

Some helps in studying Isaiah.

Commentators or guides on Isaiah in the Book of Mormon:

- Nephi (1 Ne 20–21; 2 Ne 12–24, 27)
- Jacob (2 Ne 7–8)
- Abinadi (Mosi 14)
- Jesus Christ (3 Ne 22, in much of 20)

Isaiah's writings generally focus on two major subjects, each with subheadings:

- Jesus Christ
 - First Coming
 - Second Coming
 - Mission/Atonement
- House of Israel
 - History
 - Scattering
 - Gathering
 - Last Days

John Bytheway, from his *Isaiah for Airheads*, groups the following:

Covenants

"And now, my beloved brethren, I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel" (Jacob in 2 Ne 9:1–3).

"God made a covenant with Abraham, that through his seed, all the families of the world would be blessed. Abraham and his seed are to 'bear the ministry,' or in other words, are responsible to carry the gospel message to the world. Abraham had a son named Isaac, who had a son named Jacob. Jacob's name was changed to Israel, and therefore, the 'house of Israel' means the family or descendants of Jacob. The covenant obligation and blessing continues through all the descendants of Jacob, or house of Israel (See Abraham 2:9–11)" (John Bytheway, "Don't Just 'Get Through' 2 Nephi: Get Something From It!" <http://www.lds.org/mormon/080219getprint.html>)

Missionary work is a manifestation of our spiritual identity and heritage. We were foreordained in the pre-mortal existence and born into mortality to fulfill the covenant and promise God made to Abraham. We are here upon the earth at this time to magnify the priesthood and to preach the gospel. That is who we are, and that is why we are here — today and always (David A. Bednar, *Ensign*, November 2005, 47).

"Elder Bednar made a distinction between 'going on a mission' and 'becoming a missionary.' Missionary service isn't just something we do — it's something we are, because we are Abraham's seed. In other words, as a member of the house of Israel, we have a covenant obligation to bless the families of the world. Perhaps one of the reasons new missionaries are required to receive their patriarchal blessings is so that they can have their lineage declared, and have it confirmed by revelation that they have the right and obligation to teach the gospel and bless the families of the world." (John Bytheway, "Don't ...")

"Much of Isaiah's writing is to remind covenant Israel to repent — to reprimand them when they are not living up to their covenant obligations, and to warn them of trials to come because of their disobedience. Again, God's covenant with Abraham continues through the house of Israel and is both a blessing and a burden ..." (John Bytheway, "Don't ...")

Christ

"After reading these three witnesses from the small plates of Nephi [Nephi, Jacob, & Isaiah], the reader knows two things in bold relief: that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that

God will keep his covenants and promises with the remnants of the house of Israel" (Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant*, 34.2).

"Nephi and other ancient prophets had the task of convincing the people to believe in the Messiah who would come, in the future. (It's interesting to note, therefore, that Korihor [Alma 30:13] and other anti-Christ's [Sherem, in Jac 7:7; Nehor, in Alma 21:4, 6, 8] tried to convince the people that 'no man can know of anything which is to come.' Isaiah testifies of the coming of Christ! ... According to Isaiah scholar Monte Nyman, of the 425 verses of Isaiah that are quoted in the Book of Mormon, 391 deal with the ministry and attributes of Jesus." (John Bytheway, "Don't ...")

Current Events

"Isaiah speaks often of things happening during his time....Remember, that Isaiah was an advisor to the Kings of the kingdom of Judah — one of his most common themes as, 'Don't make alliances with other nations! Let God be your ally, let God be your King!' ... In other words, you won't have to worry about what other nations or peoples are up to, if you just follow the Lord. One of the reasons that these current events are important to us is that they often foreshadow events of the last days.... The Bible Dictionary contains nine pages of biblical chronology in three columns printed in about an eight-point font.... remember just four events ... In my experience, remembering these four 'current events' will help considerably as we navigate Isaiah National Forest.

"The Four Events are:

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|--------|---|
| 740 BC | Isaiah's ministry begins |
| 721 BC | Assyrians capture the Northern Kingdom (Israel) |
| 587 BC | Babylonian Captivity of the Jews |
| 537 BC | Return of the Jews to Judah" (John Bytheway, "Don't ...") |

Coming Events

Isaiah's "most detailed and extensive prophecies portray the latter-day triumph and glory of Jacob's seed. He is above all else the prophet of the restoration." (Bruce R. McConkie, "Ten Keys for Understanding Isaiah," #2.)

Nephi's 4 Keys to Understanding Isaiah:

#1 – Learn the manner of prophesying among the Jews.

Isaiah was "what LDS scholar Victor L. Ludlow called a 'deliberately difficult' prophet.... Conceal what you are going to say. Never use the same noun twice when referring to a person, group or place (Isaiah uses five different names to describe the same place in one instance). Speak of future events in past tense at times [because you saw the future yesterday in a vision]. In fact, have no time frame — move in and out of past, present and future without telling the reader what you're doing. Use complex symbolism rather than simple parables. Never let anyone know whether you're being literal or figurative. All of these come under the heading of the 'manner of prophesying among the Jews.'" (John Bytheway, "Nephi's Keys to Understanding the Isaiah Chapters" <http://www.ldsmag.com/bookofmormon/080222isaiahprint.html>)

#2 – Have the spirit of prophecy.

