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# ISAIAH'S MESSAGES FOR OUR DAY

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## INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH

This document is divided into three parts to coincide with some fairly natural divisions in the book of Isaiah itself. In this first section, the focus is on the first 23 chapters and the themes of sin and punishment. Though these are not the only topics in these chapters, by any means, they are dominant ones and are less emphasized in subsequent chapters. In the second section, we'll cover chapters 24-47 with a focus on the concepts of atonement and redemption. Finally, in the third section, we'll go through chapters 48-66 and talk about the suffering servant portrayed there and sanctification.

I'd like to start with a few words about the overall book. Though we are strongly commanded in the scriptures to search and study Isaiah, many find the book quite challenging. There are a number of reasons for this, and two scriptural passages about Isaiah in the Book of Mormon provide seven important things to remember that can help us better understand Isaiah: 3 Nephi 23:1-3 and 2 Nephi 25:1, 4-6.

And now, behold, I say unto you, that 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. For surely he spake as touching **all things concerning my people which are of the house of Israel**; therefore it must needs be that he must speak **also to the Gentiles**. And all things that he spake **have been and shall be**, even according to the words which he spake (3 Nephi 23:1-3).

Now I, Nephi, do speak somewhat concerning the words which I have written, which have been spoken by the mouth of Isaiah. For behold, Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of my people to understand; for they know not concerning **the manner of prophesying among the Jews**....Wherefore, hearken, O my people, which are of the house of Israel, and give ear unto my words; for because the words of Isaiah are not plain unto you, nevertheless they are plain unto all those that are **filled with the spirit of prophecy**. But I give unto you a prophecy, according to the spirit which is in me; wherefore I shall prophesy according to the plainness which hath been with me from the time that I came out from Jerusalem with my father; for behold, my soul delighteth in plainness unto my people, that they may learn. Yea, and my soul delighteth in the words of Isaiah, for I came out from Jerusalem, and mine eyes hath beheld **the things of the Jews**, and I know that the Jews do understand **the things of the prophets**, and there is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them, save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews. But behold, I, Nephi, have not taught my children after the manner of the Jews; but behold, I, of myself, have dwelt at Jerusalem, wherefore I know concerning **the regions round about**; and I have made mention unto my children concerning **the judgments of God**, which hath come to

pass among the Jews, unto my children, according to all that which Isaiah hath spoken, and I do not write them (2 Nephi 25:1, 4-6).

1. **“Search these things diligently”** (3 Nephi 23:1). So commanded the Savior to the Nephites at the Bountiful temple. Diligent searching includes several efforts, such as:
  - a. Careful and consistent reading, learning line upon line. It takes about 4 hours to read Isaiah straight through, like a novel. Do it a few times and that alone will increase your understanding as you see the flow of the story, the patterns, the repetitions of words and phrases, and more.
  - b. Searching related scriptures (similar terms, topics, cross references, etc.).
  - c. Use of language tools and other translations, including the Dead Sea Scrolls.
  - d. Comparison with the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith Translation versions of Isaiah’s words.
2. Be **“filled with the Spirit of prophecy”** (2 Nephi 25:4). Revelation 19:10 says “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” The sons of Mosiah had the spirit of prophecy when they “searched the scriptures diligently” but also “had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting” (Alma 17:2-3). Pray and fast to understand Isaiah as you study him diligently.
3. Know **“the things of the Jews”** and **“the regions round about”** (2 Nephi 25:5-6). Nephi explained that he understood Isaiah because he had been raised in Jerusalem, while his people had not. To help them, he “taught [them] after the manner of the things of the Jews” (2 Nephi 25:5). We can use resources available to us today to learn more about Isaiah himself, the history and culture of his time, and the geography and lands of the region, all of which help us better grasp the meaning of the text.
4. Understand **“the manner of prophesying among the Jews”** (2 Nephi 25:1), which are **“the things of the prophets”** (2 Nephi 25:5). Like other prophetic books, Isaiah is brilliantly and beautifully structured, well-organized and carefully composed. It is mostly written in Hebrew poetic form, which is not like our poetry but relies on parallel phrases and structures that powerfully convey and point to truths. Understanding this poetry makes a huge difference in comprehending Isaiah’s messages (see Don Parry’s *Harmonizing Isaiah* for a good explanation of the poetry and a text that lays it out in the structure so it’s easier to see it). Isaiah is also rich in symbolism, some of which is better understood through knowing “the things of the Jews,” as mentioned above, but others are independent of culture and speak marvelously to us today.
5. Recognize that Isaiah’s theme is **“all things concerning my people”** (3 Nephi 23:2). Isaiah’s key messages all relate to Israel and God’s dealings with them, including the scattering and gathering of Israel, the last days and the millennial days, and the Savior of Israel, Jesus Christ. There are also repeating key phrases, like justice and righteousness, daughter of Zion, servant, and many more. Watching for these themes and phrases throughout his writings helps us see what he wants to say to us, modern Israel. Realize that in typical Near Eastern fashion, Isaiah does not write sequentially but does circle back to the same thoughts multiple times, developing them all together, side by side.

6. Realize that he spoke **“also to the Gentiles”** (3 Nephi 23:2). Isaiah’s audience was not just Israel. His messages reached outside of the borders of the local kingdoms to the whole world and today speak to the Gentiles as much as to Israel.
7. Know that his words **“have been and shall be”** (3 Nephi 23:3). Isaiah offers many prophecies that have more than one fulfillment. Many have two—something for his own day and something for the last days—but others have even more than two.

Finally, a word about authorship. Many scholars in the world today believe that there were two or perhaps even three authors of the book of Isaiah as we have it now. They cite differences in style and approach but most importantly mentions of things—like names of people not born for years after his death or events that were future to his own life—as evidence of someone writing well past Isaiah’s day. Many simply do not believe in prophecy, so they have no choice but to say prophetic sections were written in the day of which they speak, and not by Isaiah in about 700 B.C. Others just find the shift of emphasis compelling enough to push it ahead to another day.

Latter-day Saints may take issue with these conclusions because we *do* believe in prophetic vision and, more significantly, because of large quotations from Isaiah in the Book of Mormon. Because that book was pre-exilic (Lehi left Jerusalem before the Babylonian captivity), what it quotes probably was on the brass plates in about 600 B.C., only 100 years after Isaiah and well before scholars propose the later sections were written. The Book of Mormon quotes all or part of chapters 2-14, 28-29, 40, 45, 48-50, and 52-55, meaning that Isaiah’s writings up to at least chapter 55 were likely on the brass plates. It is interesting to note that there are no quotations of the last eleven chapters (56-66) in the Book of Mormon, a section some scholars attribute to a unique author. This does not require that they were written by a later hand but it does mean that the Book of Mormon does not negate the possibility.

