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John W. Welch

This article demonstrates certain similarities existing between texts in 1 Nephi in the Book Mormon and a little-known document entitled “The Narrative of Zosimus.”¹ The Narrative’s core material was written originally on Hebrew and appears to be at least as old as the time of Christ, and perhaps 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 these similarities is complicated. In a religious context, the parallels between the two writings may be explained as deriving from a common source of extensive revelation. Examined academically, the parallels are an intellectual challenge with no definite resolution. Even though I cannot account for these parallels on all respects, their mere existence tends to support claims of an Ancient Near Eastern origin for the Book of Mormon.

This article 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. I recognize that the approach followed here is not exhaustive. For example, the Narrative of Zosimus contains rich Tree of Life imagery; 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 vast bodies of symbolic and apocalyptic literatures. Those further studies, however, will have to wait until much more research has been done. For the present, less ambitious undertakings will have to suffice.

Background and Overview

While no one knows who, if anyone, Zosimus was, or even what the name *Zosimus* means or where it may have come from,³ the ancient narrative which 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. The text is of obvious interest to students of the Book of Mormon, which relates a similar history.

Dr. James H. Charlesworth, professor of Christian Origins at Duke University, Durham, N.C., 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 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 which 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.

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 which were to be discarded. Soon afterwards, the small book fell into disuse.

The first known reappearance in modern tomes 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 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*. That translation 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 which flows from its root. 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.⁹ It explains how the group, 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 other-worldly 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 require little elaboration: dwelling in the desert (1 Nephi 2:4), being led by prayer and faith (1:5, 11:3, 16:29), wandering through a dark and dreary waste (8:7), being caught away to the bank of a river (8:13), crossing to the other side of a river or abyss and passing through a great mist (8:32), coming to a tree whose fruit is most sweet above all (8:11), eating and drinking from the tree which was also a fountain of living waters (11:25), being greeted by an escort (11:2–3), being interrogated as to desires (11:2), beholding a vision of the Son of God (1:6, 11:29), keeping records on soft metal plates (3:24), recording the history of a group of people who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah (1:4, 7:14), being led to a land of promise and of great abundance due to righteousness (18:25), practicing constant prayer (Alma 34:21–27), living in chastity (Jacob 2:25–28), receiving revelations concerning the wickedness of the people of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 10:11), and yet obtaining assurances of the mercy to be extended to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (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 which exist between them may substantiate the great antiquity of both.

Detailed Comparison

In the following comparative study, the full text of Zosimus is shown in the left-hand columns, and passages from the Book of Mormon that

suggest possible parallels are arranged on the right. Not all proposed parallels are equally meritorious but are included for completeness. Likewise, 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.

The translation of the Narrative of Zosimus used here is that appearing in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* and follows the Greek text. Although the Narrative was not originally written in Greek, that text appears to be a close translation of early materials and is representative of the overall tradition.¹⁰ Sections of the Narrative identifiable as later additions are set off in brackets ([]) or have been deleted as indicated.

From the Book of Mormon, most of the passages involved come from chapters 1, 8, and 11 of 1 Nephi because here Lehi's influence is strongest.¹¹ 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 section are brief comments. General conclusions follow. Book of Mormon references to verses other than those found in 1 Nephi are so noted.

<i>Zosimus</i>	<i>1 Nephi</i>
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 . . .
<i>in the desert</i> 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 <i>into the wilderness</i>
This man <i>was entreating</i> God that he might see the way of life of the blessed,	1:5. . . . Lehi, as he went forth <i>prayed unto the Lord</i> , yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people. 11:3. And I said: I desire to behold the things which my father saw.
and behold an <i>angel</i> of the Lord was sent saying to him, Zosimus, man of God, behold I am sent by <i>the Most High, the God of all</i> , to tell thee that thou <i>shalt journey</i> to the blessed, but shalt not dwell with them.	8:5. And he [an <i>angel</i>] came and stood before me. 11:6. . . . the Spirit cried with a loud voice, saying: Hosanna to the Lord, the <i>most high God; for he is God over all the earth, yea, even above</i>

[But exalt not the 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 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.

all. . . . because thou believest . . . thou shalt behold the things which thou hast desired.

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.

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 which his father Lehi had seen, a prayer also answered by an angel who appears and announces that Nephi's request will be answered (1 Nephi 11:6) because of Nephi's 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 which the angel in each account uses for the Lord: "The Most High God of All." This is unusual and distinctive. There may also be meaningful analogs between the desert setting of the history of Lehi and that of the Narrative. Lehi and Nephi could have seen their own departure into the wilderness as a symbol of righteousness, just as the Narrative employs dwelling in the desert to show the unworldliness of Zosimus (cf. 1 Nephi 17:23–44). The initial time reference in Zosimus is too obscure to be of consequence.

Zosimus

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

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 . . .

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

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 a 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 heaven.

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].

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

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 and *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. . . .

8:23. And it came to pass that there arose a *mist of darkness*; yea, even an exceeding great *mist of darkness*, inso-much 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. . . .

In chapter 2, Zosimus' 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, 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 pre-visions of Lehi. 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. He then finds himself 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.

