
ISAIAH 48-55

Lesson 27, Old Testament, Adult Religion Class, Tuesday, 13 March 2012

Study Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Chapters 48-55 of Isaiah have one thing in common: they are all quoted in the Book of Mormon. However, unlike the other big block of Isaiah chapters, which are quoted by Nephi in 2 Nephi 12-24 (Isaiah 2-12), these chapters are quoted by four different people in one or two chapter pieces, as shown below:

Isaiah	Book of Mormon	Person Quoting
48	1 Nephi 20	Nephi
49	1 Nephi 21; 2 Nephi 6:6-7, 16-18	Nephi; Jacob
50	2 Nephi 7	Jacob
51	2 Nephi 8	Jacob
52	2 Nephi 8:24-25; 3 Nephi 16:18-20; 20:32-45	Jacob; Jesus
53	Mosiah 14	Abinadi
54	3 Nephi 22	Jesus

In addition, single or small groups of verses were quoted or paraphrased in several other locations in the Book of Mormon for these chapters:

Isaiah	Book of Mormon
49:22-23	1 Nephi 22:6, 8b
49:22-23	2 Nephi 6:6-7
49:23a	2 Nephi 10:9a

49:24-26	2 Nephi 6:16-18
52:1	Moroni 10:31a
52:1-2	Moroni 10:31
52:1-3, 6-7, 11-15	3 Nephi 20:36-45
52:7	1 Nephi 13:37b
52:7	Mosiah 15:14-18
52:7-10	Mosiah 12:21-24
52:8-10	Mosiah 15:29-31
52:10	1 Nephi 22:10-11
52:11-12	3 Nephi 21:29
52:13-15	3 Nephi 21:8-10
53:7	Mosiah 15:6b
53:8, 10	Mosiah 15:8
54:8, 10	Mosiah 15:10-11
54:2b	Moroni 10:31a
55:1	2 Nephi 26:25b
55:1-2	2 Nephi 9:50-51

The beauty of these chapters has to do with the majesty of the content. Three of the four 'servant songs' are in these chapters, the most majestic of which is Isaiah 52-53. Thus a strong message is the covenant between God and Israel and how the Lord will redeem his people and give them great blessings in the last days.

OUTLINE

Isaiah can be broken into eight sections:

1. Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (1-12)
2. Judgment on Other Nations (13-23)
3. Redemption of Israel (24-27)
4. Trust in God, Not Nations (28-35)
5. Historical Recitation (36-39)
6. The Return from Captivity (40-47)
7. The Suffering Servant (48-55)
8. Future Blessings (56-66)

This is an outline for chapters 48-55:

1. The Covenant With Israel (48-49)
2. The Redemption of Israel (50-51)
3. The Redeemer of Israel (52-53)
4. Zion in the Last Days (54)
5. Seek the Lord (55)

THE COVENANT WITH ISRAEL (48-49)

INTRODUCTION

Turning to 1 Nephi 19, we see that Nephi was quoting from the prophets Zenock, Neum, and Zenos about the suffering of Christ, his rejection by the Jews, and their future restoration. Then, in order to persuade his people (and us!) to more fully believe in Christ (1 Nephi 19:22-23), he quoted from two chapters in Isaiah. This is actually the first time that Nephi quoted a large section from Isaiah (he had previously quoted a few individual verses), and thus the first time that the Old Testament prophet was quoted at length in the Book of Mormon.

Isaiah 48-49 is about the waywardness of ancient Israel and their disloyalty to the Redeemer. So how do they help him achieve his goal of getting us to more fully believe in Christ? Because these chapters are also an invitation to come back to the covenant. The two chapters are essentially a condensed version of Deuteronomy, where Moses was trying to establish the covenant with his people just after arriving in the Promised Land. Isaiah followed that pattern in these chapters with the kingdom of Judah which had just survived the great Assyrian attack. Likewise, Nephi then wanted to establish the covenant with his people as they reached the New World, so he picked up on Isaiah's message and included it in his record.

Elements of a covenant include: Introduction of the parties; historical context; conditions/stipulations; ordinances/rights; consequences of disobeying the covenant; witnesses; perpetuation/continuation. All of these elements are found in chapters 48-49.