## SECTION 1: SIN AND PUNISHMENT (ISAIAH 1-23)

### INTRODUCTION

An outline of chapters 1-23 is:

- Judah’s social sins and her potential for greatness (1-2)
- Judgment on Judah (3-4)
- The Lord’s vineyard (5)
- Isaiah’s call (6)
- Judah’s politics and the Messiah (7-12)
- Prophecies against the nations (13-23)

The early chapters of Isaiah speak to the sins of Israel and the coming punishment. However, the prophet was not just called to minister to Israel but took the word of the Lord to the nations all around. This is relevant to us in terms of the world around us as well as our own standing before God.

The flow of these chapters is important. Isaiah's call does not appear until chapter 6, which surely had to be the start of his experience as a prophet. So why have five chapters recorded before the call? It seems probable that they came first because the themes in these first chapters are at the heart of his message, so they lay the foundation for the entire book.

After the call are the most autobiographical chapters where we get a very detailed snapshot of the prophet and his day—and even a look at his family. This flows very naturally from the commission in chapter 6, making 6-12 a single historical unit.

This section concludes with messages to the nations all around Judah, covering eleven chapters in our text and extending Isaiah's message well beyond the borders of Israel and Judah into the entire world.

These chapters also represent the longest continuous quotation of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon—2 Nephi 12-24, quoting Isaiah 2-14. There are many differences in these sections between the Book of Mormon quotations and the KJV text of Isaiah—too many to go through here. But we'll note some of the changes as we go.

The important question to ask is, why would Nephi want to quote this long section of Isaiah to his people and to others who would read his record in a future day? Nephi gave these reasons:

1. "That [his people] might know the judgments of God, that they come upon all nations" (2 Nephi 25:3). Not only does Isaiah write compellingly about the judgments, but Nephi noted that many of these judgments "hath come to pass among the Jews...according to all that which Isaiah hath spoken" (2 Nephi 25:6).
2. That even though these judgments have come upon them, "they shall return again, and possess the land of Jerusalem; wherefore, they shall be restored again" (2 Nephi 25:11).
3. Because Isaiah's words "are of worth unto the children of men" and especially "of great worth unto [his own people] in the last days; for in that day shall they understand them; wherefore, for their good have I written them" (2 Nephi 25:8).
4. And finally, because he said, "my soul delighteth to prophesy concerning [Christ], for I have seen his day, and my heart doth magnify his holy name" (2 Nephi 25:13).

In short, Nephi quoted this section of Isaiah because it speaks of God's judgments (that had already happened just as Isaiah said) but also God's promises to Israel (which he was confident would happen, too), and he especially liked to write concerning the coming Messiah, making Isaiah's words that did the same thing of great worth. And he did it because he knew that in our day we'd understand it.

## JUDAH'S SOCIAL SINS AND HER POTENTIAL FOR GREATNESS (1-2)

Isaiah's message is centered upon the capital city of Jerusalem (48 times), also called Zion (46 times). It shows both the Jerusalem of his day—corrupt and full of sin—and Jerusalem as it can and will be—holy and sanctified. Thus the story of Jerusalem—the central player in the book—is a surrogate for the covenant people overall and the events that happen as the Lord executes his plan for the earth.

The book starts with a declaration in 1:1 that Isaiah's message comes from a vision, something that otherwise only Obadiah and Nahum say at the beginning of their books. At the beginning of chapter 2 (verse 1), it notes that Isaiah is writing "The word" that he "saw." (Micah starts that way, too: "The word of the Lord...which he saw," Micah 1:1). The word "saw" there is related to the word for vision in chapter one. Essentially, Isaiah receives the Lord's words in vision. These are words that Joseph Smith could have used to describe his Book of Mormon translation experience as well: he "saw" the words.

Isaiah's name in Hebrew is *Yesha-yahu*, meaning 'Yahweh (Jehovah) saves.' His very name is thus a declaration of his greatest message—yes, God will judge and God will punish, but ultimately God will save.

Chapter 1 summarizes the messages of the whole book of Isaiah. In fact, the superscriptions at the beginning of both chapters 1 and 2 hint that chapter 1 was added after the fact to capture those major messages in an introductory way, much like Section 1 of the Doctrine & Covenants was given specifically as an introduction to the book. Chapter 1 is a courtroom-like setting, with the Lord accusing Israel before the witnesses (the heavens and the earth in 1:2, because they were invoked as witnesses also in the making of the covenant in Deuteronomy 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1). Israel has two charges laid at her feet. The first is neglect of his law—the violation of the original covenant, outlined in verses 10-15. But Jerusalem's sins are not just violations of the Law of Moses; she is secondly and more significantly accused of social sins. Today we might think that means spending too much time on Facebook or something, but to Isaiah, social sins means neglecting orphans and widows and the oppressed (1:17, 23). This means that a person can keep all the Mosaic rituals perfectly and still be filthy through sin, by not caring for those in need (such sin makes all the sacrifices pointless—1:11, 13, 15). Note: The Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah adds missing phrase at the end of 15: "you fingers with iniquity," restoring the poetry and deepening the meaning of that and the next verse.

Given these sins, the beauty of the Lord's offering in the next verses is enhanced (1:16-18). In v. 18, the Lord returns to image of blood in v. 15 and promises that as bad as their sins are, their bloody hands can be made white and pure by doing the things in vv. 16-17.

Victor Ludlow points out that this chapter contains all the elements of the basics of the gospel—faith (vv. 2, 10, 17, 19), repentance (vv. 16-18, 27), baptism (v. 16), the Spirit (vv. 2, 10), and enduring to the end (vv. 4, 11, 17-19)—but using different (Hebrew) terms than we typically use today.

- Faith (2, 10, 17, 19): "hear," "give ear," "learn," "willing"
  - Commonly, "trust" or Heb *batach* (12:2; 14:32; 26:4; 36:7, 15; 50:10; 51:5; 57:13)
- Repentance (16-18, 27): "put away," "cease," "redeemed"
  - Commonly, "turn" or Heb *shuv* (1:4 [where they don't turn]; 31:6; 58:13; 59:20)
- Baptize (16): "wash," "make clean" (also 4:4; 52:11)
- The Spirit (2, 10): "spoken," "nourished," "brought up"
  - Commonly, "spirit" or Heb *ruach* (11:2; 26:9; 30:1; 32:15; 34:16; 36:16; 40:13; 42:1; 44:3; 48:16; 59:19, 21; 61:1; 63:10, 11, 14)

Chapter 2 starts (2:2-4) by showing Jerusalem as it will be—big and exalted among the nations, God present and leading the earth from his capital, with nations honoring and respecting Zion’s position. This mirrors the message of the whole book of Isaiah, which tells the story of how we move from our current state of sin (chapter 1) to our exalted state of perfection (chapter 2).

The transition happens in 1:24-31 (1:24-27, in KJV and NIV) where the Lord overcomes his enemies, wipes out sin, exalts those who are repentant, and destroys those who are sinful. No *man* can do this work—it is only by the power of God that it happens.

