

Bringing the Real to the Ideal: 2 Nephi 12-14 (Isaiah 2-4)

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2 Nephi chapters 12-14 show by contrast the ideal state promised by the Lord concerning Israel and Israel's actual condition. In other words, these chapters show what Israel is verses what she will be. The prophecies begin by showing the future ideal condition where all people come to the Lord and follow His paths (2 Nephi 12:2-4). Then follows a long detailed account of Israel's present condition showing that Israel has chosen to follow the ways of the world instead of the ways of the Lord (2 Nephi 12:5-14:1). Ending in full circle the ideal state of the house of Israel is once again depicted using different terms (2 Nephi 14:2-6).

THE IDEAL (2 Ne 12:2-4)

Isaiah sees a time when all nations will hold Jehovah as the only god. All will come and learn the ways of the Lord at the Lord's temple. Most ancient near eastern societies viewed their gods as living in mountains: Olympus for the Greeks; Cassius for the Phoenicians; Saphon, Hermon, Tabor, and Carmel for the Canaanites; and Sinai for the Israelites were all mountains upon which the respective societies considered their god(s) as living. When temples were built to house deity, the temples were considered "mountains." If possible they were built on mountains or high places. If not, the structure of the building was designed to represent a mountain (such as the mesopotamian *ziggurat*). The phrase "mountain of the Lord's house" literally means "the temple of Jehovah." Figuratively, it means Jehovah's religion or the ways of God.

Isaiah sees that in the last days, "the mountain of the Lord's house (Jehovah's temple/religion) shall be exalted (lifted above) the hills (the false religions of the world - note the use of the derogatory term "hill" instead of "mountain" in referring to the false religions suggesting that these religions are only hills by comparison to God's mountain). All nations shall "flow" like a river to the temple of Jehovah and shall "walk" in the paths of the Lord and not their own way - the IDEAL situation! The building of the Salt Lake Temple is symbolic of the fulfillment of the *Ideal*.

THE REAL (2 Ne 12:5-14:1)

12:5 Having shown the ideal future of Israel as being a time when all nations are following Israel's lead in following the ways of God, Isaiah now turns to reality: Israel is following the nations of the world and *their* gods. Isaiah sums it up this way: those of the house of Jacob have "gone astray, every one to *his wicked ways*." **12:5-14:1** shows that man's dependance upon man will never bring about the ideal state but will only lead to death, destruction and captivity. In order for the ideal to be achieved, man must be brought to depend upon God only. **12:6-9** Specific charges are levied against Israel in these verses. The Lord has forsaken Israel because they are full of pagan ways:

(1) vs 6 "They be replenished from the east," i.e., they fill themselves with the teachings of Babylon/the world.

(2) vs 6 "They hearken unto soothsayers" instead of the revelations of God through His prophets. The use of soothsaying and magic was forbidden to Israel (Lev 19:26; Deut 18:9-14), for by these practices the gentiles sought to gain control and manipulate the gods and their own destinies. We are not to "counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand" (Jacob 4:10).

(3) vs 6 "They please themselves in the children of strangers," i.e. they make political alliances and marriages (which often involved the worship of foreign gods) instead of relying on God as their protector.

(4) vs 7 "Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures," i.e., they have set their hearts upon the riches of the world.

(5) vs 7 "Their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots," i.e., they have built up a powerful military - again, relying on their own strength and not the strength of their God. Deut 17:16-17 forbids a king to accumulate a large military or riches for they will turn him away from God.

(6) vs 8 "Their land is also full of idols." Idolatry is the ultimate form of self-exaltation for through the use of idols the idolater tries to control the gods to fit his own plan. It is easy to see why the Lord was so upset with Israel. Instead of relying on God and following His ways, Israel tried to use wealth, military power and control of one's own destiny to become great.

(7) This verse summarizes Israel's problem and fixes

squarely *the reality* of Israel: neither the poor nor the rich *humble* themselves before God to follow His paths.

12:10-22 These verses show that in order to achieve the ideal state of vss 2-4, the Lord will first need to humble man so that he will place God first in his life above all other things.

12:10 As the Lord, who is all knowing, all powerful and sovereign over all the universe, appears to the world, man will hide himself in caves as he sees the folly of his ways. Man's efforts to achieve greatness through wealth, power, and idols fades away to the God of true greatness.

12:11 As man is humbled, *only* the Lord will be exalted in that day - this has reference to vs 2 where "the mountain of the Lord's house" will be "exalted above the hills."

12:12-22 These verses show that the Lord will be exalted above every thing that man views as great and impressive.

13:1-7 Following upon 12:12-22 showing the folly of man's dependance upon worldly things for greatness, 13:1-7 shows the folly of man's dependance upon human leadership and human glory.

13:1 This verse speaks of food and water being taken away from Israel and might seem out of place in a section dealing with the folly of human leadership. Yet, the bottom line for having political leadership is the assurance that our basic needs will be met. Through the succeeding verses the Lord will remove the leaders of Israel, or, in other words, Israel's bread and water!

13:2-3 The military leaders will be taken away: the mighty man (hero), the man of war (warrior), the captain of fifty. The political leaders will be taken away: the judge, the ancient (elder), the honorable man, the counselor. The religious leaders will also be taken: the prophet, the prudent (soothsayers), the eloquent orator (the clever enchanter). Finally, the cunning artificer (skilled craftsman) will also be removed.

13:4-5 With all the leaders whom Israel leaned upon removed, Israel will turn to children (the incompetent, the immature) to lead them. This will lead to an incompetent, self-serving government where all will be oppressed. Eventually, as this government begins to collapse, anarchy will prevail. No respect for any governing official will be the rule.

13:6-7 These verses show by graphic example how bad things will get among the Israelites. A man who owns his own coat will find himself being asked to rule the people with the injunction, "let not this ruin come under

thy hand." The message of vs 1 now finds its fulfillment: the leaders, who are to insure the basic needs of the people, cannot. The man with the coat sees that there is no future for the people and that their confidence in him is vain for he cannot change the present circumstances. Therefore, he declines the responsibility.

13:8-15 What brought on this humiliation and removal of leadership? In one simple word: *WAR!* These verses deal with the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of her once proud people. Though this destruction surely awaits Israel and the wicked, the righteous need not fear for it will be "well with them" (vs 10).

13:16-14:1 The result of the war is that Israel (represented by the daughters of Zion) will lose all the worldly things that they have put their trust in. Israel will become humble, *the prerequisite for the ideal state*. This section represents the cleansing of the inner vessel which must happen before the ideal can be achieved (Alma 60:23) or the cleansing of the church (D&C 112:23-26).

THE IDEAL (2 Nephi 14:2-6)

Israel, having been humbled and cleansed and the wicked destroyed, is now ready for the ideal state. Those who have "escaped" the destructions through their righteousness shall become a "beautiful and glorious" branch of the Lord. All will become as the time when Israel, having escaped the bondage of the Egyptians, was protected and led by the Lord through the guise of "the cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night" (see Ex 13:20-22, 40:34-38).