Two differences between the accounts are noteworthy. First, for Zosimus the wall of cloud is not associated with the tempter; rather, it is a barrier keeping even him from the paradise beyond. For Nephi, 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 the same: 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. Thus, for Lehi the mists are not as impenetrable as the wall of cloud is for Zosimus, whose account is esoteric. In his account, Zosimus still must get there. How Lehi reaches Paradise is not explained, except to note that he arrives because of the Lord's mercies (1 Nephi 8:8). This is consistent with Lehi's passing through in darkness (1 Nephi 8:8), wherein he would not have observed anything along the way.

Zosimus

1 Nephi

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*.

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.

And the tree in 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.

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.

In chapter 3, Zosimus crosses the river and passes through the wall of cloud by being lifted up in the branches of one tree and handed over to the tree on the opposite bank. 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 is desirable to make one happy (blessed), symbolizing the love of God. The fruit is fair (white) and fragrant (sweet) in both accounts respectively.

Once at the tree, both Lehi and Zosimus describe the paradise around them as large and flat, emphasizing the all-important presence of the Tree of Life.

Zosimus

4. And I saw there a *naked man* sitting, and said in myself, *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.

1 Nephi

11:11. . . . I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for I beheld that he was in the *form of a man*; yet nevertheless, *I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord*; and the spake unto me *as a man speaketh* with another.

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.

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.

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.*

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.* . . .

In this chapter, Zosimus next discovers a man, apparently 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 the 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 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' emphasis in the purity of his escort's garments.

In both records, the attendant questions the traveler. In the Narrative of Zosimus, the questions the traveler. In the Narrative of Zosimus, the question initially asked 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 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 Narrative of Zosimus are further descriptions of the cloudy and watery barrier. 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 exceeding 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 both reports the river functions as a demarcation between the righteous saints and the worldly sinners, and the Book of Mormon explicitly associates this abyss with the underworld.

Zosimus

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

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

1 Nephi

8:26. . . . on the other side of the river of water . . .

11:36. . . . was the *pride of the world*. . . .

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.

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.

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

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*.

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

In both 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 exceeding fine but foolish dress.

Zosimus is next asked by his new-found 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 only 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. It is somewhat more remarkable that Lehi beholds a group of followers like the Son of God and that he even 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 sons of God to whom he has been introduced. The twelve of Lehi, however, do not require angelic attestation before presenting Lehi with the Book of Jerusalem's calamities. In Nephi's case, who will continue the instruction.

Zosimus

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 me 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.

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 me senses left me, and I cried out to the elders, saying, *Forgive me, my*

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*.

[2 Ne 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 Ne 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

lords, and the elders stilled them and made quietness. Them 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.*

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.

At this point Zosimus goes with his attendants to a garden-paradise where he 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 ambiguous, it appears that Nephi also identifies the Tree of Life with both a fruit-bearing and a water-giving function. Both functions are mentioned together and both are equated with the love of God (1 Nephi 11:25). It would be remarkable if the two texts contained this unusual tree-fountain combination, where the root of the tree itself as also a fountain, not just a tree growing beside a body of water, since this imagery is rare.

A multitude gathers to inspect the newcomer and question him. 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 committed is perpetrating a lie. In Lehi, the sin is committed by those who become ashamed and fall into forbidden paths.

Both accounts refer to the story of Adam and both emphasize the role of lies and flattery in the Garden of Eden encounter with Satan. But this point cannot be of much consequence, even though it 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 Zosimus.

For his sin, Zosimus is almost expelled from the role of blessedness. He laments and quickly seeks and receives pardon from the elders however and 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.

Having thus established his worthiness and his identity, Zosimus is now ready to answer the Question, "What do you want?" Like Nephi, he says he desires to learn the way of life.

Zosimus

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 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 he took earth upon his bed, and told all *people to turn from their wicked way*.

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

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

1:13. . . . that 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. . . . 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. . . . 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

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 him, We are the sons of the servant, and our father is Rechab the son of Jonabad, and when Jeremiah the prophet preached in the days of the father the king, he proclaimed death to the city of Jerusalem, saying, Yet three days and all of the city shall be put to death. And the king the father hearing this repented of his sins, and issued a command to all to turn aside from their wicked way. And our father the 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.

behalf of his people . . . and he saw and *heard* much; and . . . he did exclaim . . . : Great and marvelous are the 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. . . .

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 shall not *disobey God*.

Then the king was enraged and *set us in prison*, and we passed that night there. 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 all over the earth, but gave to us this country.

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*. . . .

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 . . . *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 Ne 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 and 3 Nephi 15:15.]

Chapters 7 through 9 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 (see Jeremiah 35:1–19). The account of Zosimus is remarkably similar to the overall story of 1 Nephi, so little comment is likely required.

Notice in particular the use of soft plates in both records and the references to impending destruction, to the need for repentance, to the father who leads the group away, to the obedience and sacrifice of the righteous followers, to the deliverance by an angel (cf. 1 Nephi 3:29), and to the journey across the sea to the land of promise in relation to the scattering of Israel, each common to both accounts. The parallels here are more circumstantial than literary, whereas they were more literary in previous chapters.

