



Type: Book Chapter

Words and Phrases in Jacob 5

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Source: *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*

Editor(s): Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch

Published: Provo, UT/Salt Lake City; FARMS/Deseret Book, 1994

Page(s): 174-184



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John W. Welch

Zenos's vocabulary is extremely simple. He spins a complex yarn out of the most elementary linguistic materials.

The total English computer count for Jacob 5 is 3,733 words. That total would have been significantly lower in Zenos's Hebrew, where *olive-tree* and the phrase *and it came to pass* would undoubtedly have been single words, and several other English parts of speech would not have appeared as separate words in the ancient text.

Most of the words in Jacob 5 are extremely common. Few can be thought of as truly distinctive. Several are used repeatedly by Zenos, and because of that repetition some words have become sharply characteristic of this allegory, even though they appear to be rather ordinary parts of everyday ancient Israelite speech.

By my count, only 252 different words are used in the allegory.¹ Of these, 92 are conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, articles, or other such normal parts of speech that occur universally in language. Of the remaining 160 root words, all but two are found in the Bible: the exceptions are *main* and *spot* (meaning *place*). Most of the words in Jacob 5 appear throughout the Old and New Testaments and other literatures: for example, from *bad*, *begin*, *bring*, *burn*, *call*, *come*, *to tree*, *watch*, *words*, and *young*.

Many of these words, although appearing throughout

the Bible, are used more frequently in the Old Testament than in the New. The overall vocabulary of Zenos is thus closer to the Hebrew vocabulary of the Old Testament than that of the New. For example, the following words are among those words of Zenos that are far more common in Old Testament usage: *alive, bitter, branch, broken, choice, counsel, decay, dig, hew, speedily, and wither.*

Individual words in Jacob 5 that do not appear in the New Testament but only in the Old Testament are *loftiness* (Isaiah 2:17; Jeremiah 48:29), *overrun* (Nahum 1:8), *nethermost* (1 Kings 6:6; compare also “nether parts of the earth,” Ezekiel 31:14, 16, 18; 32:18, 24), *prune* (for example, Leviticus 25:3; Isaiah 5:6), and *size* (for example, Exodus 36:9).

Only two words in Jacob 5 are not found in the Old Testament but are found in the New: *cumber* (Luke 13:7), and *graft* (Romans 11:17).² The concept of grafting, however, is present in Isaiah 17:10. Likewise, the English word *cumber* means to encumber, crowd, obstruct, or render useless. Don Parry suggests that these meanings are present in other Old Testament words meaning hinder, burden, trouble, or destroy.

Zenos's total word count breaks down into a very small vocabulary list, due to the fact that the key words in the allegory are repeated numerous times without the use of synonyms and with little variation in phraseology. Thus, of 160 total words, *the* is used 369 times, six others are used more than one hundred times each, twenty-five more appear thirty or more times each, and another fifty-seven appear ten to twenty-nine times.³ More than half of the words are used more than ten times each. A few significant words appear just once: *blessed, body, broken, care, change, choice, counsel, cut, died, faster, glory, hold, hoped, loftiness, moisture, pleasure, shoot, slackened, stretched, sweep, taste,*

thrive, together, trim, watch, waxed, wept, and wroth. For a complete listing of the words in Jacob 5, arranged according to how often they appear, see Table 1, located later in this chapter.

Zenos's words combine to form a number of distinctive expressions or idioms. Interesting results come from tabulating key phrases in Zenos's allegory and their occurrences elsewhere in scripture.

The following thirty phrases or expressions appear in Jacob 5 and not again in exactly this form in the four Standard Works (near equivalents can be found for less than half of these):

bad fruit
 bitter fruit (cf. uncircumcised fruit, Leviticus 19:23)
 began to decay
 to call servants
 choice unto me above all others
 clear away
 counsel me not
 end draweth nigh
 end is nigh at hand
 end soon cometh
 lay up fruit against the season unto myself (11x)
 look hither and behold (cf. look down and behold, Lamentations 3:50)
 main branches
 main top
 master of the vineyard (2x; cf. Lord of the vineyard, 31x)
 most precious above all other (cf. desirable above all other, 1 Nephi 11:12)
 mother tree
 natural fruit
 natural tree
 nethermost part[s]
 preserve unto myself
 slackened my hand (cf. slack not thy hand, Joshua 10:6)

spare it a little longer
 spot of ground
 sprung forth (cf. spring forth, Isaiah 43:19)
 stretched forth mine hand
 tame fruit
 tame olive tree
 season and the end
 withersoever I will

Six combinations of words appear in Jacob 5 and in the Book of Mormon, but not in Bible:

will and pleasure
 of no worth
 joy again in
 labor . . . might
 little longer
 it mattereth not

From the early chapters of Genesis (especially the creation account), seven idioms are found in Jacob 5:

and he beheld that it was good (2x; cf., e.g., Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 31)
 be one (Genesis 2:24)
 bring forth (Genesis 1:11, 20, 24; 3:16, 18)
 let us go down (Genesis 11:7; Abraham 4:1, 26)
 for mine own purpose (Moses 1:31, 33)
 from the beginning (cf. Genesis 1:1)
 [The Lord] went his way (Genesis 18:33)

