Isaiah Ideas – Religion 121

Generally speaking, all Isaiah quotes in the Book of Mormon fall under two general categories: (1) they are about the Messiah (Christ) and/or (2) they are about the scattering and gathering of the house of Israel, which also includes their history and the last days.

1 Ne 20 (Isa 48)

“First Nephi chapters 20 and 21 are the first of a number of instances in which Book of Mormon writers quote extensively from the book of Isaiah. These two chapters constitute chapters 48 and 49 of Isaiah and are our most accurate translations of those chapters. Nephi quoted them from the brass plates. It will be remembered that the brass plates paralleled the Old Testament down to the time of Jeremiah, who is quoted in them (1 Ne 5:13). Having quoted these chapters of Isaiah, Nephi gave an inspired commentary on them in the concluding chapter of 1 Nephi. He did this by taking the prophecies of Isaiah and applying them to the family of Lehi through its extended generations.”

[Theme #2—scattering and gather of Israel.]

“1–2. These verses were addressed to those of Israel whose professions of allegiance to the Lord were not sustained by works of righteousness. Their actions proved them hypocrites.

1. Out of the waters of baptism] This clause first appeared in the 1840 and 1842 editions of the Book of Mormon. It did not appear again until the 1920 edition, and it has been in all editions since that time. It appears to be a prophetic commentary by Joseph Smith to explain the meaning of the phrase ‘out of the waters of Judah.’ Such editorial comments by modern rules of grammar would be identified by the use of brackets [ ]. If this phrase were a restoration of the original text, as found in the more pure version on the brass plates [of Laban] from which it comes, it would have appeared in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, and we would also expect to find it in the Joseph Smith translation of Isaiah 48:1, but we do not.

Through the use of this phrase, Joseph Smith is calling our attention to the fact that the ordinance of baptism was as common to the people of the Old Testament as it was to the people of the Book of Mormon. The duplicity spoken of in these verses was that of baptized members of the Church.”

“2. Lord of hosts] This name title for Christ dramatizes his place at the head of the army of God. He is ‘a man of war’ (Ex 15:3) and God of battles (Psa 24:8). The phrase is the same as Lord of Sabaoth (D&C 87:7; 88:2).”

“8. A transgressor from the womb] Israel has been wayward and rebellious from the time of its formation on earth. It may also be that this statement has reference to a propensity among some for wickedness demonstrated in the premortal life (see Moses 5:24).”

“9–11. Here the Lord says that for his ‘name’s sake’ and for his ‘praise’ he would not cut Israel off, despite their wickedness. The reasoning is similar to that used by Moses when he interceded in behalf of Israel after the incident with the golden calf. Moses’ argument was threefold: first, that they were God’s people, he having brought them out of Egypt by his own power; second, that God’s glory was thus involved and would be shamed in the sight of Israel’s enemies; and third, that God had covenanted with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to raise up a mighty nation from their seed. (Ex 32:11–14.)”

“16–17. As Paul declared, ‘This thing was not done in a corner’ (Acts 26:26). No saving principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be found only in an obscure text. ‘The voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated’ (D&C 1:2; see also 2 Ne 26:23–24).”

1 Ne 21 (Isa 49)

“Isaiah 49 is a most remarkable prophecy, one intended by the spirit of revelation to embrace multiple fulfillments. The Book of Mormon version of the prophecy, which contains significant textual restorations, greatly enhances our understanding of Isaiah’s message and the workings of the spirit of prophecy. The text is a marvelous messianic prophecy, as well as a detailed description of Joseph Smith and the story of the latter-day restoration. It can also be properly argued that this prophecy applies to Isaiah, or that it is a description of major events in the history of the nation of Israel. Such interpretations are not inappropriate, as long as they do not obscure its greater meaning as it applies to Christ and Joseph Smith. Since Nephi lived a considerable time before the coming of Christ, it was appropriate that he view this prophecy primarily as it applied to the coming of the Savior. Since we live a considerable time after Christ’s mortal ministry, it is appropriate that we see this prophecy primarily as it applies to events of our day. Isaiah’s detailed knowledge of the latter-day restoration, the role of Joseph Smith, and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, sustains this conclusion. The word of God is most durable. We will here interpret the prophecy as it applies to the Prophet Joseph Smith, for such was the pattern of our Lord in the interpretation of Isaiah he gave among the Nephites (see 3 Ne 21:9–11).”

---

2 Ibid., pp. 151–152.
3 Ibid., p. 152.
5 Ibid., p. 154.
6 Ibid., p. 155–156.
7 Ibid., p. 157.
"1. All ye that are broken off...because of the wickedness of the pastors] This is a significant textual restoration. It establishes that though the prophet is addressing all the house of Israel, his message is more especially for that part of Israel that had been scattered, not through their own wickedness, but because of the corruption in the Church in the Old World. It was this corruption of the Church and the temple priesthood that caused Lehi and his family to flee.

"Jeremiah prophesied the same thing, saying: 'Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD. And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD.' (Jere 23:1–4.)"[8]

"1. From the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name] All of scattered Israel are now invited to listen to the voice of a servant of the Lord, one called from 'the womb,' not one 'self-ordained' but rather one 'foreordained' and known by name even before his birth. All are entreated to listen to Joseph, the son of Joseph, who was 'ordained from before the foundation of the world' (D&C 127:2; Teachings, p.365)."

"2. He hid me] To Joseph Smith and others who had embraced the newly restored gospel the Lord said: 'Ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh and have been hid from the world with Christ in God' (D&C 86:9). Those called to establish the kingdom of God on earth in this last great gospel dispensation were the literal lineage was preserved by the hand of God for his very purpose.

