger and spare your offences*.

1:5. Lehi, as he went forth *prayed unto the Lord*, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people.

11:8, 13. The *Spirit* said unto me: Look! And I looked . . . and beheld the great city of Jerusalem, and also other cities.

[2 Nephi 1:4. For, behold, said he, I have seen a vision, in which I know that Jerusalem is destroyed.]

[Enos 9, 11. I began to feel a desire *for the welfare of my brethren*, . . . wherefore, I did pour out my whole soul unto God for them.]

**Comments on Chapters Ten and Eleven
(Syriac Eleven and Twelve)**

In these chapters, Zosimus begins learning about life among these blessed ones, who, like the people of Lehi, were not scattered like the rest of Israel “upon the whole land” but were preserved as a righteous remnant. Zosimus first learns about the world in which these righteous people live. As is the case in the promised land of the Nephites, the land of the blessed in the Narrative of Zosimus is described as an ideal land that almost effortlessly produces fruit and all the necessities of life. The material things of life are richly abundant for the righteous. In the Syriac text, a supernal light illuminates this world “so darkness and night do not enter it.” Similarly, one of the great signs of being under God’s realm and influence is a fulness of light: “Behold, at

the going down of the sun there was no darkness" (3 Nephi 1:15); "it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but . . . at evening time it shall be light" (Zechariah 14:7).

Zosimus is next instructed in two aspects of the righteous life: prayer and chastity. In most versions of the Narrative, these principles have been cast in terms of an ascetic or monastic life, allowing people only minimal divergence from constant prayer and sexual abstinence to attend to the necessities of life and to perpetuate the race. While this is consistent with the probability that these Narrative sections were subject to extensive interpolation by later writers, it is worth noting that chastity and prayer are among the practical religious teachings found on the small plates of Nephi. These pious teachings also hark back to the piety of Rechab, who abstained from wine and lived a simple life of purity.

Zosimus then learns that the people of the land of blessedness keep no track of time, since all their life is as one day. Being timeless, they approach immortality. Later in the Book of Mormon, Alma states that time and the length of life are measured only by mortals (Alma 40:8); obviously the mortal Nephites were diligent timekeepers.

As in chapter 5 of Zosimus, the Narrative refers again in chapter 11 particularly to the garments of immortality worn by the righteous. This "heavenly clothing"¹⁸ refers to the immortal powers these people possess, and in the Syriac it relates to "a stole of glory which clothed Adam and Eve before they sinned."

Finally, Zosimus is told of the great concern the blessed have for those still in the world. Each day the angels tell the blessed about the sins and works of people in the world; and the blessed pray for these people, especially that the Lord might turn away his anger from them. In particular,

the blessed ones are told about “the incarnation of the Word of God, who is from the holy virgin, the mother of God.” The Ethiopic version also states that these holy ones were “shewn in a series of visions the circumstances of the birth and life of Christ.”¹⁹ These elements manifest a high degree or correspondence to Book of Mormon texts, which indicates that the Nephites retained deep concerns for those remaining in the Old World. They too received revelation concerning the lives of those they had left behind, and a major concern of the prophets in the Book of Mormon is praying for those who they know are in danger of God’s wrath. Learning about the incarnation and life of the Son of God is yet another very important theme in Book of Mormon prophecy (e.g., 1 Nephi 1:19; 11:13–34). The purpose of this life of righteousness in the Syriac text is that one might “be made perfect in all good things and inherit the kingdom of God” (compare 3 Nephi 12:48).

The Final Chapters

13 [Syriac] We perceive that the holy fast of forty days of our Lord has begun when the fruits of the trees are withheld and cease developing. And on each of the days of the holy fast God causes to rain down upon us from heaven manna similar to that which he gave to our fathers when he led them out of Egypt. We learn that the holy Passover will arrive when these trees among us flourish and produce magnificently sweet and abundant fruits. Then we know that the Passover of our Lord has arrived. But on the feast of our Lord’s resurrection from the grave we watch for three days and three nights. Then we are filled with gladness and rejoicing, perceiving that the holy feast of the resurrection of our Lord has arrived. And with a spiritual cheerfulness we rejoice while celebrating with the holy angels; likewise also we exult and sing praises during all of the noble and saving feasts

of the providence of our Lord. And all the assembly which are above us and all the heavenly hosts rejoice with us in these feasts.