Twenty-one further expressions, easily located with the aid of a computer or a complete concordance, are common to Jacob 5 and other texts of the Old Testament, but not the New Testament:

become corrupt
 both old and young
 [boughs] broken off
 burned with fire—especially of Mt. Sinai

cast away
 come, let us go down
 dig about
 go to
 grieveth me that
 [obey] in all things
 much strength
 only this once
 plucked off
 prepare the way
 shoot forth
 all the day long
 sweep away
 taken hold
 waxed old
 what could I have done more
 young and tender (1 Chronicles 22:5; 29:1, used only of
 Solomon)

Eight phrases in Jacob 5 are common with New Testament vocabulary:

cumber the ground (Luke 13:7)
 evil fruit (Matthew 7:17)
 first, last, last, first (Matthew 19:30)
 it profiteth me nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3)
 natural branches (Romans 11:21)
 once more (Hebrews 12:26–27)
 time draweth near (Luke 21:8)
 wild olive tree (Romans 11:17)

Several other phrases in Jacob 5 that readers of the New Testament might think of as Greek New Testament phrases can also be found in the older texts of the Hebrew Old Testament:

blessed art thou
 cast into the fire
 cast them into the fire

cut down (especially refers to pagan groves and idols in
the Old Testament)
good for nothing
good fruit
go thy way
hew[n] down (especially refers to graven images in the
Old Testament)
withered away

Several conclusions can be suggested from this brief study. First, the phraseology of Jacob 5 is rather characteristic. A significant number of phrases in Jacob 5 are unique to that text in all of scripture. This explains in large measure why listeners readily recognize the allegory of Zenos when it is quoted in sermons or talks.

Second, relatively few words and phrases in Jacob 5 appear also in the New Testament. In view of the overall vocabulary of Jacob 5, those few New Testament words should not be unduly weighted in assessing when the allegory of Zenos was composed. As words and phrases available in the working vocabulary of Joseph Smith, they cluster around only two ideas and were appropriate vehicles through which to communicate to his nineteenth-century audience the translated sense of the ancient allegory with respect to God's impending final judgment of the wicked world (*cumber the ground; evil fruit; first, last, last, first; once more; time draweth near*) and regarding the salient distinction between Israel and the Gentiles (*natural branches, wild olive tree*). It is doubtful, however, that the unprofitability of the tree in Jacob 5 has any connection with Paul's confession that, no matter what else he does, if he has not charity "it profiteth [him] nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3).

Third, by examining the Old Testament contexts of several phrases that also appear in Jacob 5, further significance of Zenos's messages in the minds of ancient Israelites or

Nephites can be explored. For example, exact phrases that seem to be reminiscent of the theophany on Mount Sinai, for example, *burned with fire*, would probably have reminded any Israelite of the covenant relationship that had been formed in the wilderness between God and his people when Mount Sinai “burned with fire” (Deuteronomy 9:15). Several expressions in Jacob 5 were otherwise used primarily in Israelite literature in connection with early anti-pagan concerns—to *hew down, cut down* pagan groves or idols—and thus it would have horrified the Israelites to think of themselves in the same terms, being cut down or hewn down, just as Jehovah had said that the groves of the Canaanites should be hewn or cut down (Deuteronomy 12:3; Judges 6:25–30). One is drawn to observe that the noun used most often in the allegory is *vineyard* (ninety times); and numerologically, perhaps there is significance in the fact that *master* is mentioned a perfect seven times, while *end, evil, and nethermost* occur an ominous six times. The mixing of phraseology from the creation account into Jacob 5 on several occasions sends the strong message in Israelite terms that God views salvation history in terms of creation, leading to the creation of a spiritual harvest and a united fruitful result in this world.

Finally, some of these words and expressions may help date Zenos. As shown by John Tvedtnes in this volume, in Hebrew at the time of Joshua and in early Israelite history there was only one word for *vineyard* and *orchard*. As further evidence that Zenos may have come from that time period, perhaps the most distinctive finding from the present examination of the words used by Zenos is that the phrase “young and tender,” used four times by Zenos, appears only two other times in scripture, both describing David’s young son Solomon as “young and tender” (1 Chronicles

22:5; 29:1). This supports the hypothesis that Zenos may have written his allegory early in the Israelite monarchy, perhaps in the latter half of David's kingship, but it is impossible to date Zenos with any degree of certainty.

