"THE STORY OF ZOSIMUS" OR "THE HISTORY OF THE RECHABITES"?

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One of the texts that has received increased attention through its recent classification among the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament is the one which older scholarship called the Story of Zosimus and more recent commentators the History of the Rechabites. This narrative, in its present form, is found in two principal recensions, the Greek and the Syriac, and in a third, the Ethiopic, which seems to be derivative. It was M.R. James who first edited the Greek version in 1893, titling it "The Story of Zosimus''). Six years later, F. Nau produced the first edition and translation of the Syriac, under the title "La Légende inédite des fils de Jonadab, fils de Rechab, et les Îles Fortunées''). Zanolli called it "La Leggenda di Zosimo'''). Picard and Nikiprowetzky termed it "La Narration de Zosime'', a title also found in English in an article by Brian McNeil4). James H. Charlesworth, who has devoted considerable attention to the text, originally called it the "Apocalypse of Zosimus'''), but later changed his mind and called it the "History of the Rechabites'''), the title under which

2) Revue Semitique 6 (1899), pp. 263-266 (introduction), 7 (1899), pp. 54-75 (Syriac text), 136-146 (French translation).
3) A. Zanolli, 'La Leggenda di Zosimo secondo la Redazione Armena', Giornale della Società Asiatica Italiana (NS) 1 (1924), pp. 146-162.
6) In the introduction to the supplement added to the 1981 reprint of The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research.
the work appears in the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* and in the SBL Texts and Translations series7). CHARLESWORTH’s research student, E.G. MARTIN, called it simply the “Account of the Blessed Ones”8).

This wide variety of nomenclature has inevitably caused confusion, which has been compounded by the fact that Zosimus was a relatively common Christian name in the first centuries of the Common Era9). It does seem, however, best to retain JAMES’ title, *Story of Zosimus*, for the present, for in its current form that is precisely what the document is, even though, as CHARLESWORTH points out, the apocryphon is composite10). The document is also, in its present form, a Christian work, probably dating from fifth or sixth century11). CHARLESWORTH’s preferred title, “which draws attention to the Jewish character of the earliest section of the work”12), is dependent on CHARLESWORTH and MARTIN’s reconstruction of the redactional history of the text, and cannot be accepted until that redactional history has been subjected to critique.

There is also a problem with the chapter divisions in the text. JAMES divided the Greek recension into 22 chapters. CHARLESWORTH, following MARTIN, divided the Greek into 23 chapters, added the versification, and divided the Syriac similarly. However, this division into 23 chapters was not made until 1979, and CHARLESWORTH’s own work on the document prior to this date used JAMES’ divisions. This creates some difficulty in using CHARLESWORTH’s work, and care is needed if his argument in *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research* is to be followed by using the modern translation and edition. For the present purposes, CHARLESWORTH’s chapter and verse divisions are followed, as his work is the most readily accessible and as his verse divisions allow


11) JAMES, op. cit., p. 95.