#3 – Know the regions round about.

Nephi had the advantage of having grown up in Jerusalem, only about 140 years after Isaiah made his prophecies. We're having to learn about the land of Judah much later.... There are 108 different place names in Isaiah. Sometimes when we read all these names, most of which we don't know how to pronounce, we feel lost. But if you don't know much about Holy Land geography, take heart. You're in good company. One day, while the Prophet Joseph Smith was translating the Book of Mormon, he looked up and asked, 'Emma, does Jerusalem have a wall around it?' She said, 'Yes, Joseph, Jerusalem has a wall around it. Everybody knows that.' He said, 'Thank goodness; I thought I was being deceived.' And he went right on translating the record. (Events in Life of Prophet, "Elect Lady," *LDS*

Church News, 1994, 09/10/94). If Joseph Smith didn't know that much about Jerusalem while translating, then we don't need to feel lost as we begin to learn our Holy Land geography.... I suggest if you can just remember four kingdoms, you'll be in great shape:"

| | |
|---------|---|
| Assyria | the military superpower to the northeast |
| Babylon | the cultural, commercial center to the east |
| Israel | the apostate kingdom just north of Judah |
| Syria | the kingdom just north of Israel |

"(I might also have mentioned Egypt, but you've all heard about Egypt, and it would mess up my system of fours.) You might say I have a BIAS for the four above. BIAS = **B**abylon, **I**srael, **A**ssyria, and **S**yria." (John Bytheway, "Nephi's Keys ...")

#4 – Live in the last days

I know that they shall be of great worth unto them in the last days; for in that day shall they understand them; wherefore, for their good have I written them. (2 Ne 25:8.)

"Nephi makes an intriguing statement that begs a question: Why? Why will we understand Isaiah in the last days? Perhaps it is because we will notice the things Isaiah prophesied happening all around us. We'll witness the growth of the Church, the building of temples, and the gathering of Israel [through missionary work and patriarchal blessings]. Perhaps the Lord will pour out his Spirit upon us as we follow the prophets by more faithfully studying the scriptures. Perhaps it's because we'll have more resources to help us understand Isaiah than ever before. For example, we have:

1. Restoration scriptures which help clarify Isaiah passages, like the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.
2. In printings since 1981, a synopsis at the beginning of each Isaiah chapter in the Book of Mormon [and the Bible], which contain helpful summaries and doctrinal points. Also, the footnotes in the Book of Mormon and in Isaiah add clarifying comments and other references.
3. The *LDS Bible Dictionary* which contains articles on Isaiah, the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah....
4. Maps of the Holy Land in the back of the scriptures [and certain Institute manuals].
5. Modern prophets who have commented on Isaiah in their writings and in General Conferences.
6. Books and articles from faithful LDS scholars on understanding Isaiah." (John Bytheway, "Nephi's Keys ...")

An Overview of the Book of Isaiah Chapters Quoted in the Book of Mormon:

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|-----------|---|
| Isa 1-12 | Sinful Israel will be scattered, but when they repent God will gather them again. |
| Isa 13-23 | The punishments of God will come upon the wicked nations of the world. |
| Isa 24-27 | Christ will overcome death for everyone and gather the faithful in the last days. |
| Isa 28-35 | Christ will come in a day of wickedness to judge the world. Israel will be gathered to Zion in joy. |
| Isa 36-39 | The story of how the Lord saved Jerusalem from the Assyrian invasion. |
| Isa 40-46 | Jesus Christ only is the Lord and beside Him there is no Savior. |
| Isa 47-66 | Jesus Christ will redeem his people and gather them to Zion in the last days. (Source: <i>The Old Testament for Latter-day Saint Families</i> , 469.) |

"You may have noticed that most of the Isaiah chapters in the Book of Mormon are the first chapters and last chapters of Isaiah in the Old Testament — dealing with the initial *scattering* of Israel, and the latter-day *gathering* of Israel. So when Isaiah in the Book of Mormon speaks of the House of Israel, they're either coming or going — being scattered or gathered. The normal way of being "scattered" is by becoming spiritually "scatterbrained." In other words, the scattering is spiritual first (you lose your testimony) and literal second (you lose your real estate). The "gathering of Israel," according to the scriptural definition, will also be spiritual first. Those who are gathered come to understand and accept Jesus as the Messiah, which is the spiritual gathering, then they are gathered physically to specific lands, or, on modern times, to stakes of Zion." (John Bytheway, "Nephi's Keys ...")

Leafing through the Isaiah chapters (one paragraph overviews) (John Bytheway, <http://www.ldsmag.com/bookofmormon/080229isaiahprint.html>):

2 Nephi 12 – The Mountain of the Lord’s House

In the last days, the mountain of the Lord’s house will be established in the top of the mountains, where all the nations will receive instruction from the Lord. The Lord will judge the nations. In the millennial day, people will burn from war to peace. The Lord invites Israel to walk in the light. Israel has given in to pride, materialism and idol worship. The day of the Lord is coming which will humble all the proud and mighty. Israel is commanded to stop relying on man, and rely on God.