14 [Syriac] And again we announce to you, O brothers, that among us there is no sickness, pain, fatigue to our bodies, mutilation, weariness, or temptations; not even Satan's power can touch us, for there is not among us rage, jealousy, evil desire, or hateful thoughts. But we experience only quietness and gladness; and exhibit love and affection toward God and each other. And the soul of each of us is not wearied or sorrowful or wishes to stay behind when the angels of God come to guide it from the body. But we are glad and rejoice and the holy angels rejoice with us when they are sent out after the soul of each of us.

As the bride rejoices over her betrothed bridegroom, so the soul rejoices at the good news of the holy angels. For they the angels say to it nothing except this alone: "O pure soul, your Lord is calling you to come to him." Then the soul with great rejoicing leaves the body to meet the angel. And seeing that pure soul, which has just left the body, all the holy angels unfold for it their shining stoles. And they receive it with joy, saying, "Blessed are you, O pure soul, and blest, for you have thoroughly done the will of God, your Lord." And this is how he brings his providence to each one of us:

15 [Syriac] The soul discerns and knows the day of its departure through a revelation from holy angels. And we live an extremely long time; and the extent of our life is not brief and short as with you. When the holy angels are sent among us, in this beautiful order of which we have informed you, they visit among us. However, first they come to our elders; and when the blessed elders see the angels who have come, they immediately with joy entreat so that all the blessed brothers assemble. And when all the people have assembled, immediately with praise we come with the angels to the place in which bodies are buried. And because we have nothing to use for digging, the angels themselves make a sepulchre for the bodies. And again when all of these souls have completed their time, then they are separated from our assembly; and each departs with great joy. And all of us with exultation

come near to it and offer it peace in the kiss of the Lord while it is being conducted and led to the grave by the holy angels. And then the soul of our blessed brother leaves the body in which it had settled; and with joy far removed from mourning it approaches and comes to the holy angels and ascends up to God with joy. But we with one accord see the soul when it leaves the body clearly and plainly; the appearance of the soul when it leaves the body is the likeness of a glorious light, and formed and imprinted in the likeness and type of the body, and it is spiritually flying.

16 [Syriac] And while we are looking at that holy and spotless soul, the holy angels carry it away and salute it, and thus it ascends and goes up from us in glory. And after it ascends with them and passes into the region of the power of the highest heavens, then other orders of angels receive it with joy. And the archangels salute it; and afterward they stretch out to it their hands and lead it to the thrones and dominions that are above them. And thus it goes up and ascends until it enters before and worships the Lord. And when the highest order of cherubim and seraphim receive it, they rise to the gate of the holy Trinity. Then the Son of God receives that soul from their hands and brings it forward so that it may worship his father. And when the soul falls down upon its face to worship before God, then the revelation is revealed to us, and all of us fall upon the land and worship the Lord with the soul. And when God makes that soul rise from its worship, we also rise to our feet. And then God sends that soul to a stately mansion to await the day of resurrection for the rest of our community. Then we also go away from the body of that soul of our brother to our own assembly and complete the service through praises to the Holy Spirit. And so we have engraved upon these tablets and sent them to you through the hands of our brother Zosimus.

And again God, our Creator, has given us this privilege: we hear the voices of the spirits and the praises of the angels, the hosts, and the heavenly orders, who continually praise God. When they praise God, so also we in our land praise him.

And the angels receive and transmit our prayers and our praises by entering and worshiping in love before that divine and mystic throne, which knows secrets. And thus by the aid of the angels and the heavenly hosts our prayers pass on and find entrance before God. This is all of our manner of life. And we are truly called the Blessed Ones, because we experience the benevolence of God. And we write and send these tablets to you, O people who dwell in that world of vanity, through the hands of this our brother Zosimus, who entered among us for your sake through the mercies of God and remained with us for seven days. And accompanying him we traveled with him until we came to the shores of the great ocean.

17 [Syriac] And then all of us together knelt down upon the shores of the sea and prayed and petitioned God to be for our brother Zosimus a guide and a refuge. And then immediately in a moment a white cloud appeared above the sea and its top extended to the highest summit. And we praised God, confessing that it is easy for him to do everything.

Then suddenly two trees appeared in the middle of the sea and by a command of God one of these trees bent down toward me, Zosimus. And it held me securely in its branches and stretched itself out to the height of heaven; and carried me and lifted me gently unto the summit and the top of that white cloud. And that second tree bent down toward me, then that first one now bent its head; and that second tree also bent down toward me, lifted me up, and brought me to dry land. And again I crossed the ocean, the great sea, and that cloud. And I gave thanks unto and praised the merciful God, who fulfills the desires of those who fear him, and who hears their petition and saves them.