The name “Holy One of Israel” (first used in 1:4) is used 25 times in Isaiah (plus 5 more with just “Holy One”) but only 6 times in the rest of the OT. It’s one of Isaiah’s favorite names for God because his book is about holiness—a state of existence that comes because it’s a gift from the holy God. A holy God cannot tolerate or exist with sin and wickedness, so Isaiah shows how God will cleanse his people of their sins so in the end they can be with him. Fascinatingly, the same title appears 40 times in the Book of Mormon. All but two of these are either in the Isaiah quotations or in Nephi’s writings, who is clearly influenced by his favorite prophet and thus uses the name frequently himself. The only other person to use this title is the last of Jacob’s descendants to write on the plates, Amaleki, who lived during the time of the first Mosiah and his son, Benjamin, and who gave the plates to King Benjamin.

Isaiah is a book of dramatic reversals and of significant contrasts, for which these chapters are exemplary. He invoked these images to help us see both the plan and power of God to change us and our world in ways that man can barely imagine or is incapable of without God’s power.

## JUDGMENT ON JUDAH (3-4)

The judgment that falls on Jerusalem is illustrated in chapters 3-4. First, the Lord removes the ‘normal’ things that people expect—bread and water (3:1) and the seven typical leaders (3:2-3). In their place, he puts boys and babes to rule (3:4), but anarchy among men results (3:5-8, 12). Women who enjoy pleasures and finery will lose it all (3:13-24) and the picture is of a desolate city, barely surviving (3:25-4:1). The section ends with a beautiful image of Zion, the city of God, with bounteous crops, holy inhabitants, washed from sin and surrounded by the presence of God in the form of the cloud and smoke of Exodus, including a tent that protects them from sun and storm (4:2-6)

Embedded in these messages of doom and promises of greatness in the first four chapters are invitations, each starting with “Come”:

- 1:18 the willing and obedient are invited to come and be forgiven;
- 2:3 invites people to come to the temple and learn from the Lord;
- 2:5 Come, walk in the light of the Lord.

## THE LORD’S VINEYARD (5)

5:1-7 starts nicely but soon turns condemnatory. Isaiah describes (5:1-6) the efforts made by a vineyard owner to prepare a successful outcome, with a fence and tower for protection, a winepress for the

harvest, and quality ground and vine. But in the end the grapes are bad, so the owner takes away the protections and lets animals eat everything, then ignores it, then even commands it not to rain on it (our first clue this is no ordinary land owner).

5:7 has wordplay using similar-sounding words in Hebrew to make the point. In verse 7, the Lord looks for “judgment” (or ‘justice,’ *mishpat*) and “righteousness” (*tsedaqah*) but instead finds “oppression” (or, ‘bloodshed,’ *mishpach*) and “a cry” (or, ‘outcry,’ *tsa’aqah*). Jesus used this same imagery of the vineyard in Isaiah as the basis for his parable of wicked tenants (Matthew 21:33-46). Both are a setup—Isaiah and Jesus give what appears to be an innocent tale that poses an obvious answer, but the answer condemns the person who gives it. (Another great example of this is Nathan letting David know that God was aware of his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah in 2 Samuel 12.)

In 5:8 we see the word “Woe” (Hebrew *hoy*). Woe is used 21 times in Isaiah—and six of those in this chapter. “Woe” implies death and destruction, a strong message of condemnation in a single syllable.

5:13 is the first mention of captivity and exile, a prominent theme in Isaiah. And why does this happen? Because “they have no knowledge.” Of what? Of God and his plan for them. They do not seek to know him in any way that would bring meaning or purpose to their lives, so they end up captive to others.

5:25 the first mention of God’s hand “stretched out still” (it comes up again in 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4; 11:11; look at who is judged in the verses just before each reference). This hand outstretched is generally not a good thing but is a sign of judgment (notice the accompanying phrase, “his anger is not turned away”). The instrument in God’s hand to bring about this judgment is none other than Assyria. It’s not until 11:11 that his hand acts in Israel’s behalf, reaching out to recover a remnant of scattered Israel.

## ISAIAH’S CALL (6)

Isaiah’s call doesn’t come until chapter 6 because he first lays out all his themes in chapters 1-5, then provides his authority to give the message. It sets up the next few chapters which are the most specific to Isaiah’s life in the book and directly show his preaching and results.

The chapter begins (6:1) with Isaiah perhaps mourning the death of King Uzziah (along with all of Judah). This king, called Azariah in 2 Kings (14:2, 22; 15:1-7, 13; his name means ‘helped by Yahweh’) contracted leprosy near the end of his life and was forced to live in seclusion (2 Kings 15:5). Isaiah’s call comes in the year that Uzziah died, which is 740 B.C.

Isaiah’s vision was in the temple, but probably the heavenly temple, not the earthly one. The prophet saw Israel’s true king (6:5) seated on his throne—not the earthly king Uzziah or his son, Jotham. This King was surrounded by *seraphim* or beings of fire, reflecting God’s glory, who cry out declaring the Lord’s holiness in triplicate (6:3). This is the only place in the Old Testament where that triple use the term is found, and only in Revelation 4:8 is it used again, signifying perfect holiness.

Recognizing his own unworthiness, Isaiah declared that he was “undone” (6:5, meaning ‘ruined’ or ‘doomed’) because he has unclean lips and lives among people like himself. But one of the fiery beings takes a hot coal and touches it to Isaiah’s lips, symbolically purging him of his uncleanness (6:6-7). Then

the Lord asked who he can send? Having experienced the cleansing power of the Atonement and God's grace through his Son, Isaiah declares, "Here am I; send me" (6:8).

In verse 9, the KJV text reads as if this whole verse were a command from the Lord—Isaiah is telling the people to hear but not understand, to see but not perceive (know). The JST changes the command only to hear and see, with a divine commentary that unfortunately they will not understand or perceive. Though subtle, the Hebrew for this verse has some support for the change. The verbs translated "hear" and "see" are in the imperative form—a command. But the verbs translated "understand" and "perceived" are in the jussive form, related to the imperative but often put into the third person. Those verbs don't have the letter *yod* which would make it third person and thus match the Prophet's translation, but as one commentary notes, they "show what the result of the prophet's preaching was to be" (Keil & Delitzsch, 7:130). This sense is reflected both in verse 10 and in the two New Testament quotations of this verse in Matthew 13:14-15 and Acts 28:26-27 (which are unchanged in this sense in the JST).

## JUDAH'S POLITICS AND THE MESSIAH (7-12)

2 Kings 16:5-9 tells the same story as Isaiah 7-8, which took place in about 635 B.C. Uzziah's grandson, Ahaz, was newly installed on the throne. What's called the "Syro-Ephramite war" began when the Assyrian monarch, Tiglath Pileser III, reasserted Assyrian power in Syria, Israel, and Judah. Israel had joined forces with Syria to the north to stand up against Assyria and wanted Judah to join with them. Ahaz, as a new king, disagreed with this alliance (which had been formed during the time of his father, Jotham), so Rezin king of Syria and Pekah king of Israel threatened to invade Judah. Isaiah's encounter with Ahaz took place as the king was preparing for the siege by checking the city's water supply.