TABLE 1

Vocabulary Distribution in Jacob 5: By Frequency

(369x) the	(32x) bring/brought
(254x) and	(31x) for
(133x) of	(30x) good/goodness
(127x) that	(30x) this
(113x) it/its	(29x) natural
(105x) I	(29x) them/themselves
(100x) had/has/hath/have	(24x) be
(90x) vineyard	(24x) shall
(69x) to	(23x) root/roots
(67x) fruit/fruits	(22x) graft/grafted
(65x) unto	(22x) nourish/nourished
(64x) in/into	(22x) which
(59x) tree/trees	(20x) me
(54x) branch/branches	(20x) not
(53x) beheld/beheldest/ behold/beholdest	(20x) preserve/preserved
(44x) came/come/comest/ cometh	(20x) wild
(43x) my/myself	(20x) time
(41x) he/him/himself/his	(19x) all
(38x) Lord	(18x) a
(38x) thereof	(17x) also
(36x) forth	(16x) away
(36x) said/saith/say/saying	(16x) cast
(36x) they	(16x) last
(36x) will	(15x) again
(34x) servant/servants	(15x) mine
(33x) may	(15x) up
(33x) pass	(15x) we
	(14x) began/begin/begin- neth/beginning/begun

(14x) long/longer	(9x) pluck/plucked
(14x) own	(9x) prune/pruned
(14x) wherefore	(8x) dig/digged/dug
(13x) became/become	(8x) first
(13x) is	(8x) from
(13x) much	(8x) grieveth
(12x) according	(8x) ground
(12x) because	(8x) might
(12x) down	(8x) perhaps
(12x) labor/labored/laboring	(8x) plant/planted
(12x) fire	(7x) like/liken
(12x) part/parts	(7x) master
(12x) season	(7x) overcome
(12x) should	(7x) their
(12x) thou	(7x) went
(11x) against	(6x) end
(11x) are	(6x) evil
(11x) bad	(6x) grow/grown
(11x) do/done	(6x) hither/hitherto
(11x) go	(6x) if
(11x) lay	(6x) more
(11x) strength/strong	(6x) nethermost
(11x) these	(6x) now
(11x) was	(6x) spot
(11x) with	(5x) as
(10x) about	(5x) been
(10x) did/didst	(5x) cumber/cumbered
(10x) let	(5x) even
(10x) perish/perished	(5x) hew/hewn
(10x) self	(5x) look/looked
(10x) take/taken/taking	(5x) no/none
(10x) us	(5x) off
(10x) ye	(5x) once
(9x) but	(5x) other/others
(9x) corrupt/corrupted	(5x) whither/whithersoever
(9x) lose	(5x) yea
(9x) olive/olive-tree	(5x) young

(4x) burn/burned	(3x) profit/profiteth
(4x) cause/caused	(3x) purpose
(4x) draweth	(3x) save
(4x) knew/know/knowest	(3x) saw
(4x) little	(3x) soon
(4x) most	(3x) stead
(4x) mother	(3x) then
(4x) nigh	(3x) there
(4x) nothing	(3x) took
(4x) so	(3x) top
(4x) tame	(3x) were
(4x) thee	(3x) when
(4x) those	(2x) alive
(4x) thus	(2x) call/called
(4x) thy	(2x) day/days
(4x) way	(2x) decay
(4x) what	(2x) exceedingly
(4x) Who/whose	(2x) gather/gathered
(4x) wither/withered	(2x) grew
(4x) word/words	(2x) hid
(3x) another	(2x) house
(3x) at	(2x) Israel
(3x) bitter	(2x) keep/kept
(3x) clear	(2x) laid
(3x) commandments	(2x) main
(3x) could	(2x) many
(3x) diligence/diligent/ diligently	(2x) mattereth
(3x) dung/dunged	(2x) must
(3x) equal	(2x) notwithstanding
(3x) hand	(2x) O
(3x) joy	(2x) old
(3x) land	(2x) only
(3x) one	(2x) place
(3x) our	(2x) precious
(3x) out	(2x) prepare
(3x) poor/poorer/poorest	(2x) ripened
	(2x) some

(2x) sort/sorts	(1x) loftiness
(2x) spare	(1x) man
(2x) speedily	(1x) moisture
(2x) than	(1x) Nay
(2x) thing/things	(1x) near
(2x) until	(1x) Nevertheless
(2x) would	(1x) number
(2x) yet	(1x) obey
(2x) you	(1x) or
(1x) after	(1x) overrun
(1x) almost	(1x) prophet
(1x) art	(1x) pleasure
(1x) bear	(1x) put
(1x) blessed	(1x) rejoice
(1x) body	(1x) sent
(1x) both	(1x) second
(1x) broken	(1x) shoot
(1x) canst	(1x) size
(1x) care	(1x) slackened
(1x) change	(1x) something
(1x) choice	(1x) somewhat
(1x) commanded	(1x) spoken
(1x) Counsel	(1x) sprung
(1x) cut	(1x) stretched
(1x) died	(1x) sufficiently
(1x) every	(1x) sweep
(1x) except	(1x) taste
(1x) faster	(1x) therefore
(1x) few	(1x) thrive
(1x) glory	(1x) together
(1x) hear	(1x) too
(1x) Harken	(1x) trim
(1x) here	(1x) watch
(1x) hold	(1x) waxed
(1x) hoped	(1x) wept
(1x) How	(1x) whence
(1x) kinds	(1x) worth
(1x) lest	

Notes

1. This statistic is necessarily imprecise because it is often difficult to decide whether to count two forms of the same word as one word or as two; but this number is a serviceable estimation for present purposes.

2. *Dung* is found in the Old Testament as a noun, but only in the New Testament as a verb (Luke 13:8).

3. I appreciate the assistance of Kathleen Reynolds in compiling these figures.