18 [Syriac] And suddenly that animal arrived and carried me; and it brought me to the cave while I praised and exalted God, who had answered me and heard my petition and fulfilled my desire. To him be praise, amen, from heavenly and earthly beings for all time, amen.²⁰

Comments on the Final Chapters

There are few specific similarities between the concluding portion of the Narrative and the Book of Mormon. In chapters 12 through 14 (Syriac 13–15) of the Narrative, Zosimus is told how the blessed keep the law of fasting (Lent) as Easter approaches to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord, and how their souls are taken up to God when they are called. They ascend into heaven, where archangels salute these souls by stretching out their hands and ushering the blessed to thrones and dominions. Upon entering the presence of God, the blessed fall on the ground, and God bids these souls to rise to their feet. This account very generally parallels King Benjamin's statements as he anticipates his own return to God (Mosiah 2:26–28). King Benjamin speaks of Jesus stretching forth His hand (3 Nephi 11:9), the people falling down in worship (Mosiah 4:1; 27:12, 18), and his own arising when called forth by God (Mosiah 27:13; 3 Nephi 11:14, 20).

In chapters 15 through 17 (Syriac 16–17), the Narrative retraces Zosimus's steps from the land of blessedness back to the worldly wilderness where he began. Significantly, Zosimus is said to have brought back with him the tablets upon which had been inscribed the history of these people and the instructions he had been given. Upon returning to his cave, Zosimus sets up this knowledge as a covenant (or testament). In a similar fashion, the Book of Mormon serves as "another testament of Jesus Christ" and restores knowledge of the terms of that covenant. The covenantal role of this material may hold a key for understanding the meaning the Narrative of Zosimus has for early Christians.

Certain later manuscripts of the Narrative of Zosimus contain a postscript in which the devil and 1,360 demons tempt and torment Zosimus after his return to the world.

Through prayer and the knowledge he has acquired, Zosimus vanquishes the devil, who agrees to tempt men no longer. Zosimus uses the knowledge and covenant received during his journey as a great shield against the devil's powers. Perhaps a final point of contact can be discerned here, inasmuch as the Book of Mormon also promises that the knowledge of those who have been scattered will return again and that the forces of evil will thereby be ultimately vanquished (see, for example, 1 Nephi 13–14).

Possible Explanations

Despite the many similarities set forth in this article between the Book of Mormon and the Narrative of Zosimus, it is difficult to draw any specific conclusions about these two texts. Is it possible that some sort of relationship existed between the two? Or are they wholly independent? We simply know too little about the authorship and transmission of the ancient core material in the Narrative of Zosimus to venture any judgment about the kinds of spiritual experiences its authors may have had and how they might have compared with the visions and revelations of Lehi or Nephi. Similarly, we cannot know precisely what influence the general literary or cultural backgrounds of ancient Israel may have had on those who were responsible for composing and transmitting the Narrative of Zosimus or, for that matter, on Nephi as he recounted his own and his father's inspirations. Perhaps someday we will have greater knowledge to assess what connections, if any, stand between these two intriguing ancient accounts.

In the meantime, however, it seems both reasonable and productive for us to stand these two texts next to each other. Both deserve greater attention than they have received by

scholars in the past, and neither should be overlooked in the study of early Jewish and Christian sources. In the past, people have reserved interest in the Book of Mormon by wondering if any other ancient Near Eastern texts closely resembled it. On that score, one need no longer wonder.

In spite of the obvious ascetic orientations and overtones of the Greek and Syriac versions of this material, the relationship between the basic core of the Narrative and parts of the Book of Mormon seems to be a rather close one—not so close that either is a copy of the other, but then again, not so distant that one has to squint to detect their similarities. Specific words, phrases, images, metaphors, attitudes, and events are shared by both. In attempting to account for that relationship, there seem to be at least five possibilities:

Contacts with Lehi's Group

The Narrative of Zosimus might reflect, to some extent, someone's faint memory of Lehi and his departure from Jerusalem. It is unclear, however, how that memory could have been preserved in the ancient Near East. The Narrative of Zosimus, in its present form, cannot be dated anywhere near as early as Lehi or Nephi, who left Jerusalem in 597 B.C. Furthermore, there is no evidence, after that departure, of cultural transmissions between Lehi's group and the Old World. Nevertheless, it is not totally impossible that Lehi made contact with other people traveling in the wildernesses of Arabia before he and his group departed from the Old World. If this occurred, Lehi's dreams and prophecies or some reflection of them could stand behind parts of the Narrative.

Similar Religious Experiences

Lehi, Nephi, and the author of the Narrative of Zosimus could have had similar revelations or religious experiences. Of course, for Lehi and Nephi, the journey to the land of blessedness came as a mandate for travel and not just as a spiritual quest for knowledge.