Sometimes the many names used in chapter 7 can be confusing, but there are just three kingdoms involved:

- Syria = Damascus (capital city) = Rezin (king)
- Israel = Samaria (capital city) = Ephraim (dominant tribe) = Pekah, son of Remaliah (king)
- Judah = Jerusalem (capital city) = Judah (dominant tribe) = Ahaz, son of Jotham (king).

This is a paired, contrasting story, but the challenge is that the second story isn't presented until chapters 36-37, so it's easy to forget by the time we get there. But Isaiah basically delivered the same message to two kings in nearly identical contexts (down to the location of the events). One will reject his words and the other will embrace them, with very different results. Ahaz, mentioned here in chapter 7, is the one that will reject them; his son Hezekiah is the later king who embraced Isaiah's words.

The Lord directed Isaiah, with his son, Shear-Yashub, to go meet the king at that moment near the upper pool because the king was there at that time surveying the water supply. Isaiah thus had to be prepared and had to be prompt because the king would only be there at that time. Isaiah's son has the symbolic name of 'the remnant shall return.' Prophets were often called upon to do symbolic things, such as to wear certain clothing or carry something around, to catch people's attention and teach them a principle. In this case, Isaiah's own children's names reflect his teachings.



Isaiah counseled Ahaz to trust the Lord and not man and promised that the “these smoking firebrands” (meaning sticks nearly burnt out after a long fire) should not scare him (7:4-7). Isaiah offered Ahaz a sign, and even though the king declined it, Isaiah gave it anyway, in one of the most famous passages in scripture: “Behold a virgin [or young woman] shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (7:14). But there is more to it: “For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings” (7:16). This puts a loose timeframe on the declaration—before this predicted child shall come of age, the kings troubling Ahaz would be gone. It ended up only being about three years until that happened, but Ahaz didn’t accept Isaiah’s sign or warning, and instead made an alliance with the very power Isaiah warned him about—Assyria (7:17). He thought it would protect him from Syria and Israel but instead it cost him dearly (as Isaiah said it would in 7:17-25) and ultimately led to the destruction of most of his kingdom during the reign of his son, Hezekiah.

So who is the son in 7:14-16? Matthew (1:22-23) sees it as Jesus himself, and the name Immanuel (which he correctly interprets as ‘God with us’) certainly applies to Jesus. But Jesus’ birth was hundreds of years after these events, so there must have been a more immediate fulfillment as well. The text isn’t clear but at least three possibilities present themselves. First, it may have been Isaiah’s son. Second, it may have been Ahaz’s own son, Hezekiah, the next king of Judah. Good estimates have Hezekiah born a few years before this encounter, though, posing a problem for this theory, but the chronology for this period is not certain and might allow it. Third, it could be the child of another woman who just happened to be at the pool that day, getting water, or another member of the royal family, and Isaiah simply pointed to her and declared her upcoming pregnancy and child.

While all of these are valid interpretations, I believe it was Isaiah’s son. The name given to Ahaz as a sign to get him to believe Isaiah and the Lord was “Immanuel”—God with us. But Ahaz rejected the sign, so in chapter 8 when the record of the son’s birth was given, the Lord commanded Isaiah to call him by a different name, Maher-shalal-hash-baz meaning something like ‘quick to spoil, swift to plunder’ (8:3) a reference to the coming destruction at the hands of Judah’s enemies. In other words, had Ahaz accepted the Lord’s counsel, God would have been with the people. But because the king turned away from the Lord and relied on the Assyrian arm of flesh, the child’s name was altered to represent instead the coming destruction.

7:17-25 describe the devastation that Assyria would inflict on Judah. So complete would it be that it would cover the land like flies and bees that would land everywhere—in “the holes of the rocks” and even on thorns and bushes that bees would normally ignore. Captured men would be shaved on their heads, legs, and faces, signifying great shame. Farms would be overrun with weeds. But even in the destruction, there is a glimmer of hope: those who remain will be able to keep a cow and two sheep and eat butter and honey (7:21-22)—a clear reference to the sign of the son in 7:14-16, showing that God’s hand is in the preservation of the remnant.

In chapter 8, Isaiah was commanded to take a large tablet (that could be read by a crowd) and write the Lord’s words on it. With two witnesses beside him, he wrote about the birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz and how it fulfilled his prophecy. Isaiah’s other (apparently older) son, the one he brought to meet Ahaz

at the pool, was called Shear-yashub, meaning ‘a remnant will return’ (7:3), perhaps a reference to the truth Isaiah learned at the time of his call (6:13).

The overall theme of these chapters is captured wonderfully in 8:5-10. There is a choice to be made. The people reject the gentle and life-giving waters of Shiloah, that flow out of the Gihon Spring there in Jerusalem (and represent the Lord) and instead look to “the river” (v. 7), meaning Assyria. But that big, fast-moving and powerful river is going to come upon them—turn on them—and flood the whole country of Judah “even to the neck” (so almost drowning them). In other words, because they have trusted in Assyria to solve their problem instead of the Lord, it will come to haunt them later, which it did. To remind Judah to trust God, Isaiah twice put the first name of the son of his prophecy in vv. 8 and 10: Immanuel/God with us. But remember, the prophesied name was rejected by Ahaz so God is NOT with them now but instead spoil and plunder (Maher-shalal-hash-baz) are speedily coming to them like a flood. Only a faithful reliance on the Messiah could save them from Assyria.

Chapters 9 and 11 both include clear Messianic prophecies. In 9:6-7, we might at first think it’s referring back to Isaiah’s earlier sign of a son being born in that day, but the language quickly moves to the divine, not a mortal son, as he is called ‘wonderful counselor [no comma], mighty God, everlasting Father, prince of peace.’ He is of the house of David but his government and the peace it brings will never end (v. 7). It is only through the power and effort of Yahweh that this can happen (v. 7). This prophecy emphasizes the Messiah’s two major attributes in Isaiah: justice and righteousness.

In the rest of chapter 9 and chapter 10, Israel is portrayed as a forest or vineyard at the beginning that gets hewn down and burnt by its oppressors (Assyria), becoming a wasteland. Then 11:1-9 (11:1-4) shows the coming king restoring the land and creation. It is in this context that we need to see the root and stem of Jesse in 11, a tree being restored from the desolation. Joseph Smith taught that the stem is Christ (D&C 113:1-2) and the rod and root are servants of the Lord (D&C 113:3-6), one or both of which was probably Joseph Smith himself. The Hebrew means that even if the tree is cut down, a shoot or branch will spring out of it and bear fruit—miraculously! Christ and his servants, including the Prophet Joseph Smith, will again bring forth fruit to a desolated Israel. In Isaiah’s day, this would have also referred to the renewal of the house of David on the throne of Judah, restored even though Assyria (in chapters 9 and 10) was enacting a devastating destruction.

Though Israel and Judah will be destroyed, the Lord will preserve a remnant that will rely on the Lord, not worldly power (so 10:20-21, where “The remnant shall return” is Isaiah’s son’s name, Shear-yashub). This remnant will overcome its enemies and take control, led by the Messiah of chapters 9 and 11. This pattern will be repeated in the last days when the Lord “shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people” (11:11). With “an ensign for the nations” (11:12) established, he will gather the covenant people from all over the earth, mend old wounds (11:13), and make trade and communication easy (11:14-16).