"A polished shaft] Joseph Smith gave the following characterization of himself: 'I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else, striking with accelerated force against religious bigotry, priesthood, licentiousness, lawyer-craft, doctor-craft, lying editors, suborned [perjured] judges and jurors, and the authority of perjured executors, backed by mobs blasphemies, licentious and corrupt men and women—all hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty, who will give me dominion over all and every one of them, when their refuge of lies shall fail, and their hiding place shall be destroyed, while these smooth-polished stones with which I come in contact become marred.' (Teachings, p. 304.)"

"6. A light to the Gentiles] Both Christ and Joseph Smith are spoken of as 'a light unto the Gentiles' (Isa 42:6; D&C 86:11). Similarly, all who labor to take the light of the gospel to the Gentiles are properly referred to as 'a light unto the Gentiles' (D&C 86:11).

"7. To him whom man despiseth] The promise made to Joseph Smith was that his name would be had for 'good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people' (JS–H 1:33)."

"9a. Prisoners: Go Forth] The phrase has a double meaning. It extends the teaching of the restored gospel to both sides of the veil. The promise to those who are in the prison of apostate doctrines and the bondage of false traditions is that they shall be brought out of 'captivity,' or, as Isaiah put it, 'out of obscurity and out of darkness' (Isa 29:18). 'When the times of the Gentiles is come in, a light shall break forth among them that sit in darkness, and it shall be the fulness of my gospel' (D&C 45:28). Their promised restoration is a return to both the fulness of gospel principles and the lands of their inheritance (1 Ne 22:12; D&C 113:9–10).

"The phrase also refers to the teaching of the gospel to those in the world of spirits. 'Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise to the King Immanuel, who hath ordained, before the world was, that which would enable us to redeem them out of their prison; for the prisoners shall go free' (D&C 128:22). While his body lay in a borrowed tomb, Christ in the world of spirits preached to the righteous dead in paradise. From among them 'he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead. And the chosen messengers went forth to declare the acceptable day of the Lord and proclaim liberty to the captives who were bound, even unto all who would repent of their sins and receive the gospel,' (D&C 138:30–31.) Thus was Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled that liberty would be proclaimed to the captives and the prison be opened to them that were bound (D&C 138:42).

"19. In the millennial day the earth will be renewed and its barren deserts blossom in paradisiacal splendor. Metaphorically Israel gathers to the waters of everlasting life as the unite themselves once again in covenant with the God of their fathers.

"21. Who hath begotten me these] All will be surprised at the great numbers of the gathering hosts of Israel. The Lord will be victorious in numbers, as in all things."

"22–23. Interpreting these verses, Nephi later explained (1 Ne 22:6–9) that after the scattering of Israel the Lord would raise up a might gentile nation that would act like a nursing parent to Israel. In this nation (obviously the
United States of America) the gospel would come forth to nourish the spiritually famished descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thus giving them the strength to grow to spiritual maturity (1 Ne 22:6–9). Jacob prophesied of the time when Israel would be "restored to the true church and fold of God; when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise" (2 Ne 9:2; see also Jacob’s discussion of these verses in 2 Ne 6:8–15).14

“22–26. The promise granted to the returning tribes is that ‘their enemies shall become a prey unto them’ (D&C 133:28). This is a reference to the destruction of the wicked (the enemies of God) at the time of the Second Coming. Speculative theories of various and sundry peoples going forth with a divine decree to destroy the wicked and faithless are without scriptural foundation. (See also 3 Ne 16:13–15; 20:15–21; 21:12–21.) Further, Nephi prophesied that the mother of abominations would gather great multitudes ‘upon the face of all the earth, among all the nations of the Gentiles, to fight against the Lamb of God’ (1 Ne 14:13–15) and that the wrath of God would be poured out upon the great ‘whore of all the earth,’ who would then ‘war among themselves, and the sword of their own hands’ would ‘fall upon their own heads, and they shall be drunken with their own blood. And every nation which shall war against thee, O house of Israel, shall be turned one against another, and they shall fall into the pit which they digged to ensnare the people of the Lord.’ (1 Ne 22:13–14.) How fitting that those thirsting for the blood of the Saints will eventually turn upon their own in that same spirit of vengeance!”15

2 Ne 7 (Isa 50)

“In Isaiah 50 the Lord confirmed to Israel that he had not forgotten them or his covenant with them. Further, he assured them of his power to accomplish all that he had promised in regard to their redemption. Surely he who is the Creator and has power over the elements is not without the power to gather the scattered remnants of Israel from the four quarters of the earth and enthrone them with the glory they once knew as a united kingdom. It is the right of him who patiently suffered the greatest of all humiliations to require his people to bear their day of infirmities and afflictions with like faith. The Lord counseled Israel that the only ones beyond deliverance were those who refused to walk in his light.

2 Ne 8 (Isa 51)

“Abraham’s seed were here admonished to remember their covenant heritage. In blessing Abraham the Lord promised that through the restoration of the gospel in the latter days, his children—trusting in the immutable word of God—would become as a watered garden, the truths of the gospel becoming to them as the riches and comfort of Eden. Such are they that shall return to Zion—no obstacle can deter them. As ancient Israel trod the Red Sea on dry ground, so latter-day Israel will pass safely through all the waters of opposition. Treading the highway of righteousness, they will return to Zion with songs of everlasting joy and holiness.