Chapters 7 through 9 of the Narrative constitute its centerpiece. This section is stylistically and probably historically prior to the rest of the Narrative,¹² and so it is not unreasonable to believe that the historical roots of the traditions preserved here are very ancient indeed.

Zosimus

1 Nephi

[Included here are some weaker parallels from assorted sections from Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Alma, and Mormon.]

10. Hear, ye sons of men, hear the way of life of the life of the blessed. For God placed is 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.

18:24–25. . . . we did put all our seeds into the *earth* . . . that 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 in the wilderness. And we did come to the land which we called Bountiful, because of its much *fruit* and also *wild honey*. . . .

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

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

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, not *iron wrought or unwrought, nor silver nor gold*, nor air too heavy or too keen.

18:25. . . . we 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.

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 intercourse 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.

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.

[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 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 on 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*. . . .]

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

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

11:8, 12–13. . . . the *Spirit* said unto me: Look! And . . . I looked and beheld the great city of Jerusalem, and also other cities. . . .

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

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.*

[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.]

Zosimus is instructed here, and in subsequent chapters, concerning life among these blessed ones. He first learns about the world in which they 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 which almost effortlessly produces fruit and all the necessities of life. The material things of life are richly abundant for the righteous.

He 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 only minimal divergence from constant prayer and sexual abstinence to attend to the necessities of life and 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.

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. In a later section of the Book of Mormon, Alma also states that time or the length of life is measured only to mortals.

As in chapter 5 above, the Narrative refers particularly to the garments of immortality worn by the righteous. This “clothing” refers to the immortal powers these people possess.

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. This shows a high degree of correspondence to Book of Mormon texts which indicate that the Nephites retained deep concerns for those remaining on 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.

There are no specific similarities between the Book of Mormon and the Narrative in the small remaining portion of the Narrative. In chapters 13 through 15, Zosimus is told how the souls of the blessed are taken up to God when they are called. This only very generally parallels King Benjamin's statements in Mosiah 2:26–28 anticipating his own return to God. In chapters 16 through 17, the Narrative retraces Zosimus' steps from the land of blessedness back to the worldly wilderness where he began. It may be significant, in evaluating the meaning this Narrative might have had for the early Christians, that Zosimus is said to have brought back 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).

Certain manuscripts of Zosimus' Narrative 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).

Conclusion

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 regarding possible direct relationships or, on the other hand, the independence of these documents with respect to each other. We simply know too little about the authorship and transmission of the Narrative of Zosimus to venture any judgment about the kind of spiritual experiences its author had as compared with the visions and Revelation of Lehi. Similarly, we cannot know precisely what influence general literary or cultural backgrounds may have had upon those responsible for composing and transmitting the Narrative of Zosimus or, for that matter, upon 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.¹³

In the meantime, however, it seems both reasonable and productive that one continue to study these two texts together. Both deserve greater attention, and neither should be erroneously judged amiss against valid

ancient Judeo-Christianity. Before the recognition of similarities such as those between the Book of Mormon and the Narrative of Zosimus, it was possible to reserve interest in the Book of Mormon by wondering why no other Ancient Near Eastern books existed which closely resembled it. On that score, one need wonder no longer.

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1. English translation appears in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, 24 vols. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1867–72), supp. vol. 10, pp. 220–24.

2. James H. Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1976), pp. 223–28.

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 Schizia, an island in the Ionian Sea.

4. Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research*, pp. 223–28.

5. *Ibid.*, p.225.

6. Professor Charlesworth reports having examined in Paris, Oxford, London, and Manchester manuscripts of this document written in Greek, Syriac, Ethiopic, and Karshuni. His English translation of Zosimus will appear in Doubleday's forthcoming publication of the *Pseudepigrapha*, and soon a new edition of the Greek, Syriac, and Ethiopic text will be available in the SBL *Pseudepigrapha* Series.

7. English translations exist from the Greek (see note 1): from Syriac, which is yet unpublished by Dr. Charlesworth; and from the Ethiopic, which appears in E. A. W. Budge, *The Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great* (London: Clay, 1896), 2:555–84.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 560.

9. I read *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 (see Narrative of Zosimus, chap. 7).

10. 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.

11. Chapters 1 and 8 derive directly from Lehi's account. Nephi and Lehi received the same vision (see 1 Nephi 14:29). Chapter 11 is part of Nephi's account of that vision.

12. Charlesworth, *Pseudigrapha and Modern Research*, pp. 223–28.

13. For example, some day we may know more about the teachings of the mysterious Rechabites, a seminomadic religious group located in the deserts of southern Israel about the time of Lehi (2 Kings 10:15–17). This might prove relevant, since Rechab is specifically mentioned in the Narrative of Zosimus and since Lehi may have some contact with this group. Second, perhaps it might also be that some ritual known to both Lehi and the author of the Narrative of Zosimus stands as a common backdrop behind these texts. 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 which are finally set up as a covenant. (Cf. Hugh W. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975], esp. pp. 255–83.