Chapter 12 ends this description of God’s work among Israel with a song of triumph, honoring the Lord for his great work of salvation. It is a psalm, a response to the great works of the Lord in chapters 1-11. It

provides hope for the future that we can endure the trials of the present. It celebrates that the Holy One of Israel—God—is with us. It’s a song we all can sing—and I hope one day to see it in our hymnbook!

## PROPHESIES AGAINST THE NATIONS (13-23)

As mentioned in the introduction, Isaiah spoke to a Gentile audience as well. His calls to repentance and prophecies of coming judgment were not limited to Judah and Israel, but extended in chapters 13-23 to many nations surrounding his own land. But these chapters also serve as proof of Isaiah’s messages in the earlier chapters. They show that God’s power and glory is greater than the nations of the earth and that he can deliver Israel from its oppressors. How can Israel look to other nations for support when they, too, are reliant on great promises from the Holy One of Israel?

The first two chapters of this section were quoted by Nephi in his large quotation of Isaiah in 2 Nephi. Isaiah 13-14 was likely included by Nephi because they speak of Babylon, which was ahead of Isaiah’s time, but in Nephi’s time, Babylon was the major world power and ultimate threat to Judah. Thus Isaiah’s messages about Babylon—which Nephi now knew to be true—were both confirmatory of his prophetic gift and relevant to his messages to his people about being a remnant that had been preserved from destruction.

The order of the chapters might seem random at first, but it has a pattern that aligns with the rest of Isaiah’s messages and chapters. They are not chronological but organized according to themes, which we’ll see next.

Babylon is addressed first in chapters 13:1 – 14:23. 13:1’s *massa* (“burden” in KJV, but a neutral term in Hebrew that points to God’s actions in human affairs) need not be translated as the burden *against* Babylon but as the tribute to the role Babylon will play in the history of the Lord with his people Israel. They are the great army the Lord musters for his own purposes in 13:1-5 to bring judgment against Assyria—and Judah. 13:6-18 describes the attacks of Babylon on Judah but also how they will be held accountable for their own evils one day with an attack from the Medes (13:17-18).

Israel is the elect nation of the Lord—not because they’re better than anyone else but because they had a mission and responsibility to be a light to the nations. All the nations were to be blessed through Israel, as Abraham learned back in Genesis 12. If they do not keep their part of the covenant, the Lord uses other nations to get their attention and work his own purposes.

Listing Babylon first addresses both the culture that would be the greater threat to Judah’s existence in the near term, but also sets up Babylon as a type of the world and Satan’s plans that makes the messages timeless. In 612, Nineveh (capital of the Assyrians) fell to the Babylonians, ushering in 100 years of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom. But reading this, it would be easy to ask how the Lord can use as his servant such an evil empire? Habakkuk had the same question (Habakkuk 1); how can the Holy One who has “purer eyes than to behold evil” (Habakkuk 1:13) allow evil to have power over the covenant people? The answer in his book is to trust God: “But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him” (Habakkuk 2:20). The Babylonians will also be judged and destroyed in the end (Habakkuk 2:5-8).

Isaiah's answer, like Habakkuk's will be later, is that the Babylonians, like the Assyrians before them, will be defeated in the future by the Medes. The Lord can use them for his purposes or judge them, as he sees fit. This theme comes back in the latter half of the book of Isaiah.

The other nations listed in the book are there as a reminder of God's universal sovereignty. He alone is in charge of the fate of all nations and all people, not all their gods of gold, silver, metal, or wood. This ties back to the core message of chapters 7-12: Jerusalem and her people need to trust the Lord and no one else and not rely on other nations and powers to save them. Only Yahweh can and will do that.

Though the first few verses of chapter 13 talk about the conquest of Babylon over its neighbors, in verses 6-13 it quickly moves to a destruction that is more than war—it is cosmic in nature, “the day of the Lord” (13:8). The land is desolate; the sinners are destroyed; the stars and the sun are darkened; the heavens shake and the earth moves; and the wicked and arrogant are punished for their sins. This is the last days, the power that the Lord will exercise at his Second Coming.

The prophecy about Babylon being like “Sodom and Gomorrah” and “never [to] be inhabited” in 13:19-22 had to be considered outrageous in Isaiah's day, even in Nephi's day, even in Jesus' day. Babylon may have been brought down and humbled over the years, but it remained a great center of trade, study, and culture for hundreds of years after the New Testament was written. But during the Arab days, it was abandoned and remains so today, though Saddam Hussein did build a palace in the middle of the old city ruins (which is now a museum like the archeological remains of the city). People live all around it in towns and on farms, but no one lives in ancient Babylon.

14:3-21 seems to fling us back to the pre-existence in the same cosmic way that chapter 13 looks ahead to ultimate judgment. Thus we see that God concerns himself with judging sin and wickedness in all times.

14:24-27 briefly revisits Assyria, likely because it is Babylon, just discussed, that destroys them.

14:28-32 is directed to Philistia, dated in the year of Ahaz' death (about 725 B.C.). Isaiah warns them not to rejoice in the fall of Assyria but rather take joy in the establishment of Zion.

Chapters 15-16 speak of Judah's neighbor and perennial enemy, Moab.

17 is addressed to Damascus (Syria) but also (and perhaps even more) Israel, hearkening back to chapter 7 where Ahaz was challenged by these two nations. Like Assyria, these nations are mentioned twice, likely because of their immediate threat to Judah in Isaiah's day.

18-19 speak to Ethiopia and Egypt; both include a symbolic action on Isaiah's part in chapter 20 that gives them context. At the Lord's command, Isaiah walked around nearly naked for three years to represent a coming experience of slavery for them after their defeat in war, becoming a personal symbol, as Ezekiel and Jeremiah both did and going with the idea of his son's names and his own name and life being signs. This is also a reminder to Judah not to trust in foreign powers for their support, since they, too, will ultimately become slaves to another.

19:8-25 surprisingly includes a promise of salvation for Israel's enemies, Egypt and Assyria. It hearkens back to the vision of a Jerusalem where all nations flow in chapter 2:1-4, and Isaiah's message of salvation through the Messiah in chapter 11:10-16, though in this one Israel returns with the other nations, while previously they were in Jerusalem already and received the nations. In 19, titles are given that typically are reserved for the people of Israel (Egypt is "my people" and Assyria "the work of my hands"). Egypt has a temple of the Lord where they offer acceptable sacrifices (19:19); "the Egyptians shall know the Lord" (19:21); and God will "send them a saviour" who will deliver them (19:20).

Chapter 21 returns the focus to where it began—Babylon ("the desert of the sea" in v. 1, but named in v. 9)—and begins the section of Isaiah that is often referred to as Isaiah's apocalypse, which we'll discuss in the next session. It pains Isaiah to see and write it (21:3-4). It mentions Dumah, Seir, Arabia, Tema, and Kedar—other nations in the area.