“Israel is enjoined to have no fear of earthly powers. Man is but dust. Israel’s God is the creator of heaven and earth, the God of Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts; heaven’s army will prepare the way before returning Israel. The covenant people are once again to be adorned in the robes of righteousness and clothed in the power and authority of the priesthood, a priesthood to which they have a right by virtue of the promise made to Abraham. In this final day of gathering, this day of millennial glory, Israel—having freed herself from her fallen and cursed state—will enjoy once again holy conversations with her God (see D&C 113:7–10).”16

“Nephi Quotes Isaiah 2–14

“Why did the Book of Mormon prophets quote so frequently from the writings of Isaiah? Why should Nephi and Jacob take the time (and precious space on the small plates) for the words of Isaiah? What is there in the writings of an eight-century [742–701] B.C. prophet—one, in fact, whose oracles are often extremely difficult to comprehend and appreciate—that would be of such worth to the Nephites and Latter-day Israel?

“Why did the Nephites quote Isaiah?

“A number of reasons suggest themselves. First, Isaiah was a relatively recent prophet. Many scholars place the dates of Isaiah’s ministry around 742–701 B.C., only 100 to 150 years removed from the days of Nephi and Jacob. Though the time of his labors places him almost twenty-seven centuries from our day, Isaiah’s words would have been viewed by the Nephites much as the Latter-day Saints today view the sermons and writings of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.

“Second, one of Isaiah’s central themes was the destiny of the house of Israel, of which the Nephites were an important branch. ‘And now, the words which I shall read,’ Jacob recorded, ‘are they which Isaiah spoke concerning all the house of Israel; wherefore, they may be likened unto you [the Nephites], for ye are of the house of Israel. And there are many things which have been spoken by Isaiah which may be likened unto you, because ye are of the house of Israel’ (2 Ne 6:5).

“Third, Isaiah spoke frequently of the status of the house of Israel in the last days; the Book of Mormon is a record prepared and preserved for the people of the latter days. ‘I proceed with mine own prophecy’ Nephi wrote after having quoted some thirteen chapters from Isaiah, ‘according to my plainness; in the which I know that no man can err; nevertheless, in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled men shall know of a surety, at the times when they shall come to pass. Wherefore, they are of worth unto the children of men, and he that supposeth that they are not, unto them will I speak particularly, and confine the words unto mine own people; for I know that they shall be of great worth unto them in the last days; for in that day shall they

14 Ibid., p. 167.
15 Ibid., pp. 167–168.
16 Ibid., pp. 232–233.
understand them.' (2 Ne 25:7–8.)

“Fourth, Isaiah spoke repeatedly of the coming of Christ the Messiah. Nephi explained: ‘And I did read many things unto them which were written in the books of Moses; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah’ (1 Ne 19:23). One Book of Mormon scholar has observed that of the 425 verses from Isaiah quoted in the Book of Mormon, 391 of them deal with the ministry or attributes of the Savior (see Monte S. Nyman, Great Are the Words of Isaiah [SLC: Bookcraft, 1980]. p. 7).

“Isaiah’s witness of the Lord Jesus Christ was sure and certain, even as were the testimonies of Nephi and Jacob. Thus Nephi said: ‘And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words…. for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word.’ Nephi then added: ‘Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.’ (2 Ne 11:2–4.)

“In the Lord’s recorded instructions to the Nephites he twice endorsed the writings of Isaiah (3 Ne 20:11; 23:1). In the second instance, after having quoted Isaiah 54, Jesus declared: ‘Ye ought to search these things, Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah.’ If the Lord’s example of quoting Isaiah was not sufficient motivation for the Nephites and for us to read, ponder, and pray over his prophetic words—indeed, it is one thing to quote the Lord, and quite another to have the Lord quote you!—then his commandment to do so is surely sufficient.

“What are some suggestions for better understanding Isaiah?”

1. “An overall understanding of the plan of salvation. Isaiah like most of his prophetic colleagues, assumed that his listeners and readers understood the things about which he spoke. Three examples will suffice. If one understands the doctrine of the premortal existence, then he is certainly more prone to grasp the significance of Isaiah’s words: ‘How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!’ (Isa 14:12; 2 Ne 24:12). Likewise, if one already knows of the nature of the millennial day, he will discern immediately the context of such words as ‘the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and falling together; and a little child shall lead them’ (Isa 11:6; 2 Ne 21:6). Finally, if one has studied the life, ministry, and atonement of the Savior from the New Testament and from modern revelation, he is more apt to comprehend the doctrinal import of such words as these: ‘It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand’ (Isa 53:10; Mosi 14:10).

2. Study the doctrine of the gathering of Israel. Since so much of the writings of Isaiah center in the scattering and gathering of Israel, competence in that subject greatly facilitates an appreciation of the prophetic words on the matter. Primary source material for such study would include the Old Testament—particularly the books of Moses—and the teachings of the Book of Mormon prophets.

3. Use modern revelation. In at least sixty-six places in the Doctrine and Covenants (from thirty-one different chapters of Isaiah) the Lord used language identical with or similar to that in Isaiah. In Joseph Smith’s sermon (as contained in Teachings), there are explanations or commentary upon thirty-five Isaiah passages representing twenty-one chapters (see Nyman, Great Are the Words of Isaiah, pp. 11, 13).

5. Learn how the New Testament writers understood and explained Isaiah. There are at least forty-two Isaiah passages from twenty-five chapters in the New Testament (Nyman, Great Are the Words of Isaiah, p. 11). The words of Isaiah are found frequently in the sermons or writings of Jesus, Paul, and John the Revelator.

6. Know and understand the Old Testament setting and context for Isaiah’s writings. Nephi indicated that he had not taught his children ‘after the manner of the Jews,’ but that he had dwelt at Jerusalem. ‘Wherefore,’ he adds, ‘I know concerning the regions round about.’ (2 Ne 25:6.) One cannot hope to appreciate the ominous description of the coming of the Assyrian destroyer in Isaiah 10 (2 Ne 20), for example, if he does not know the whereabouts of such cities as Aiath, Migron, Michmash, or Geba. Nor can he appreciate the full import of Isaiah’s declarative prophecy in Isaiah 7–8 (2 Ne 17–18) if he is unaware of the confederacy of the kingdoms of Syria and Israel as a part of their planned overthrow of Judah.