A STUBBORN COVENANT PEOPLE (48:1-15)

48:1 **the waters of Judah**. Scholars believe this means the house of Judah (waters referring to the birth). In preparing the 1840 edition of the Book of

Mormon, Joseph Smith added a clarifying phrase after this in parentheses: "(or out of the waters of baptism)." It appears that he was only adding a commentary or interpretation, and not implying that this phrase was originally in Isaiah. In fact, later editions dropped this phrase, as it wasn't in the original Book of Mormon or the manuscripts. However, in preparing the 1920 edition, the committee determined not only to insert the phrase, but to drop the parentheses, making it look like part of the text. But not even the JST includes this reference to baptism, so we should see it as Joseph Smith's inspired interpretation of the phrase "the waters of Judah" and not as part of Isaiah's book (see Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, Part 1, pp. 426-428).

48:2 **they call themselves of the holy city**. The context and the Book of Mormon's "nevertheless" make it clear that these are hypocritical actions; they claim to be the Lord's people and rely on the Lord, but they are not saying this "in truth" (48:1); "they do not stay themselves [rely] upon the God of Israel (1 Nephi 20:2).

48:3 **I have declared the former things**. The Lord told Israel the things that were going to happen so that later they could not attribute those events to idols, chance, or anything but him.

48:6 **I have shewed thee new things**. The Lord has showed Israel things that could not be known by any method but revelation from him—new and hidden things unknown to any man.

48:10 **I have refined thee**. God still chooses Israel but will refine and purify her through afflictions and trials.

48:12 **I am the first, I also am the last**. God is eternal, the creator of all things. This is the third time the Lord is referred to by these titles (also 41:4 and 44:6). The next time this phrase is applied to the Lord is Revelation 1:11 where the Lord adds by way

of poetic parallelism “Alpha and Omega,” the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.

48:14 **The Lord hath loved him.** First the Lord certified his servant (14-15) then the servant declared his authority (15) and gave his message (16-22). The servant could be Isaiah, Jesus, a collection of prophets sent to Israel—or all of the above.

BLESSINGS GOD DESIRED FOR ISRAEL
(48:16-19)

48:16 **the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me.** The prophet declares his authority, called by the Lord himself and sent by the Spirit of the Lord.

48:17 **I am the Lord thy God.** To be clear about who is behind the prophet’s authority, he quotes the Lord declaring who he is—YHWH, the God of Israel, who patiently has taught and lead Israel for hundreds of years.

48:18 **as a river . . . the waves of the sea.** See D&C 121:46 where great blessings flow (also D&C 121:33 where water is a metaphor tied to blessings).

48:19 **Thy seed also had been as the sand.** Verses 18-19 list blessings that Israel could have had, had they been faithful. The implication, however, is that these blessings are still available if they return to the Lord.

How have you learned that God desires to give us blessings that we ‘leave on the table’ because we are not ready or worthy to receive them?

SONG OF THE FLIGHT FROM BABYLON
(48:20-22)

48:20 **God ye forth of Babylon.** We are commanded to flee Babylon, to leave the world. Just as he cared for Israel when leaving Egypt, he will care for modern Israel.

48:20 **The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob.** In spite of their obstinacy recorded at the beginning of the chapter, the call to leave the world and be redeemed—freed from prison and bondage—remains in force.

48:21 **he led them through the deserts.** Referring to the Exodus from Egypt, Isaiah reminded his listeners how the Lord had miraculously given their ancestors water in the desert. Likewise, as we leave Babylon behind and move into the desert of discipleship, we must have faith that the Lord will provide, since are his redeemed people.

48:22 **no peace . . . unto the wicked.** In contrast to the peace promised in verse 18, the wicked have no peace, and this in spite of all that the Lord has done (see 1 Nephi 20:22).

SONG OF THE LORD’S SERVANT (49:1-7)

This is the second of four ‘servant songs’ in Isaiah (42:1-9; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). What is unique about this one is the seeming conversation going on between two ‘servants.’ One is the Israel of Isaiah’s day where the Assyrians are victorious and things seem bleak, the other the Israel of the future where God has triumphed and Israel is restored, almost like a traveler from the future coming back to assure his past self that everything will turn out okay. In this case, though, it’s the prophet’s vision of the future that results in the assurance of victory. 1-3 is the future; 4 is the past; 5-7 is the future.

All these servant songs have multiple applications. The servant can be Israel as a whole, certain prophets, or others. This is because, in the end, all are types of Christ—the ultimate willing slave of God who gave up everything because his Father asked it of him.

49:1 **Listen, O isles.** 1 Nephi 21:1 more than doubles the size of this verse with a substantial statement clarifying that the audience of the following verses is the broken off and scattered branches of Israel; they are the ones that need to listen to the servant.

49:1 **called me from the womb.** This is another Old Testament reference to the pre-existence and the doctrine of foreordination.