Chapter 22 reminds Israel that the promised judgments on these nations also hang over them, and reminds them how to correctly respond when the Lord spares them, as he did with Jerusalem and the Assyrian attack (discussed in chapters 36-37). Shebna (22:15-19) is offered as an example what NOT to do—stealing from others to enrich and make himself famous with an elaborate tomb. How we act in times of tragedy as well as in times of triumph says much about who we really are. The best reaction to both is the same—humility and gratitude and a willingness to acknowledge that all things in our lives—good or bad—come from the Lord.

And chapter 23 concludes with an oracle about Tyre and Sidon—the Phoenician kingdom. Tyre was the benchmark for prestige in Isaiah's day, a center of trade and wealth. Ezekiel 28 describes its fall more than 100 years after Isaiah. Tyre is a good final nation on which to focus because perhaps more than any other, its fall because of sin demonstrates, as it says in 23:9, that "The Lord of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth."

I summed up all these chapters in the title of this session: Sin and Punishment. Isaiah deals in contradictions or opposites: heavens and the earth; now and later; judgment and salvation; sin and punishment. Isaiah's message is that sin has consequences which the Lord will exact on his recalcitrant children, in Israel, Judah, Syria, Egypt, Assyria, Moab, and Babylon.

So the message is to us today. Our sins may not be exactly those of the people Isaiah taught but they have the same consequences. Unless we exercise faith (hearing and seeing), repent (turn around), be baptized (washed and cleansed), receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (the spirit), and endure to the end (justice and righteousness), we are eternally at risk, just like the ancient peoples of the Old Testament.

## SECTION 2: ATONEMENT AND REDEMPTION (ISAIAH 24-47)

### INTRODUCTION

The last movie I saw before my mission in 1977 was *Star Wars*. Having heard great things, I waited all day in line for tickets the Saturday before I left for the Language Training Mission (what they called it then).

My family joined me later that afternoon before the showing and we all enjoyed a rousing story that most of you know well. During my mission, my mom mentioned that she heard a sequel was coming out not long after I got home. I anxiously waited for that day, and again, waited in line for tickets to see the movie on the opening day. It picked up where the story left off, but *The Empire Strikes Back* ended with a surprise revelation and also plot lines hanging right and left. I left disappointed and wondering how long I had to wait for the third installment and the resolution of the story.

The middle chapters of Isaiah tend to have the feel of *The Empire Strikes Back*. We learn new and great things but the story is unresolved, leaving us wanting more. I hope this middle section does the same thing so you'll keep reading!

These chapters have messages about the Atonement and the redemption God promises to sinful Israel, though also reinforcing previously introduced messages and preparing us for others. These messages bring hope and promise to their day and ours and reveal the Lord's hand in the future of the world and more specifically in the lives of his covenant people.

The outline is:

- Isaiah's Apocalypse (24-27)
- Drunken leaders and a farmer (28)
- Voice from the dust (29)
- God protects his people (30-32)
- The Second Coming and justice (33-35)
- Hezekiah and Isaiah (36-39)
- Israel delivered and redeemed (40-47)

## ISAIAH'S APOCALYPSE (24-27)

Some might say that apocalypse is an overriding theme of Isaiah—after all, we've seen cosmic events portrayed in previous chapters and will see yet more in the concluding third of the book—but in these chapters the eschatological concept comes out especially strong. They demonstrate that God doesn't just react to the choices of men but is actually in full control and is the driving force behind all great events. As we trust him and keep our minds set on him, he will deliver us from judgment and destruction.

'Apocalypse' means something hidden that is revealed from God; typical texts are Daniel and Revelation. In that sense, these chapters are also eschatological, meaning focused on the last days and the end of God's plan for man. They show the triumph of God over his enemies and on behalf of his people.

These chapters may be viewed as standing alone in the text but they also appear to be a natural and logical summary of the messages to the nations in chapters 13-23, spoken of in the previous section. What applies in those chapters to specific countries and cities here applies to mankind as a whole. So "the city of confusion" mentioned in 24:10 and 12 does not represent a specific city, but the collective cities of the world. These chapters present universal themes that range back and forth from tragedy and destruction to triumph and joy.

Chapters 24 and 25 function as a sort of diptych. Like side-by-side panels that portray two often contrasting images, these two chapters are like two sides of the same coin, one focused on the consequences of sin and the other on the blessings of righteousness.

Chapter 24 is about destruction for sin across the whole earth (mentioned 17 times). First, we view the destruction caused by wickedness (1-6, read 1-3), then we get the reaction of the people to the destruction (7-12, read 8) and to God's triumph as he gathers in the righteous and they sing his praises (13-16a), then we hear their (or Isaiah's) mourning for the earth (16b-20), concluding with the magnificence of the Lord's reign (21-23).

It is from this chapter that we get well-known phrases such as 24:5, which language reappears in D&C 1:15 and signals the reason for the Restoration.

Chapter 25 (really starting in 24:23) turns the message of destruction around (the other side of the diptych) and demonstrates God's love and tenderness. It is first a song of thanksgiving for the Lord's care for his people (1-5, read 4) followed by the great feast of celebration, now that the King has taken control (6-8, read 6), and concluding with joy exclaimed by those who waited for the Lord (9-12, read 9). The feast here is echoed in Revelation 19:6-9 as the marriage supper of the Lamb, the great covenantal meal that culminates the Lord's work of salvation among men.

Many terms in 24 and 25 are powerful opposites:

- "My leanness, my leanness" cried the prophet in 24:16, contrasted with "a feast of fat things" in 25:6
- There is no wine to drink in 24:9, but "a feast of wines on the lees" in 25:6
- The land is "utterly empty" in 24:3 but in 25:8, tears are wiped "from off all faces" (which image John also uses in Revelation 21:4)

The phrase "in this mountain" (6, 10) speaks to the Lord dispensing these blessings on his people and the entire earth from his house, the temple in Jerusalem—or in a latter-day interpretation, any temple.

Continuing the message of praise, chapter 26 starts with a song that praises the triumph of the Lord and how he is the protection for Zion, not walls or gates (1-6; read 1-4). The righteous freely enter the city and peace is maintained because the people inside trust him. Verse 4 is one of only four times that the name Jehovah is used in the Bible, with two of those being in Isaiah (Exodus 6:3; Psalm 83:18; Isaiah 12:2; 26:4).

Verses 7-18 are a song and a prayer, with beautiful inspiration (7-9). The Lord responds to the prayer/song with marvelous promises, one of very few OT references to the resurrection (19). Yahweh directs the righteous to hide themselves while he exacts judgment on the wicked (20).

Wrapping up this apocalyptic section, chapter 27 speaks to those who have covenanted with the Lord, who gives promises of protection and peace, asking only two things in return: "fill the face of the world with fruit" (6, meaning missionary work) and "worship the Lord in the holy mount" (13). The climax is in these last two verses where the Lord holds back the rivers in the north and the south—the mighty

Euphrates and the huge Nile—to let his people come free from Assyria and Egypt, to worship at the holy temple (12-13).