Those who have come to understand Isaiah are conversant with the ‘manner of prophesying among the Jews’ (2 Ne 25:1). Nephi chose to couch his prophetic utterances in plain and simple declarations [see 2 Ne 25:7, 7]. But among his fellow Hebrew prophets it was not always appropriate so to do. Because of the wickedness of the people, Isaiah and others often spoke in figures, using types and shadows to illustrate their points.” (Bruce R. McConkie, Ensign, October 1973, p. 82.)

“7. Understand the manner in which prophecies may be fulfilled. Some of the most important and far-reaching prophecies may have more than one fulfillment. These prophecies, called ‘pattern prophecies,’ may come to pass in dual or multiple fashion, that is, at a number of times during the earth’s history.

“One of the best examples of an Old Testament prophecy with multiple fulfillments is Joel 2:28–29: ‘And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also
upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.’ On the day of Pentecost, some fifty days after the death of the Savior, the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the people in a marvelous manner. Persons in the area—gathered from far and wide at this time of festival—‘were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.’ Peter responded: ‘These are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.’ The chief Apostle then quoted the above passage from Joel (Acts 2:1–21). When Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith in September of 1823 he quoted several passages of scripture. After quoting the prophecy of Joel, he ‘said that this was not yet fulfilled, but was soon to be’ (JS–H 1:41). That is to say, Joel’s prophetic prediction came to pass in the meridian of time as well as in the dispensation of the fulness of times.

“Other examples of Isaiah’s prophecies having dual fulfillment or multiple application would be the reference to both Lucifer and the king of Babylon (Isa 14; 2 Ne 24); the prophesied destruction of Assyria and the destructions at the second coming of Christ (Isa 10; 2 Ne 20); and the Immanuel prophecy, dealing with Isaiah and Ahaz on the one hand, and with Mary and Jesus on the other ( Isa 7–8; 2 Ne 17–18).

“A second key to understanding the manner of prophetic fulfillment is to recognize contemporary events as fulfillment of ancient oracles. In Nephi’s language, ‘in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled men shall know of a surety, at the times when they shall come to pass’ (2 Ne 25:7). 8. Seek the spirit of prophecy and devote yourself to serious study. ‘Because the words of Isaiah are not plain unto you,’ Nephi explained, ‘nevertheless they are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy’ (2 Ne 25:4). The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Rev 19:10). One who enjoys the gift of the Holy Ghost and seeks through sincere and prayerful study of the holy writ (see Alma 17:2–3) to be led in his scriptural interpretation by that same spirit which animated Isaiah of old—that person will come, in process of time, to understand Isaiah and come to treasure his words as spiritual silver and gold. Thus we see that it takes a prophet to understand a prophet, and current revelation to understand past revelation.

“How important is it that we understand Isaiah? ‘Isaiah has been preserved for a reason. Nephi and Mormon went to great efforts to see that Isaiah’s writings were a part of the Book of Mormon. They are meant to be understood. Nephi never intended that we skip or hurry through the now sixteen-page segment in the middle of his second book. “If our eternal salvation,’ Elder McConkie warned, “depends upon our ability to understand the writings of Isaiah as fully and truly as Nephi understood them—and who shall say such is not the case!—how shall we fare in that great day when with Nephi we shall stand before the pleasing bar of Him who said: ‘Great are the words of Isaiah’?… It just may be that my salvation (and yours also!) does in fact depend upon our ability to understand the writings of Isaiah as fully and truly as Nephi understood them. For that matter, why should either Nephi or Isaiah know anything that is withheld from us? Does not God who is no respecter of persons treat all his children alike? Has he not given us his promise and recited to us the terms and conditions of his law pursuant to which he will reveal to us what he has revealed to them?’ (Ensign, October 1973, p. 78).”

2 Ne 12 (Isa 2)

“Though this nation was given up to wickedness, Isaiah prophetically described a future day—a day of righteousness, a day of renewal, a day of restoration. This was to be a day in which the ‘mountain of the Lord’s house,’ that is, the temple of God, would be established in the ‘top of the mountains,’ and Jacob’s sons and daughters, though scattered among all nations, would ‘flow unto it.’ Thus the hearts of the children would turn to the covenants the Lord had made anciently with the forefathers and those same everlasting covenants would be made with them. [See D&C 2.]

“When Israel gathers under the Lord’s direction, temples are built. The Lord’s people must have a place where their God can reveal to them ‘the glories of His kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation; for there are certain ordinances and principles that, when they are taught and practiced, must be done in a place or house built for that purpose’ (Teachings, p. 308). ‘Only a handful of Saints had been gathered in this last dispensation when the Lord announced the necessity of building a temple. Indeed, the Lord told Joseph Smith that the Church had been ‘established in the last days for the restoration of his people, as he has spoken by the mouth of his prophets, and for the gathering of his saints to stand upon Mount Zion, which shall be the city of New Jerusalem’ (D&C 84:2). Thus Jackson County in the state of Missouri was designated as the place where the New Jerusalem and a temple would be built (see D&C 57:3; Ether 13:1–12).

“The prophecies of the New Jerusalem and its temple stand independent of the promised rebuilding of a temple in the latter days in Jerusalem of the Old World. Traditionally the world has supposed that Isaiah’s reference to the law going forth from Zion and the word of the Lord going forth from Jerusalem was a Hebrew parallelism and that both references pointed to the Old World. That such was not Isaiah’s intent is illustrated in a revelation given to Joseph Smith wherein it was announced that the Gentiles (meaning non-Jewish nations) were to flee to the Zion of the New World while those who are of Judah were to flee to Jerusalem, ‘unto the mountain of the Lord’s house’ (D&C 133:12–12).