49:2 **sharp sword.** This metaphor represents the power of the word of God (see Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:16; 2:12. The sword is two-edged, meaning it can cut both ways). Compare this also to the arrow metaphor below, something in God's hand that is sent forth with power.

49:2 **polished shaft.** This imagery was used by Joseph Smith when he said, speaking of his persecutions, "Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 304.).

49:4 **laboured in vain.** Sometimes we feel this way, perhaps with family members, Church callings, jobs, or other activities of life. Isaiah's words can give us hope: "my work [is] with my God."

49:6 **a light to the Gentiles.** The Lord declares that it is a simple thing for him to save Israel and restore them to their covenant status in the last days. Israel must also become a beacon to the whole world. The point of being an example is not just to declare how great the Lord's blessings are but to "be my salvation unto the end of the earth."

ISRAEL'S RETURN IN THE LAST DAYS (49:8-12)

49:8 **in a day of salvation have I helped thee.** The "day of salvation" is the day of Jesus, since his name means salvation. In that day and through his Atonement, the Lord hears our pleas.

49:8 **a covenant of the people.** The Book of Mormon adds that the servant (from verses 1-7) is the one who brings the covenant

49:8 **establish the earth.** Better translated as 'restore the land.' Likewise, the next phrase is better rendered 'allot the desolate inheritances.'

49:12 **Sinim.** In modern Hebrew, this is the word for the Chinese, but in ancient Israel it simply means 'east.' South is probably 'far,' thus bringing in all four directions poetically.

THE LORD COMFORTS HIS RETURNING CHILDREN (49:13-26)

49:13 **Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth.** Having established his great promises, the Lord calls upon heaven and earth to rejoice.

49:14 **The Lord hath forsaken me.** In spite of the great promises, Israel is stuck in the past and having a 'pity party,' accusing the Lord of forgetting about her.

49:16 **graven thee upon the palms of my hands.** Jesus bears the sign of his love and sacrifice for us in his hands; see 3 Nephi 11:13-14.

49:16 **thy walls are continually before me.** Jesus is ever watching over his people so that the city is always in his view.

49:17 **Thy children shall make haste.** Israel will move back into the land, moving out their enemies.

49:20 **Who hath begotten me these.** Not only do the Gentiles help in Israel's return, but the Gentiles become the new sons and daughters of Israel, replacing those lost to apostasy and destruction.

49:23 **nursing fathers.** Should be translated 'foster fathers' who care for Israel as if they were their own, just as the nursing mothers do.

49:24 **lawful captive delivered.** 1QIsa^a of the Dead Sea Scrolls adds at the end of this verse, "...from a tyrant," making the poetry complete.

49:25 **captives of the mighty.** See the version in 2 Nephi 6:17-18, which matches the JST version of this verse (interestingly, 1 Nephi 21:25 matches the KJV). In war, the conquered people were lawfully the possession of the victors. But God will override that 'law' and redeem them by his own power, so that all will know he is God.

49:26 **I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer.** Because the Lord will do these great works in

Israel's behalf, restoring them to their lands with the assistance of the Gentiles, everyone will be compelled to acknowledge that the God of Israel is indeed powerful and "the mighty One." Sadly, even though this has happened, such as acknowledgement has not yet happened but we can be assured it will.

How can Isaiah's words provide comfort at a time when you might feel distant from or neglected by the Lord?

THE REDEMPTION OF ISRAEL (50-51)

INTRODUCTION

These two chapters are quoted in 2 Nephi 7-8 (but not noted in Isaiah chapter headings, so write it in) by Jacob in a speech that Nephi recorded. The entire speech is 2 Nephi 6-10, and directly precedes Nephi's long quotation of 13 chapters of Isaiah. Jacob actually begins quoting Isaiah in 2 Nephi 6 by pulling in a few verses from Isaiah 49 (2 Nephi 6:6-7 is Isaiah 49:22-23 and 2 Nephi 6:16-18 is Isaiah 49:24-26). In other words, he read part of the brass plates, commented on those verses, then started reading in earnest, beginning at Isaiah 49:24. Orson Pratt decided to split the Book of Mormon chapters to match the Isaiah chapters in the Bible, but it's all one speech for Jacob.

With our current chapter breaks, we might ask, why would Jacob quote two full chapters plus the four preceding verses and the two verses following? Why not just end on the chapter breaks. If Joseph Smith was the author of the Book of Mormon, that would certainly make more sense than grabbing a small number of verses at either end.