“Other Sheep”

The final form of the Narrative of Zosimus may have drawn some inspiration and information from some unknown words of Jesus spoken in connection with his statement that he had “other sheep” elsewhere (John 10:16).

A Common Influence

More likely, a third text or tradition could stand behind both the writings of Lehi and the Narrative of Zosimus. One such possible source would have been the teachings or traditions associated with the Rechabites, a semi-nomadic religious group located in the southern deserts of Israel. Jonadab ben Rechab, its founder, can be said (from 2 Kings 10:15–17) to have lived some time during the ninth century B.C. Not much is known about this group, except that its followers were required to take a vow to abstain from wine and to dwell in tents. Jeremiah praised this group for its obedience in keeping their vows (Jeremiah 35:16). The Narrative of Zosimus, of course, is expressly tied to Rechabite traditions, mentioning Rechab several times by name. The connection between Lehi and the Rechabites is not explicit but can be supported by several circumstantial factors. Both groups were located in the same general desert localities. Lehi knew of and respected Jeremiah (1 Nephi 5:13; 7:14) and could have shared his admiration for the Rechabites.

Great emphasis is placed on Lehi's dwelling in a tent (1 Nephi 2:15; 9:1; 10:16; 16:6). Furthermore, the use of wine is conspicuously absent in most sections of the Book of Mormon (especially in 1 Nephi 18:9), and wherever wine is mentioned in the record, except sacramentally, it carries negative connotations. The traditions associated with the Rechabites, therefore, could have provided a link or common source on which both the Book of Mormon and the Narrative of Zosimus could have drawn.

It is not improbable that Lehi and Nephi were influenced by other religious writings of their day. Most writers reflect, to some extent, elements of the cultural world in which they live. Lehi and Nephi could have read Rechabite writings or witnessed Rechabite ceremonies, which could have given them impressions or backgrounds upon which their own visions and insights were received. Likewise, a strong Rechabite separatist tradition could easily have provided Nephi with historical and literary precedents for the manner in which he recounts the story of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem and might also have encompassed teachings about a land of promise, separate and serene, having attributes of paradise. Similar details would then have been independently preserved in the Narrative of Zosimus as well.

Ritual Transmission

Even if these four speculations are accepted, it is still puzzling how or why these traditions or teachings were handed down from generation to generation, which raises the possibility that these teachings might have been part of a ceremony or ritual. It is not unreasonable to believe that the Rechabites made more covenants than simply vowing to live in tents and to abstain from wine. If their covenants

were set down in a ceremonial text, this would have enhanced the importance of these teachings in the minds of Lehi and others, thereby increasing the chances of the teachings' being preserved through the centuries.

Indeed, the Narrative of Zosimus has several characteristics of a ceremony. Its contents could easily have been dramatized to portray how a soul seeking to learn the life of righteousness receives, by covenant, instructions in specific religious doctrines. The Narrative may be viewed as a veiled account of a ceremony in which the initiate passes out of the world, through a garden paradise, beyond a conflict with a wicked king, and into a setting where he receives instructions that are finally set up as a covenant.

Reconstructing such a ceremony from the Narrative, one can deduce that it would have begun with fasting and prayer. The soul would then be led out of a desolate world into a garden, where he would be made aware of his nakedness as a powerless mortal. After proving his worthiness to receive instruction, the initiate would then be introduced to elders, who would receive confirmation from two witnesses that instruction should commence. The candidate would then partake of the fruit of one of the trees in the garden and become like the tempter in "the story of Adam." Threatened with expulsion and banishment, the person would plead for mercy, in response to which the group present would rejoice. A conflict would then be enacted between the righteous ones (led symbolically by Rechab) and the wicked ones (led by an archetypal king of the world whose predecessor was almost converted to the ways of righteousness). The righteous souls prevail in this ritual encounter by declaring themselves loyal to the principles of obedience and abstinence, and they are thereby freed from a worldly prison. The initiate would then be instructed in the proper order of prayer, the correct attitude toward prop-

erty, and the required rules of chastity. These things would be presented engraved in stone, perhaps reminiscent of the tablets and covenant of Moses. Wearing “garments of immortality,” the soul would then learn how this group prays for the welfare of those still in the world. Finally the candidate would be called forth, and “as a bride receives a bridegroom,” the recipient responds. Others with outspread robes would then receive that person, who is ceremoniously taken to the “Son of God himself” and then into the presence of the “undefiled” Father and Lord. After the completion of this ceremony, the instructed soul would continue to hold this knowledge as a “covenant” for protection against the forces of evil. As Hugh Nibley has shown, these are familiar patterns in several ancient texts.²¹

If a religious text of possible ceremonial significance anything like the Narrative of Zosimus was known to Lehi or Nephi, they may have seen in their own exodus from Jerusalem a concrete manifestation or reenactment of its pattern. Since Nephi reserved writings with particular religious significance for his small plates, parts of the histories contained in 1 Nephi would take on added religious significance if they reflected such ceremonial patterns or religious traditions.