‘Isaiah uses the destruction of corruptible things in his day as a means of foreshadowing the destruction of that which is corruptible prior to the Second Coming and the reign of millennial peace. Again in that day the proud and wicked shall be brought low.’

2 Ne 13 (Isa 3)

“Isaiah’s vision of the effects of wickedness continued from the preceding chapter. For Nephi and his people this would have been a prophetic
confirmation for the suffering and degradation they were spared by fleeing Jerusalem. In lieu of an inheritance of sorrow they obtained a land of promise. Such are typical of the rewards of following the Lord’s anointed.

“Given that Nephi included these chapters of Isaiah in his record for the benefit of those of our day, we properly see in this description of Judah’s haughtiness, pride, and intoxication with fashion a pattern and warning for the last days.”

Note that in prophetic language Christ is often portrayed as the groom and Israel or the Church is portrayed as the bride. Therefore the portrayal of the worldly women in Isaiah 3 pertains to all members of the Church, both male and female, not just to females alone.

2 Ne 14 (Isa 4)

“In the preceding chapter we read of the bitter winter seasons of apostate darkness. Now we read of darkness and wickedness giving way to light and righteousness; we read of the glorious spring of restoration with its heaven-sent cleansing rains, followed in turn by the pleasant summer of millennial splendor. It is a day when Zion’s daughters have abandoned worldly fashions and have adorned themselves with robes of righteousness, while Jacob’s faithful sons have, in the language of Isaiah, put on their beautiful garments—the authority and power of the holy priesthood (see Isa 52:1; D&C 113:7–8).”

In the Inspired Version of the Bible (JST) published by the church once known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, in some Hebrew Bibles, and in some modern English translation of the Bible, verse 1 of the King James Version of the Bible chapter 4 is moved to the end of chapter 3. Rather than being an endorsement of plural marriage, it becomes a curse that Israel suffers along with all the others mentioned in chapter 3. She has no God (or husband) to lead her, so she pleads for anyone to come to her aid. Seven signifies completeness; she is totally desperate and pleads not to be single, or left without a husband (God). This change is only in the printed edition of the Inspired Version; there is no change in the manuscripts of the IV (JST)—Joseph Smith did not make this change from the KJV. Some LDS scholars feel that the verse is a reference to plural marriage.

2 Ne 15 ( Isa 5)

“As did Zenos with his allegory of the olive tree [Jac 5], Isaiah characterized the wickedness of Israel with the image of a vineyard. A barbarous and undisciplined people are likened unto the bitter fruits of a vine grown wild, its fruits to be plucked by the evil one and bartered for in the marketplaces of hell. From such fruits the wine of self-conceit and unholy arrogance is made, a draught to dull spiritual sensitivities and rob man of the knowledge by which salvation comes.

“Again in the midst of it all, Isaiah’s attention turned to an ensign raised to the nations—the latter-day unfolding anew of the gospel banner, the glad tidings of heaven’s plan. In ways incomprehensible to those of Isaiah’s day, Israel gathers to the gospel standard.”

2 Ne 16 ( Isa 6)

“Isaiah, writing in imagery difficult to the modern mind, describes his call to the prophetic office. Caught up in vision to the heavenly council, Isaiah is purged of his sins and granted his mission and commission as the Lord’s anointed, with an accompanying admonition that a wayward people would be more than slow to hearken to his words. The chapter is consistent with what we know about prophetic calls generally, the pattern having been established with the Savior and others in the Grand Council of Heaven (Abr 3:27; Teachings, p. 365). Thus every prophet has been ordained in a heavenly council, and his authority and message traces itself directly to the throne of God. For Joseph Smith, of course, whose profession to authority and doctrine comply perfectly with the pattern of Isaiah’s, this is preeminently so.”

2 Ne 17–18 (Isa 7–8)

“For proper understanding, 2 Nephi 17 and 18 (Isaiah 7 and 8) should be read together. They constitute a pattern of prophecy whose fulfillment came in the days of Isaiah and King Ahaz and more profoundly in the miraculous birth of the Christ child. In the face of an alliance between Syria and Israel, Ahaz, king of Judah, considered the necessity of his own alliance with a greater foreign power. The word of the Lord to Ahaz through Isaiah was direct: ‘Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted’ (2 Ne 17:4). That is, trust the powers of heaven rather than the arm of flesh. To dramatize the message, Ahaz was told that a woman was with child, and that before that child would know to choose the good or evil, the alliance to the north would have been destroyed. The child was thus, in prophetic similitude, called Emmanuel, literally ‘God is with us.’ Such was the prophecy for Isaiah’s day.

“As to a future day, a virgin would conceive and bear a son of whom it would be said in the literal sense, ‘Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us’ (Mt 1:23).”

“Nephi’s inclusion of this prophecy of consolation is for us a call to faith. It is a reminder that there is no salvation in foreign alliances, but that our hope must rest in the assurance that the Holy One of Israel is in our midst as we remain true to our covenants.”

---

23 McConkie & Millet, p.279.
21 Ibid., pp. 279–280.
24 Ibid., p. 280.
2 Ne 19 (Isa 9)

“Israel’s consolation is ever the hope of their Messiah—he who will sit upon the throne of David and reign in everlasting peace. In the midst of his prophetic description of the night of Israel’s sorrows and apostate darkness, Isaiah saw a great light, the latter-day David, even Jesus the Christ, the acceptance of whom would bring to an end the vexations of Judah and Ephraim.”