It is significant that Jacob's source, the brass plates, did not have chapters and verses. It probably did have breaks in the text however, giving indications of section breaks. The plates Joseph Smith translated apparently had such breaks, since Joseph Smith would indicate the start of a new chapter or book to his scribe before he began translating the text. We have no texts of Isaiah as old as that on the brass plates, but the oldest text we do have (the Great Isaiah scroll, or 1QIsa^a, and the Septuagint or ancient Greek translation) show clear breaks at the same locations where Jacob starts and stops. Additionally,

the end of chapter 51 and the first part of 52 have no break in these sources, so if Jacob was reading from a similar record, he would have very naturally carried on reading two verses into chapter 52. To be specific, between Isaiah 49:22 and 52:2, there are twelve major paragraph section (with several more minor breaks), including a major break after 52:2, dividing the content into thought segments that correspond to these sections of our modern Isaiah:

- 49:22-26
- 50:1-3
- 50:4-11
- 51:1-3
- 51:4-6a
- 51:6b
- 51:7-8
- 51:9-11
- 51:12-13
- 51:14
- 51:15-16
- 51:17 – 52:6

Thus the starting and stopping places Jacob employed make little sense in Joseph Smith's 1828 KJV Bible but match perfectly with the oldest manuscripts we have of Isaiah, providing yet another testimony that Joseph Smith was not creating something from his own imagination but was translating an ancient record, just as he said.

The imagery of marriage is used in many places in the scriptures, such as Ezekiel 16 or the book of Hosea. Isaiah 50 is yet another place that uses this same metaphor. In the Old Testament, the bride is Israel. In the New Testament and in our day, the

Church is the bride (Revelation 19:6-9; D&C 58:8-11).

ISRAEL IS FAITHLESS, DESPITE GOD'S POWER (50:1-3)

50:1 **ye sold yourselves**. Though legally the husband/father was empowered to sell his wife and children or to divorce his wife under certain circumstances with a divorce decree, the Lord here pointed out that he had never done this with Israel. He took them as his bride and the marriage was still in force (hence the invitation to produce documentation about a divorce, which cannot be done because there isn't one), even though Israel has greatly sinned.

PROPHECIES OF THE MESSIAH (50:4-11)

50:4-9 is the third servant song (see 49:1-12 above). Though it certainly can apply to Israel's suffering in the Diaspora, it is also tied directly to Jesus' suffering in his crucifixion. The servant stands in contrast to the sins of Israel just discussed: where no man would listen, the servant receives the Lord's word; where Israel doubted God's love, the servant is confident of his help; Israel suffered for their iniquities, and the servant suffers because of his obedience; the Lord accused Israel of sin, but the servant is innocent of all charges.

50:4 **speak a word in season**. Compare 2 Nephi 7:4, where it is clear that the group to whom the Lord is speaking through his servant is covenant Israel. They are the ones who are weary.

50:4 **to hear as the learned**. When Jesus taught the people, they wondered at his knowledge, asking, "How knowesth this man letters, having never learned?" (John 7:15). Isaiah said that the servant will "listen as a disciple" (NASB), meaning he will submit himself to the master teacher in order to achieve "the tongue of the learned."

50:5 **I was not rebellious**. The servant is submissive, listening carefully to and obeying the Lord's words.

50:6 **gave my back to the smiters**. Verse 6 describes the servant's experience—flogging, having hair

pulled out of his face, shame, and spitting (compare 1 Nephi 19:9). This matches Jesus' experience during his trial and crucifixion, during which he stood firm, faced his accusers, and made clear his innocence.

50:8 **let us stand together**. In our legal system as in theirs, a victim has the right to face his accuser and the two stand together to hear the decision.

50:11 **walk in the light of your fire**. Men doing their own will and relying on their own power are compared to those trying to start a fire and see where they are going using only small sparks (compare D&C 1:16).

The third servant song focuses on the servant's great knowledge and abilities yet total willingness to suffer in behalf of the people. How does this section help you understand the angel's question to Nephi, "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" (1 Nephi 11:16)?

A CALL TO SALVATION (51:1-8)

A little more positive than chapter 50, chapter 51 continues the thoughts of 50, with the Lord inviting us to follow his commandments and remember his covenants. It includes some concrete things Israel (and we) can do to get the blessings promised to the obedient.

51:1 **Hearken**. This is *shema*, a call to hear and obey. The call is repeated and thus emphasized in verses 4 and 7.