## DRUNKEN LEADERS AND A FARMER (28)

Chapters 28-32 should be seen as a unit but are broken up in this discussion only because of the unique LDS interpretation of 29. They show the folly of trusting in human leadership and contrast it with the righteous and peaceful rule of the divine King (chapters 30 – 32). The leaders and people are foolish—portrayed as drunks—and reject the message the Lord delivers to them, both in oral and written form. But it is especially a book mentioned in chapter 29 that will prepare the way for the return of the great King, who will atone for and save his people even as he rules over them in judgment and love.

Chapter 28 first portrays Israel’s leaders as proud drunks, who sit clinking their wine glasses even as the storm and floods are upon them (1-4). The “crown of pride” worn by these drunks (1, 3) is replaced by a “crown of glory” on the righteous remnant (5). Unlike the drunken leaders, those in the remnant are like children, and the Lord can teach them (9). Most of the people were taught line upon line but still “would not hear” so they fell (10-13). Switching to Jerusalem’s leaders, he says they have fooled themselves by making pacts with other nations (represented by “death” and “hell” here, 15) but it does them no good—the only “sure foundation” is Yahweh, the certain foundation stone (16). The chapter concludes with a parable of a farmer, who patiently sows and reaps all in good order (23-29). The farmer is the Lord, working his plan and anticipating the harvest.

## VOICE FROM THE DUST (29)

No chapter in Isaiah is more quoted in the Church than 29. No chapter of Isaiah has more changes in the Joseph Smith Translation, with most verses changed and significant material added with verses 11-12. The chapter opens with a siege of Jerusalem (1-4; 1-3), probably tied to that of the Assyrians but today a symbol of attacks on the righteous from evil of all sorts. But the siege of Jerusalem will be nothing compared to the judgments of God, which will devour the wicked (5-6).

Without Nephi’s interpretations and commentary in 2 Nephi 27, which lead to similar JST changes, verses 11-12 would appear to be a mere metaphor for the inability of the people to see. But with these other resources, we see it as a great prophecy of the Book of Mormon. It is “the words of them which have slumbered” (2 Nephi 27:6) that are “delivered unto a man” (2 Nephi 27:8). The words of the book shall be “read upon the house tops; and they shall be read by the power of Christ” (2 Nephi 27:11). It will have “three witnesses” and “a few [more] according to the will of God” (2 Nephi 27:12). The book will come from an unlearned man (2 Nephi 27:19-20) who “shall read the words that shall be delivered him” (2 Nephi 27:23). Thus with these comments from 2 Nephi and the subsequent JST changes that tell the same story, we readily perceive Isaiah 29 to be a prophetic account of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

How does that mesh with the larger interpretation of these chapters? Magnificently. The drunken leaders are unteachable but the humble people will hearken to the Lord and learn line upon line. And how do they learn about the Lord and his plans for them? From the book hidden up and coming forth at the hands of an unlearned man. The book is the key to them gaining understanding. The book is the key to providing



correct knowledge so the people will not fail. The book is the key to a people who will recognize Yahweh as their King—the message of the next three chapters.

## GOD PROTECTS HIS PEOPLE (30-32)

These three chapters return to the theme of trusting in man versus trusting in Yahweh. Isaiah condemns the people who “go down into Egypt” to make alliances of protection but “have not asked at my mouth” (30:2). Trusting in Egypt to save them from Assyria would be pointless: “the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose” (30:7). They tell true seers and prophets to be silent (30:10) and reject the Lord. But though the people abandon the Lord, he stays with them (30:20-21), even as he also judges the wicked (30:27-33).

In chapter 31, the message is repeated: “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help” (31:1) and if they turn to the Lord, “then shall the Assyrian fall” (31:8).

We have heard about the Messiah in chapters 9 and 11. And we have heard that the line of the kings of David will be preserved in a great Davidic king one day. Chapter 32 brings those two concepts together, letting us know that the Messiah and the King are the same person—Yahweh himself (32:1). He reigns under two of Isaiah’s favorite words—justice and righteousness. His people will be protected and blessed to overcome their limitations and faults (32:2-8). He will make “the wilderness be a fruitful field” (32:15) and cause people to “dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places” (32:18). More than any other chapter so far in Isaiah, chapter 32 shows the power of the atonement and redemption offered by the Messiah, the King, the God Yahweh.

The cumulative message of chapters 28 to 32 can be summarized this way: the people trust in the arm of flesh—in alliances with other nations—instead of the arm of the Lord. They are drunk and without knowledge. What will bring them around? A book coming out of the ground—the Book of Mormon. Armed with that guidance and the Spirit that accompanies it, the people can learn to reject the ways of man and instead trust God to bring down their enemies. Doing so paves the way for the great King to reign and brings blessings to the entire earth.

## THE SECOND COMING AND JUSTICE (33-35)

Chapter 33 is about burning: the wicked will burn at the second coming (33:12), but the righteous will live in “everlasting burnings” in the presence of God (33:14). There appears to be a very natural break at the end of chapter 33, one that was even recognized by ancient copyists, such as the one that made the Great Isaiah Scroll from cave 1 of the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls collection, who left three lines blank before starting chapter 34. Not only does it mark the halfway point in our modern Bibles (33 of 66 chapters) but it marks a change in approach and tone in many ways.

Chapters 34-35 are compare/contrast chapters, again echoing the previous themes. 34 speaks of the destruction that comes by trusting in the world, while 35 demonstrates that trusting God bring peace, plenty, and holiness. These chapters show the difference in how the ancient world learned versus our day, influenced as we are by Greek, Roman, and Western thinking. We like things presented in a logical order,

and usually only once. In the ancient world, they taught and learned by repetition. Like Hebrew poetry, a good learning experience in ancient Israel made a point, came back to it, came back to it again, and said it again. Each time there are subtle differences in the presentation of the concept, but repeating something several times over multiple pages felt normal, natural, and reinforced learning, in a world where not all could read or write and thus take notes or capture their thoughts. Hearing something presented multiple times and ways helped cement it in their minds.

## HEZEKIAH AND ISAIAH (36-39)

Chapters 36-39 appear very different than other Isaiah chapters, being a historical recitation and not a poetic version of events. It is nearly identical to 2 Kings 18-20, though with some interesting differences, especially the song of Hezekiah in 38:9-22. The story is seemingly inserted here randomly. But its placement in Isaiah is actually well-planned and thematic.

The story is quite similar—but contrasting—with chapters 7-12, the story of Ahaz, Assyria, and Egypt, and serve as a role model for the points made in the previous chapters (don't trust the world, do trust the Lord). In both cases:

- The kings (Ahaz and Hezekiah) faced a serious external threat and the prophet counseled reliance upon God.
- The conversations with the kings took place at the same location ("the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field").
- Ahaz didn't trust the Lord and rejected a sign; Hezekiah had great faith and welcomed the sign.
- Ahaz's desire to trust Assyria more than God resulted in a predication that Assyria would conquer Judah. As that prophecy was coming to pass, Hezekiah trusted God more than the armies of men.
- Ahaz exhibited fear of this situation; Hezekiah exhibited faith and commitment to the Lord.