2 Ne 20 (Isa 10)

“Isaiah prophecies that Assyria, an idolatrous empire, would be the rod with which the Lord would chasten his own people, who had become a hypocritical nation. Assyria would be as the axe in the hand of the Lord to hew down a corrupt tree, but, supposing that the power was in themselves, they too would be felled by him whom they mocked. Their destruction was but a type and forewarning to modern idolaters, those who fail to acknowledge the hand of the Lord but rather trust in the arm of flesh. Their ruination at the time of Christ’s return is certain, while the righteous remnant of Israel, those who have trusted in the Lord, will greet their returning king with anthems of praise.”

2 Ne 21–22 (Isa 11–12)

“Isaiah testifies of Christ as both the ‘stem of Jesse’ (mortal Messiah) and the righteous judge (millennial Messiah). He further testifies of a rod and root of Jesse (Joseph Smith), ‘a servant in the hands of Christ, who is partly a descendant of Jesse as well as of Ephraim, or of the house of Joseph, on whom there is laid much power,’ a man ‘unto whom rightly belongs the priesthood, and the keys of the kingdom, for an ensign, and for the gathering of [the Lord’s] people in the last days.’ (D&C 113:1–2, 4–6; cf. JS–H 1:40.)

“God having unfurled an ensign to the nations—a gospel banner flying atop Mount Zion—Ephraim and Judah would next begin the trek along the highway of righteousness (Isa 35:8) as they return to worship their God in the mountain of the Lord’s house. This day of mighty works, in which the Lord would set his hand a second time to gather the dispersed of Jacob, would culminate in the great millennial era. It would be a day when once again the covenant hosts of Israel will raise their voice in praise to Jehovah, who will then reign among them.”

2 Ne 23–24 (Isa 13–14)

“As the Medes conquered the Babylonians in 538 B.C., so shall the conquest of the wicked by the destroying angels be accomplished at the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. As ancient Israel was left to marvel at the once mighty but now deposed and displaced king of Babylon, so latter-day Israel will marvel at the dethronement of Lucifer, the despot of darkness and king of evil.

“Having sown evil seeds, Israel and her neighboring nations reap a harvest of sorrow. Yet in it all, there was that promised day of renewal, a day of the Lord’s triumph. Thus the past becomes the key that unlocks the future. As history has its cycles, so prophecies have multiple fulfillments and repeated applications. Isaiah’s prophecies of events now past foretell events yet future. The past is the stage upon which the is portrayed. The scriptures thus have a timeless value and an eternal relevance. As Latter-day Saints, we echo the words of the Master, ‘Great are the words of Isaiah’ (3 Ne 23:1).”

“Nephi’s Keys to Understanding Isaiah …”

“The first eight verses of this chapter [2 Ne 25] represent Nephi’s keys to understanding Isaiah, the principles of which were dealt with earlier under the heading ‘Nephi Quotes Isaiah 2–14.’

Mosi 14 (Isa 53)

“2. He shall grow up … as a tender plant] Christ is the tender plant. The Lord Omnipotent would, like all his mortal fellows, experience the tender and helpless years of infancy and childhood. ‘God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man,’ Abinadi had said (Mosi 13:14). He ‘whose gions forth have been from of old, from everlasting’ (Micah 5:2) was to be born a helpless infant to the youthful Mary in a stable in Bethlehem of Judea.

“2. A root out of dry ground] The dry sterile ground of apostate Judaism neither watered nor nourished this plant. ‘Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come. And he served under his father, and he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him.’ (JST, Mt 3:24–25).”

“8. Who shall declare his generation] A clearer rendering of Isaiah’s thought would be: ‘Without protection, without justice, he was taken away’ (New English Bible). That is, he was taken forcibly and denied a fair trial.

“8. Who shall declare his generation] That is, Who shall declare his genesis, his roots, his origin? Who among all that profess to be his ministers can correctly testify as to his divine sonship? In our day the only ones who can so testify are those who understand, as Nephi declared, that he is literally the Son of the Eternal Father ‘after the manner of the flesh’ (1 Ne 11:18–21). An understanding of the Atonement rests upon a proper understanding of the doctrine of divine sonship. Of necessity Christ had to be the literal son of a mortal mother from whom he could inherit blood or the capacity to die. God must be his Father as literally as Mary was his mother, so that he might inherit from his Eternal Father the ability and capacity to live endlessly. Thus Christ became the only man ever to walk the earth who had both the ability to lay down his life (which he inherited from this mother) and the ability to take it up again (which power came by

---

25 Ibid., p. 281.
26 Ibid.
28 Ibid., pp. 282, 283.
29 Ibid., Volume 2, p. 222.
9. Crucified between two thieves. Buried in a rich man’s tomb (Joseph of Arimathea).31

“10. It pleased the Lord to bruise him] Attendant to the Fall came the promise of redemption. The first Messianic prophecy was directed to Satan. ‘I will put enmity between thee [Satan] and the woman [Eve], between thy seed [those choosing to follow you] and her seed; and he [the seed of the woman, meaning Christ] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel’ (Moses 4:21; Gen 3:15). Satan will have his victories; he will ‘bruise the hell’ of God’s Son; yet the ultimate victory will be with Christ, who will bruise the head of the adversary.

Thus it ‘pleased the Lord [the Father] to bruise him [Christ]’ in the sense that Jesus carried out to the fullest the will of the Father, in spite of the pain associated with the implementation of the terms and conditions of that will.”32

“12. Surely the rewards that come from God will be worthy of the majesty and power of God. It would be ungodly to grant to man that for which he was unworthy; it would be less than godlike for the divine Father of us all to refuse to share all that he had with those who had laid their all upon his altar. A theology that refuses God the right to make of his children joint heirs, and yet expects the sacrifice of all things by mere mortals, is a theology which demands of men greater magnanimity than of God from whom the very virtue is to have come. The glory of God, which is manifest in all that he does, is nowhere more evident than in the order and nature of the resurrection and the eternal rewards granted to his children.”33

3 Ne 22 (Isa 54)

“1. O barren] Scattered Israel, those who for generations have lived without the light of the gospel, who have not been fruitful in the faith of their fathers. These are also identified in this passage as ‘the children of the desolate.’