51:1 **look**. The other verb repeated in the chapter is "look," which means to look to or pay attention to. It is repeated in verses 2 and 6, with a similar thought starting verse 6: "Lift up your eyes."

51:1-2 **rock . . . pit . . . Abraham . . . Sarah**. Though the rock metaphor is often symbolic of Jesus, in this

case, Isaiah seems to be making the comparison to Abraham and Sarah—the foundation of the house of Israel. The covenants made with Abraham apply to all their descendants—and to those adopted into his family—and we can look to them both as examples of faithfulness. Thus all the families of the earth are blessed through Abraham, and Christians, Muslims, and Jews all claim Abraham as their father.

51:3 **the Lord shall comfort Zion.** There is both a physical and spiritual restoration of the house of Israel. The waste places, destroyed from war and neglect, will be miraculously restored. But joy, gladness, and thanksgiving will also be there as they recognize the grace of God in the results.

51:4 **judgment.** Almost always in the Old Testament, “judgment” should be translated ‘justice.’ Thus the Lord’s fairness will be a light to the people that will beckon them forward.

51:5 **righteousness . . . salvation.** These are great names for the Savior and reflect his mission and attributes—be our example and live a perfect life (“righteousness”), and deliver us from our enemies and bring us to the presence of God (“salvation”). The words are repeated in verses 6-8 for emphasis.

51:7 **in whose heart is my law.** “. . . with the point of a diamond, it is graven upon the table of their heart” (Jeremiah 17:1). The “heart” represented the inner person, the soul, the mind and knowledge and will.

What kinds of things have you done that have helped make the laws of God etched on your heart?

ISRAEL APPEALS AND THE LORD ANSWERS (51:9-16)

These verses, especially 11 and 16, are the summary verses of the great blessings in these chapters. This

section and the next are a dialogue between Israel and the Lord; first Israel asks the Lord to help them (9-11), then the Lord answers by reminding Israel of his great power and calling on them to turn to him (51:9 – 52:2).

51:9 **Awake, awake.** This phrase is repeated three times in these passages (51:9; 51:17; 52:1). This first one is a call from the people for the Lord to awake and show his power. But the other two times, the phrase is a reverse call from the Lord to his people to awaken from their spiritual slumber and turn from their sins. That double-use of the phrase demonstrates that it is not the Lord that is asleep, but us, for he turns it back and uses it twice to call us to join him in his great work.

51:11 **everlasting joy.** The Book of Mormon adds, “...and holiness shall be upon their heads” (2 Nephi 8:11). To be holy is to be consecrated for a sacred purpose through a covenant. The joy comes from the sanctification that Israel receives from its Redeemer as it returns to its covenant.

51:16 **Thou art my people.** The beautiful imagery of this verse shows the tender love God has for his people—he puts his words in their mouths, covers them from the sun in the shadow of his hand, and created the heavens and the earth just for their benefit.

GOD’S WRATH ON JERUSALEM (51:17-23)

51:17 **Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem.** The Lord’s call for Israel to wake up (see 51:1 above).

51:17 **and wrung them out.** Or, ‘drank it all.’ Israel has known the full punishment of the Lord, brought on by their disobedience and sin.

51:19 **These two things are come unto thee.** The Book of Mormon and JST change “things” to “sons” (notice the word “things” is in italics, so while most interpret the “two” as referring to destructions, there is nothing wrong with linking it to “sons” referenced twice in the previous verse). A reference to the two sons is also added in verse 20. This should be compared to Revelation 11:3-12 which has its fulfillment in the last days. But in the spirit of likening scripture to himself, did Jacob see another

fulfillment of this in his and Nephi's preaching to their people? 2 Nephi 11:2-3 perhaps opens the

possibility of that interpretation.

THE REDEEMER OF ISRAEL (52-53)

INTRODUCTION

No chapter of Isaiah is more quoted than chapter 52; it is quoted or paraphrased at least thirteen times in the Book of Mormon, including when the Savior quoted it as he visited the Nephites (3 Nephi 20-21). It is the subject of a section of the Doctrine & Covenants (113). It is perhaps one of the scriptures Jesus quoted to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27). It has a critical message about the redemption and Redeemer of Israel. It is a message that should cause us to "rejoice, and lift up [our] heads forever, because of the blessings which the Lord God shall bestow upon your children" (2 Nephi 9:3).