2 Nephi 13 – Hearken, Daughters of Zion

When Judah falls, men with skill and leadership will be taken away, leaving only the young and inexperienced to rule. The people have brought this punishment upon themselves because they have provoked the Lord and oppressed each other. The daughters of Zion (another metaphor for the people of Judah) are obsessed with appearance and fashion (attracting other lovers), but they will be humbled like slaves, and their men will perish in wars.

2 Nephi 14 – The Branch of the Lord, Glorious and Beautiful

In the millennial day, a holy people will be established in Zion, and Jerusalem will be glorified.

2 Nephi 15 – Parable of the Vineyard

The Lord plants his vineyard, and does everything he can for it, but it brings forth wild fruit. The Lord forsakes the vineyard and allows it to be taken over. Sins of vanity, materialism, drunkenness and dishonesty describe the behavior of the Lord’s people. Covenant Israel in Isaiah’s time will be scattered, modern Israel will be gathered.

2 Nephi 16 – See, Hear, Understand and Be Healed

This is Isaiah’s call to be a prophet. Isaiah sees the Lord upon his throne. He feels unqualified but is cleansed, and offers “Here am I, send me.” The people will harden their hearts against his message, but he must continue to cry repentance. Eventually a remnant of the House of Israel will return from captivity.

2 Nephi 17 – The Immanuel Prophecy

The kingdom of Syria and the kingdom of Israel (here referred to as Ephraim, the dominant tribe) threaten to war against the kingdom of Judah if she will not join their alliance against the Assyrians. Isaiah prophesies to the King of Judah (Ahaz) that the alliance will fall, and offers to give Ahaz a sign. Ahaz refuses, but Isaiah gives the sign anyway, that a virgin will conceive and bring forth a son called Immanuel, but before the child reaches the age of accountability, the alliance of Syria and Israel will be broken (a dual prophecy of perhaps Isaiah’s son, and a later Immanuel). If Ahaz refuses to believe the Lord, Judah will be invaded by the Assyrians and the Egyptians; inhabitants will be captured and humiliated leaving once productive farmland to become land for hunting and grazing.

2 Nephi 18 – Cornerstone of Stumbling Block?

Isaiah’s son is given a name which means “destruction is imminent.” Because the kingdom of Judah refuses the leadership of the Lord, but seeks worldly alliances, they will fall. The Lord will be a sanctuary for those who choose him to rule over them, but a stumbling block to those who reject him. Those who will seek wisdom from wizards and familiar spirits (mediums) will receive darkness.

2 Nephi 19 – Those in Darkness See a Great Light

The “dimness” mentioned in the last verse of the previous chapter will not last forever. Those in darkness will see a great light (spiritual darkness of apostasy, emotional darkness from wars fought in that area, physical darkness of the black basalt rocks in that area). The areas referred to in this chapter as Naphtali and Zebulun (lands given to two of the tribes of Israel) will become Galilee where Jesus, the “light of the world” spent much of his ministry. A Son, the Messiah, will be born and rule with justice forever. Judgments are pronounced against the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

(Note – the three preceding chapters all refer to a son being born. Some scholars view it in this way:

- 2 Nephi 17, The Immanuel Prophecy;
- 2 Nephi 18, The first fulfillment (Isaiah's son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz
- 2 Nephi 19, The modern fulfillment, Jesus Christ)

2 Nephi 20 – Tools in God's Hand

Social injustices exist in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Assyria is an instrument in God's hand to punish Israel. God destroys Assyria, which is a type of the destruction at the Second Coming. A remnant of Israel will return in the last days. Assyria will march toward Jerusalem (in Judah) causing terror, but Jehovah will defend her. (fn BMRC, 376).

2 Nephi 21 – The Stem and the Branch of Jesse

In the future, the "stem" (or descendant) of Jesse (the father of David), will be born (Jesus Christ). He will judge righteously and destroy the wicked. In the millennium, animals will lose their aggressiveness, and the knowledge of the Lord will be worldwide. The Lord will raise an ensign and gather Israel. Hostilities between Ephraim (the dominant tribe in the Northern Kingdom of Israel) and the Kingdom of Judah will cease as the gospel is taught.

2 Nephi 22 – Sing Unto the Lord

This chapter is fairly straightforward. "In that day," (in the millennium), all men will sing this psalm or song of thanksgiving, praising the Lord whose anger is turned away, and recognizing that He is the source of strength and of salvation.

2 Nephi 23 – O Babylon We Bid Thee Farewell

The Lord will call his forces, and Babylon will be destroyed. This prophecy is also foretelling events in the last days before the Second Coming of the Christ.

2 Nephi 24 – How Art Thou Fallen, O Lucifer

The Lord will still have mercy on the house of Israel and restore them to their lands. The king of Babylon is fallen and compared to Lucifer, the followers of Lucifer will be left desolate. Assyria will also be defeated, as will Palestina.