Conclusion

These suggestions have far-reaching implications. Perhaps they go too far. On the other hand, the only other alternative is that there is no connection whatsoever between the Book of Mormon and the Narrative of Zosimus, and that seems even less satisfactory. Too many similarities exist between these writings to account for them all simply in terms of normal human experience, the commonality of man, or happenstance.

The possibilities suggested above, of course, are not conclusive; nevertheless, I find all of these proposals to be highly intriguing. Whatever the final explanation may turn out to be, it can at least be said that these two texts share a considerable amount of common ground and that these close parallels corroborate the claim that the authorship of the Book of Mormon is rooted in the ancient Near East.

Notes

This chapter enlarges the article by John W. Welch, "The Narrative of Zosimus and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 22/3 (1982): 311–32, by updating footnotes, adding a full translation from the Syriac [printed in block texts to introduce each section in the previous article, which compared the standard translation from the Greek with passages from the Book of Mormon], and expanding the concluding observations. For a brief discussion of the discovery of the parallels between this Narrative and the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch, "A Book You Can Respect," *Ensign* (September 1977): 48.

1. English translations appear in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1867–72), supp. vol. 10:220–24; James H. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2:450–61. See also M. R. James, "On the Story of Zosimus," in *Apocrypha Anecdota: Texts and Studies*, ed. J. Armitage Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893; reprint Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1967), vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 86–108.

2. James H. Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1976), 223–8. See also Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:445.

3. The name Zosimus itself does not appear in the earliest manuscripts. Later, Zosimus also was the name given to a revered Christian monk, who, according to one Armenian tradition, lived on a mountain on Schizia, an island in the Ionian Sea.

4. Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research*, 223–8; and Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:443–9.

5. Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research*, 225.

6. Charlesworth reports having examined, in Paris, Oxford, London, and Manchester, manuscripts of this document written in Greek, Syriac, Ethiopic, and Karshuni.

7. For English translations from the Greek, see note 1 above; from the Syriac, see Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*; and from the Ethiopic, see E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great* (London: C. J. Clay, 1896), 2:555–84.

8. Budge, *Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great*, 2:560.

9. Brian McNeil argues for “a Jewish origin for the *Urschrift* of the Narration,” and finds the ascetic Jewish group in Egypt known as the Therapeutae as the most likely candidates for its compilation and preservation (see his “The Narration of Zosimus,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 9/1 [1978]: 68–82). J. Duncan M. Derrett finds that “an attempt to connect Zosimus with Qumran has not been a success,” and turns to Hellenistic Judaism for its provenance (see his “Jewish Brahmins and the Tale of Zosimus: A Theme Common to Three Religions,” in *Studies in the New Testament* [Leiden: Brill, 1989], 5:8–23).

10. I read the Greek *lithinoi* (literally “stone-like”) as embracing soft plates, since the Narrative indicates that these people wrote on these tablets by inscribing them with their fingernails.

11. The use of this text by permission of the translator is gratefully acknowledged. Parentheses that were placed around contextual English words supplied by Professor Charlesworth in his translation have been removed to aid readability.

12. The Syriac version, for example, is substantially the same as the Greek. The Ethiopic text, on the other hand, is later and diverges from the basic tradition in many respects.

13. For specific details about the texts, see especially the textual apparatus in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, and the introduction by M. R. James, “On the Story of Zosimus,” 86–95.

14. Chapters 1 and 8 of 1 Nephi derive directly from Lehi’s

account. See S. Kent Brown, "Lehi's Personal Record: Quest for a Missing Source," *BYU Studies* 24/1 (1984): 19–42. Nephi and Lehi had received the same vision (see 1 Nephi 14:29), and chapter 11 is part of Nephi's account of that vision.

15. On the flight into the wilderness as a type, see chapter 11 of Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964); reprinted as vol. 6 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 135–44.

16. In "The History of the Holy Men in the Days of Jeremiah, the Prophet," in James, "Story of Zosimus," 88.

17. Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research*, 2:223–8.

18. James, "Story of Zosimus," 90.

19. *Ibid.*

20. The Greek contains chapters 19–23, which appear to be later expansions by a Christian.

21. Compare Hugh W. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), especially pp. 255–83.