DELIVERANCE OF CAPTIVE ISRAEL (52:1-12)

52:1 **Put on thy strength.** Joseph Smith was asked the meaning of this phrase by Elias Higbee. The inspired response is in D&C 113:8 – "He [Isaiah] had reference to those whom God should call in the last days, who should hold the power of priesthood to bring again Zion, and the redemption of Israel; and to put on her strength is to put on the authority of the priesthood, which she, Zion, has a right to by lineage, also to return to that power which she had lost."

52:2 **arise, and sit down.** Sounds like the prophet can't make up his mind, but the call is to the slave Israel to arise from a prostrate position and instead take a seat next to the king.

52:2 **loose thyself from the bands of thy neck.** In section 113, the Prophet interpreted this phrase as well: "We are to understand that the scattered remnants are exhorted to return to the Lord from whence they have fallen; which if they do, the promise of the Lord is that he will speak to them, or give them revelation. See the 6th, 7th, and 8th verses. The bands of her neck are the curses of God

upon her, or the remnants of Israel in their scattered condition among the Gentiles" (D&C 113:10).

52:3 **Ye have sold yourselves for nought.**

Continuing the concept from 50:1, Isaiah reminded Israel that they sold themselves into slavery by their sins and it gained them nothing. But now he boldly declared that they shall be redeemed—brought out of their self-inflicted slavery—*without* money. It is not with silver or gold that they are redeemed, but by his blood and body, his life.

52:7 **How beautiful upon the mountains.** The priests of Noah quoted Isaiah 52:7-10 to Abinadi, asking him about their meaning (likely to trap him). Abinadi then used the idea of beautiful feet several times in his discourse to Noah and his court (see Mosiah 15:14-18). Since mountains are often associated with God's house, this could be interpreted: 'How beautiful in the temple are the feet of those bringing the good news of the gospel to the world.' The feet are beautiful because they are carrying the person with the "good tidings."

52:7 **beautiful.** In Hebrew this is *na'vû*, and it is from this verse that Joseph Smith got the name for his city, Nauvoo.

52:7 **salvation.** This is the Hebrew *yešû'ah*, which becomes the name of the son of Mary in mortality. In Greek it became *Iesus*, which then became Jesus in English.

52:9 **The Lord hath comforted his people.** Comfort and peace come through the Atonement of Christ, as the people of Jerusalem are redeemed.

52:10 **made bare his holy arm.** To bare your arm is to prepare for battle (so the sword arm is free). Here the Lord prepares to battle for his people.

52:10 **see the salvation of our God.** Or, 'see the *yeshua* of our God.' All will see the son of God as who he really is—the salvation of God's people.

52:11 ***be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.*** The vessels are the items in the temple, with a call to all priesthood holders to cleanse themselves from their own sins and the sins of the world.

52:12 ***go before you . . . be your rearward.*** Compare D&C 49:27 and 84:88. There is no need for an army because the Lord will be the protection on all sides of his people.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT (52:13 – 53:12)

Though there is a chapter break in our modern text in the middle of this section, these verses are merely the beginning of the fourth and final Servant Song that continues through the end of chapter 53. It provides a marvelous and tragic image of the Savior's suffering and sacrifice. But the Lord himself also indicated a latter-day fulfillment when he told the Nephites that at least things from the first few verses would happen when the Book of Mormon came among the Gentiles and their own descendants (3 Nephi 20:43 - 21:7).

52:13 ***deal prudently.*** "See, my servant will act wisely" (NIV).

52:14 ***many were astonished at thee.*** 'Astonished' is the modern form of this verb, which can also mean to be appalled or stunned.

52:14 ***his visage was so marred.*** "his appearance was so disfigured" (NIV). The Atonement he carried out was greater than any other person could bear.

52:15 ***So shall he sprinkle many nations.*** In the JST, "sprinkle" is changed to "gather." This change is not in the Book of Mormon version (3 Nephi 20:45) but fits the context of the verse. However, the Hebrew word also carries the meaning of 'startle,' meaning that the Lord's work will surprise the nations of the world, such that kings will be speechless.

53:1 ***Who hath believed our report?*** John quoted this as applying to the people who heard and saw Jesus' miracles yet did not believe on him (John 12:37-38).

53:2 ***a tender plant.*** This refers to a young shoot that comes out when a plant first starts growing.

Jesus' youth was a time of learning and tutoring by the Father (Luke 2:40 and the JST additions to Matthew 2:23—see JST Appendix).

53:2 ***root out of dry ground.*** This is the root of a small plant that is desperately trying to find the waters of life in the parched earth of the apostate Judaism of Jesus' day.

53:2 ***no beauty that we should desire him.*** Not that Jesus wasn't good-looking but rather that he was just a mortal and not the great Messiah that first century Judaism had come to expect.