“2–3. The command here is to spread out, to make room for those who are to be gathered home. ‘For Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; yea, verily I say unto you, Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments’ (D&C 82:14; compare Isa 33:20).

“4. Scattered Israel’s unfaithfulness—her failure to forsake the ways of Babylon and receive the covenants of Zion—shall be forgiven; Israel’s God will remember her and the promises he made to her. The reproach of her youth, her spiritual sterility, shall be forgotten.”

“5–6. The Bridesgroom, the Lord of Hosts, has returned to receive his bride, repentant Israel. The wanderings of Israel over the generations, her tendencies toward unfaithfulness, her inclination to go whoring after other gods (see Ex 34:15–16), will be a thing of the past.”34

“11–12. Zion, the city Of God, the holy commonwealth that all of the ancient worthies sought for and but few found, will be built under God’s direction. It will be adorned with the treasures of this earth—gold and silver and precious stones (compare Rev 21:18–21)—as a monument to Jesus Christ, the King of Zion (see Mosi 7:53).

“13. All thy children shall be taught of the Lord] Zion shall begin to be built before the time of Christ’s second coming in glory. The Saints who are gathered in all nations shall live for a season in love and peace (despite the degenerative condition of the world) prior to the Millennium. Because of the goodness of those who have given themselves fully to the Lord and his cause, their meetings shall be pentecostal outpourings: the Spirit of God shall truly burn like a fire in their hearts. Prophecy and revelation and healings and angelic ministrations shall abound, for the faith of the Saints shall have rent the damning veil of unbelief and opened the heavens to the gifts and wonders enjoyed by the former-day Saints. And these spiritual experiences shall be multiplied immeasurably after the glorious return of the Master. When wickedness and enmity shall have been removed from this earth, there will be no end to the truths to be taught, the miracles to be performed, the outpourings to be enjoyed. Truly in that day ‘all thy children shall be taught of the Lord.’ All men and women who choose to do so shall grow in spiritual graces to the point where they are prepared to inherit that glory and power which is enjoyed by God their Father. In that day ‘the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea’ (2 Ne 21:9; Isa 11:9).”35

There was only one writer of Isaiah; there was only one Isaiah.

A segment of the scholarly world has presented the theory that there was more than one Isaiah, or more than one person who wrote the book of Isaiah. This is partly based on the notion that no one can know the future: one cannot predict the name and the man Cyrus from Persia 100 years before he was born, for example. Sherem, Nehor, and Korihor, the three main anti-Christis of the Book of Mormon, also taught that no man could know the future (Jac 7:7; Alma 21:6, 8; 30:13).

The first theory divided Isaiah in two parts: “First Isaiah” and “Deutero-Isaiah” (2nd Isaiah). “First Isaiah” went from chapter 1 through chapter 39.

30 Ibid., p. 224.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., pp. 224–225.
33 Ibid., p. 225.
34 Ibid., Vol 4, p. 155.
35 Ibid., p. 156.
“Deutero-Isaiah” went from chapters 40 through 66. Later on a “Trito-Isaiah” was proposed, which covered chapters 56–66. It was assumed that this part of Isaiah was written during a later time period than the previous chapters.

Other divisions have also been proposed: 4th Isaiah (chapters 1-12) and 5th Isaiah (chapters 13-23). Still other divisions have been proposed by some scholars. See Hugh Nibley, *Improvement Era*, July 1966, p. 637.

But the Book of Mormon, written around 600 bc, quotes from one end of Isaiah virtually to the other, indicating that the entire book of Isaiah was including on the brass plates about 100 years after Isaiah’s death.

“First Isaiah” 2 Ne 12–24 (Isa 2–14)
“Deutero-Isaiah” 1 Ne 20–21 (Isa 48–49)
“Trito-Isaiah” 2 Ne 7–8 (Isa 50–51)
“Deutero-Isaiah” Mosi 14 (Isa 53)
“Deutero-Isaiah” 3 Ne 22 (Isa 54)


Away back in the 12th century, Ibn Ezra, a Jewish scholar, declared that chapters 40 to 66 of Isaiah seemed to form a literary unity, distinct in style and content from the rest of the book. To explain this, it was assumed that this part of the book was written not by Isaiah but by another person and at another time, presumably some 200 years later.

Since 1789 this hypothetical author has been referred to as the Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah. But once the dual authorship of Isaiah was generally accepted, it soon became apparent that there was no need to stop at two Isaiahs. By applying exactly the same reasoning that split the original Isaiah in two, it was possible to break up the two main sections into a number of separate packages, each of which in turn readily yielded to the fragmentation process to produce scores of independent compositions, all going under the name of Isaiah. First, chapters 40-66 broke up into separate books, 40-55 being by one author and 56-66 by another, duly labeled Trito-Isaiah. Chapters 36-39 were recognized as a separate book on the grounds of their resemblance to 2 Kings 18:13-20:19. The earlier Isaiah, chapters 1-35, became a swarm of separate sayings glued together, according to one school, from a large number of smaller or medium-sized collections or, according to another school, gathered as minor additions to a central main work. Some scholars agreed that chapters 1-12 and 13-23 represent separate collections, though each had his own theory as to how, when, where, and by whom such collections were made. There is no point to going into the subject in detail. Typical is the present dating of the so-called Trito-Isaiah, which is variously placed in the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th centuries B.C.