53:3 ***despised and rejected.*** Jesus was rejected by his own people (especially Luke 4:28-30). They "esteemed him not."

53:3 ***a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.*** Jesus knew sadness in his life and understood what it was to be mortal and subject to the pains and challenges of this existence.

53:4 ***borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.*** Matthew taught that Jesus did this by healing others around him (Matthew 8:14-17). But his greatest act of doing this was surely in Gethsemane and on the cross when he bore all "the pains and the sicknesses of his people" (Alma 7:11).

53:4 ***smitten of God.*** "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Galatians 3:13, quoting Deuteronomy 21:23).

53:5 ***wounded for our transgressions.*** "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities" (NASB).

53:5 ***the chastisement of our peace was upon him.*** "the punishment reconciling us fell on him" (NJB). This and other passages remind us of the Day of Atonement when the high priest ceremoniously put the sins of the people on the head of a goat and sent him away (Leviticus 16).

53:6 ***All we like sheep have gone astray.*** Sheep wander over the hill looking for anything to eat. They have no concept of staying on the safe, narrow path. So we act when we disobey God's commands or follow our own wills. (Funny aside: When I first heard Handel's Messiah performed, singing this

verse, I thought they were saying, ‘Oh, we like sheep.’ It made no real sense to my young mind—I wasn’t sure what that had to do with the Messiah—but I liked the tune and sang it many times. As a result, I came to like sheep, even though I later learned what they were really singing!

53:7-8 **as a lamb to the slaughter.** This was the scripture the eunuch was reading in his chariot when Philip found him (Acts 8:32-33). Notice the differences in the translation of the two. Philip’s version is from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. John refers to Christ as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8; see also 5:6, 12).

53:8 **who shall declare his generation?** Abinadi answered this question: “. . . that when his soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed” (Mosiah 15:10). See also 53:10.

53:9 **he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.** In Isaiah, the “wicked” and the “rich” were often the same people, so the sinless servant finds his body placed in a rich person’s tomb by wicked (meaning, sinful) people.

53:10 **it pleased the Lord to bruise him.** “Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him” (NIV). God took no pleasure in hurting his servant but did find it necessary for a greater purpose.

53:12 **poured out his soul unto death.** A jar is poured out when it is tipped over and all the contents rush out. Jesus voluntarily gave his soul for all of us, pouring it out on the ground with his blood that fell in Gethsemane as he bled from every pore (Luke 22:44; D&C 19:18) and on the cross as blood drained from his wounds. In the end, it declared, “It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost” (John 19:30).

52:12 **made intercession for the transgressors.** There is no greater statement that the servant, the Messiah, is also the Redeemer and Savior. Some have seen this chapter as an image of just the house of Israel, but this wording forces you to see the servant as someone who suffers in our behalf. That is never the role of Israel, but it is the role of the suffering Messiah.

The suffering servant of Isaiah 52-53 is one of the most powerful prophecies of Christ in scripture. How have the four servant songs touched your heart to help you better appreciate the first coming of Jesus Christ?

ZION IN THE LAST DAYS (54)

INTRODUCTION

Quoted by the Savior in 3 Nephi 22, he also quoted Isaiah 52, but interestingly skipped 53. This was the last great sermon of the Lord to the Nephites and he quoted this chapter as a capstone, then gave a powerful commandment in 3 Nephi 23:1-3.

Jesus set up his quotation of Isaiah 54 by saying that if people would repent, he would establish his church among them, recall scattered Israel, build the New Jerusalem, and preach the gospel “among all the dispersed of my people” (3 Nephi 21:22-29). Then he concluded: “And then shall that which is written

come to pass:” (3 Nephi 22:1), placing Isaiah 54 squarely in the last days.

ZION SHALL BE ESTABLISHED (54:1-3)

54:1 **more are the children of the desolate.** A barren woman had no children, but in the last days, this woman with no children shall miraculously have more than the woman who could bare them. Perhaps this reference brought to mind some of the barren women in scripture who ended up with great posterity and blessings, such as Sarah, Rachel, or Hannah. Such women are all symbolic of apostate

Israel that had no righteous sons or daughters but in the last days will have more than can be imagined.

54:2 **Enlarge the place of their tent.** In the ancient world, it was the woman's job to set up the tent and maintain it. In the metaphor of Isaiah, the woman is Israel/the Church. Thus the Church is told to enlarge the tent as many more children are going to be gathered into it, especially the Gentiles (who are often scattered Israel anyway, but they don't know it until they are gathered). It is from this verse that we get the name "stake."