The most recent survey of the whole Isaiah problem reaches the conclusion that because of its “very long and complicated prehistory,” it will “never be possible to achieve a completely satisfying and thoroughly convincing analysis” of the original book of Isaiah.

But our immediate concern is not with the unity of Isaiah but with the dating of the Deutero-Isaiah, since the charge against the Book of Mormon is that it quotes from that work, which did not exist at the time Lehi left Jerusalem. The dating of Deutero-Isaiah rests on three things: (1) the mention of Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28), who lived 200 years after Isaiah and long after Lehi; (2) the threats against Babylon (Isaiah 47:1, 48:14), which became the oppressor of Judah after the days of Isaiah; and (3) the general language and setting of the text, which suggest a historical background commonly associated with a later period than that of Isaiah.

The late date of Deutero-Isaiah is one of those things that have been taken for granted by everybody for years, so that today it would be hard to find a scholar who could really explain it and impossible to find one who could prove it. The Isaiah question belongs preeminently to that “large part of the questions about the history and prehistory of the Old Testament” which, as J.A. Soggin has recently noted, “were formulated at a time when men possessed a different concept of historical study and a much smaller knowledge of the ancient East” than they do today. Until recently, Soggin observes, biblical scholarship was dominated by “the dream of the completely objective investigator, or at least by the belief that such an ideal was attainable.”

But with the passing of authoritarian absolutes in scholarship, the interpretation of Isaiah has become increasingly fluid. Thus, Eissfeldt can now tell us that references to Babylon do not necessarily date the chapters or even the verses in which they appear, the passages being so typically “Isaiah” that the names may well be later substitutions. He notes that Isaiah always preached the restoration as well as the destruction of Jerusalem (he named his first child “The Returning Remnant”), and that the threat and the promise go necessarily and inseparably together, so that the optimism of Deutero-Isaiah is no sign of separate authorship. He notes that there has never been any agreement among the experts as to what are “characteristically Isaiah” thoughts and expressions, and that while one group of scholars sees carefully planned organization and development in the arrangement of the writings, another cannot detect the slightest trace of either. Finally he concludes with pointing out that there is a very close overall resemblance among all the chapters of Isaiah.

The trouble with dating any part of Isaiah, as Eissfeldt points out, is that we have not the least really definite to go on; fixing dates or places with reference to “any religious or spiritual concepts is very uncertain. . . . All we have to go by is general impressions, and we must be satisfied at best with mere possibilities.” In the past, scholars have put great confidence in their ability to assign origins to documents on the evidence of the general language and setting of the text. A classic example is the impassioned utterance of Isaiah against the wicked nations, plainly the cry of an afflicted people to be avenged on their enemies, plainly an eschatological yearning that breathes the spirit of the exile, which therefore must have been written during the exile and by one of the exiles, long after Isaiah’s day. And so we can identify Deutero-Isaiah. But, as Eissfeldt now points out, there is no reason why the imprecations against the nations should not have been uttered against the Assyrian army and empire in Isaiah’s curse embracing as they did all the nations in their sinister host. Nor, as other scholars note, is there any reason why one must be an exile to write about the exile; how far can we trust the insight of the experts when each can tell us that it is obvious to him that the exile passages were written in Babylon (Volz), Palestine (Mowinckel), Egypt (Marti), or Lebanon (Duhm)?
The most telling dichotomy between Isaiah and Deutero-Isaiah in time is the emphasis of the latter on the apocalypse of bliss—the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the holy city and temple, as against the grim apocalypse of woe that prevails in earlier Isaiah. But again, we are now being reminded that the two conceptions always form an indivisible whole in the thinking of Isaiah—you can’t think of a gathering unless there has been a scattering and vice versa: they do not represent two different concepts of history at all, but one and the same doctrine that is basic to all the prophets and much older than Isaiah.

This is a thing that is being increasingly emphasized today in the light of comparative studies which show that the idea of a cyclic concept of things, of alternate periods of suffering and defeat followed by victory and prosperity, is attested very early in the Egyptian and Babylonian literature and seems to have been a fundamental part of the ritual patterns of the ancient East from very early times. Because the eschatological and apocalyptic element dominates in the later apocrypha, it was long assumed to be a later religious development, but the comparative study of ancient ritual texts and monuments and their discovery in constantly increasing numbers is definitely changing the picture.

Turning now to the Book of Mormon, we find that the most widely accepted of all the divisions of Isaiah is the three-fold classification, following Isaiah’s own designation, of the Words of Isaiah (ch. 1-35), the “Accounts” (Berichte, 36-39), and again the “Words” (40-66). That the titles are authentic is implied in the designation of sections of the Book of Mormon by their ancient titles as the Words of Mormon, “An account of the sons of Mosiah . . . according to the record of Alma,” and “the account of the people of Nephi . . . according to the record of Helaman.” This is the sort of complexity that scholars discover everywhere in Isaiah, where certain words may serve as key words or signatures, denoting the beginning or ending of an independent writing that has been inserted into the text. If anything, the Book of Mormon attests the busy reshuffling and reediting of separate pages of sacred writings that often go under the name of a single prophet.

It is further significant that the main passages from Isaiah quoted in the Book of Mormon are chapters 2-14 and 48-54. This corresponds surprisingly to the major divisions of Isaiah on which the scholars have most widely agreed as the original Isaiah collection and as the authentic Deutero-Isaiah. Why does Nephi, the passionate devotee, as he proclaims himself, of the writings of Isaiah, quote almost exclusively from these two blocks of those writings? Can it be that they represent what pretty well was the writing of Isaiah in Lehi’s time? The failure to quote from the first chapter, the most famous of all, suggests the theory of some scholars that that chapter is actually a general summary of the whole work and may have been added after. But we are playing the same game as the others, and it is time to return to firmer ground.