GOD'S EVERLASTING KINDNESS (54:4-10)

54:5 **For thy Maker is thine husband.** Lest we miss the metaphor, Isaiah is clear that Israel is the bride and the Lord is the husband.

54:5 **The God of the whole earth.** The Lord is not just a local God or the God of the Hebrews, but is God over the entire earth and all the people on it (see also 3 Nephi 11:14).

54:7-8 **For a small moment have I forsaken thee.** To scattered Israel, it may seem like a long time that the Lord hid his face, but one day all will acknowledge that it was only for "a small moment" that they felt that way because ultimately "with great mercies" and "everlasting kindness" the Lord will gather them in and richly bless them.

54:10 **my kindness shall not depart from thee.** Like the eternal covenant the Lord made with Noah (54:9; see Genesis 9:9-17), the Lord likewise promises that he will never again remove "the covenant of my peace."

THE NEW JERUSALEM (54:11-17)

This section portrays the beauty and divine protection of Millennial Zion. Though enemies arise, the Lord has even created them, and will protect Israel from them.

54:11 **I will lay thy stones with fair colours.** Revelation 21:10-20 speaks of "holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" as having a foundation of precious stones, gates of pearls, and streets of gold, similar to Isaiah's vision here.

54:13 **all thy children shall be taught of the Lord.** Jesus quoted this phrase in John 6:45, saying that every person who had learned of the Father would come to him. In the Millennial day, all will be taught directly by the Lord and know truth from the source.

54:15 **whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall.** The Lord will protect his people from all their enemies in that day.

54:17 **No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.** The Lord quoted this to the young Church in 1831—see D&C 71:9.

SEEK THE LORD (55)

INTRODUCTION

This short chapter is an invitation to seek the Lord, to drink of his living waters without cost, to know and trust him and find joy in his blessings.

COME TO LIVING WATERS (55:1-5)

55:1-2 These first two verses were quoted in Jacob 9:50-51 and are the last Isaiah verses quoted in the Book of Mormon (speaking of Isaiah's text, not the Book of Mormon chronology). Jacob quoted/commented on them, changing them from a question to a call to action.

55:1 **Ho.** A Hebrew word that is to get our attention. Today, we might say, 'Hey, pay attention!'

55:1 **he that hath no money.** How can we buy something with no money? Why doesn't it cost anything? Because the Savior has already paid the full price. He purchased this great feast for us through the Atonement, and now invites us to his table.

55:3 **sure mercies of David.** Refers to the resurrection, a promise that we all will enjoy, just as David will, even though he committed serious sins (see Psalm 16:10 and Acts 13:34).

55:4 **given him for a witness.** Christ is our witness of God’s love and also our leader and commander when we come to him.

55:5 **shall run unto thee.** Non-Israelites will recognize God’s power and “run unto thee [Israel].” People will come with great urgency into the Church as they see its power to save. But first, we have to “call a nation,” and open our mouths that they might know the message and be invited to come unto Christ.

GOD IS GREATER THAN MAN (55:6-13)

55:6 **Seek ye the Lord.** Now that we have been taught about the free gift, we are told how to receive it:

- Seek the Lord (6)
- Call upon him (6)
- Forsake wicked ways (7)
- Forsake wicked thoughts (7)
- Return unto God (7)

55:7 **he will abundantly pardon.** This is the true God of the Old Testament, an image that many miss if they focus on the judgment and punishment scriptures. As Isaiah shows, the Lord is also merciful and forgiving.

55:8 **my thoughts are not your thoughts.** Our thoughts are doubtful, his are certain. Our thoughts

are mundane, his are eternal. Our ways are sinful, his are perfect.

55:10 **as the rain cometh down.** Alluding to verse 8 (my ways are not your ways), the Lord sends three things down from heaven: water (verse 10), the word of God (verse 11), and finally us (verse 12). All three are to bless the world both temporally and spiritually.

55:11 **it shall not return unto me void.** In the creation accounts in Genesis, God speaks, and it is done (e.g., Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14). So here the Lord assures us that when he speaks, it is accomplished. We can count on him. The metaphor is deeper when we consider that “my word” is later used as a symbol for Christ (John 1:1).

55:12 **hill shall break forth.** The Lord’s work is such a great triumph that even the earth itself will rejoice, with mountains and hills singing and trees clapping.

What have you done in your life that has helped you ‘seek the Lord while he may be found’ and feel his greatness and his love for you?

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