Let's look at some details of the story. First, chapter 36 describes how Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, attacked Judah in 701 B.C., in an attempt to fully assert his authority over Hezekiah who had determined to rebel against his status as tribute. After defeating many cities, including Lachish which was a stronghold in the southern kingdom (and famous by the panels found depicting that victory, today visible in the British Museum), Sennacherib's men, led by Rabshakeh (whose name is a title that means basically 'commander'), came to the walls of Jerusalem to try and persuade the people to surrender, but the people stood by their king.

In humility, Hezekiah sought the blessing of the Lord in chapter 37 by calling on his prophet Isaiah and by praying in the temple, pouring out his problems to the Lord. Isaiah promised deliverance from the Assyrians, counseling Hezekiah not to fear. He also prophesied that the king of Assyria would return to his own land and be killed. That night, an angel destroyed a large part of the Assyrian army and the siege against Jerusalem was lifted; the city was saved.

In chapter 38, Hezekiah fell ill and was near death. (This event was before those of the previous two chapters, as indicated in the text. It's presented in this order because it closely ties to chapter 39.) Isaiah came and told him to prepare to die. Hezekiah prayed in great humility for his own life, and the Lord told

Isaiah to return and tell him he would recover and live fifteen more years. Hezekiah then composed a great psalm of praise to the Lord for his goodness.

In chapter 39, after Hezekiah's recovery but still before the events of chapters 36-37, he was visited by emissaries of the kingdom of Babylon and they brought him gifts. Like Hezekiah, Babylon was under Assyrian rule, but unlike Judah, they remained an immensely influential culture. The king showed them the fortifications that he had built to withstand Assyria's attack and the wealth that he was able to generate to support the workings of his kingdom. After they left, Isaiah came to the king and prophesied that all the things the Babylonians had seen would be carried away by them one day. Hezekiah understood it wouldn't be in his day and was grateful for that, but the prophecy did come true just over a hundred years later.

One note about this chapter. Many see Hezekiah's action as negative but we do not get that tone from Isaiah, just from the consequences; when Isaiah says all will be taken, we presume Hezekiah did something wrong. But a careful reading of the text, considering all that went before, rather shows Hezekiah doing just what is predicted—the nations come to Jerusalem, bringing gifts and honoring its king (Isaiah 2:2-4). Thus chapter 39 is a positive display of God's favor, even though Isaiah's pronouncement is negative.

From Isaiah's description, Hezekiah could be considered as a candidate for the Davidic Messiah that will save God's people from destruction at the hands of its enemies. He is blessed by Yahweh to overcome personal illness and is granted a long(er) life. He leads the remnant (the people in Jerusalem, almost the only ones left after the Assyrian destruction of their land) to rely on the Lord and keep the temple holy.

But Hezekiah is a type of and not the promised Messiah who will deliver his people from their sins, who will redeem them and give them eternal peace. When the true Messiah comes, it will be with perfection, holiness, and immortality. Hezekiah is a good king and perhaps the most faithful of all in the line of Judahite kings, but he only prefigures what Jesus will do to fully save his people.

That leads us to why these chapters are here and in a non-chronological order. First, they serve as a natural bridge between the judgment and promise sections of the book. Hezekiah's actions are messianic in nature and his leadership and faithfulness provide a situation where Jerusalem can be preserved by divine power. Second, the coming of the Babylonians provides the opportunity for Isaiah to teach us of the power of this coming kingdom and their role in Judah's future. That leads us naturally and perfectly into the rest of the book, where the focus is no longer on Assyria and the present situation of Isaiah's day but to a future where Babylon is the world power and the new threat to the survival of Judah.

## ISRAEL DELIVERED AND REDEEMED (40-47)

Handel's Messiah has many quotations from Isaiah. But it should be no surprise that most of them are from the last half of the book—indeed, four songs quote from Isaiah 40 alone. It's hard to read the verses without at least hearing the music in your head ([40:1, 3-4](#)). As mentioned, the messages of these chapters are focused on the deliverance and redemption of the Lord's people, scattered throughout the Babylonian empire—and in today's perspective, throughout the world as we undertake a worldwide missionary effort.

Chapters 1-39 of Isaiah are mostly focused on events concurrent with Isaiah, leading up to the unsuccessful Assyrian attempt to conquer Jerusalem in 701 B.C. Chapters 40-55 represent the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies given in 1-39. They speak to the future remnant *in* Babylon, the people carried away in the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah and Lehi, more than 100 years after Isaiah. Isaiah pronounces the reality of the Babylonian captivity to Hezekiah's posterity in chapter 39, then starting in chapter 40 the prophet speaks to those people, reassuring them that God is in charge and he has the power to accomplish his will. This is especially true for chapters 40-47.

In other words, starting with chapter 40, Isaiah speaks no more of his own day but prophetically looks ahead to a people whose parents (or grandparents) were forcibly dragged away from the land of their fathers. These Babylonian Jews, born and raised outside of the land of Judah, now call Babylon (or other similar provinces) home. And he is going to tell them some surprising things, each of which is a miraculous message.

The most important message is that even though Yahweh's people have not trusted him but instead turned to other nations for support (which Isaiah spent the better part of 39 chapters warning them not to do), Yahweh has not forsaken them but through his mercy and grace will yet bless them. The Lord promised he would preserve a remnant through his prophets, and Isaiah now assures his people that the Lord is so completely trustworthy, that it will still be done, even though the people have in no way merited such a gift. The atonement brings people into a position to receive such blessings, even if they have done nothing to deserve it, just as it brings you and I blessings we could not possibly earn or merit on our own.

The second amazing thing Isaiah says goes back to a concept common in the ancient world: if one nation defeats another, the winning nation's god must be the most powerful. That just makes sense—if you believe in many regional gods who battle things out in the heavens, resulting in various defeats and victories on earth. So since Judah was defeated by Babylon, it stands to reason that the Babylonian gods must be more powerful than Yahweh, the God of Judah. But Yahweh is going to turn that conventional wisdom completely on its head. Isaiah's message is that God *allowed* his people to be carried away as part of his great plan. And now to show that he is still all-powerful and the God of the whole earth, he will deliver them, and even bring them home—something completely unprecedented. Captive people just didn't return to their native lands, especially after 2-3 generations.

And what is the means by which God will bring about this miraculous deliverance? The messiah, the anointed one from God, of course. Isaiah has spoken of a messiah as being of the house of David, as being their redeemer, as being chosen by God. But this is the third surprise: this messiah that will accomplish God's great purpose at this time is not of the house of David. In fact, he's not even a Jew. Let's see how this plays out.

In [41:2-3](#), the Lord calls this messiah "a righteous man from the east." Nations fall before him and he rules over kings. Later in that chapter, he comes "from the north" and from the "rising of the sun" (east), overcoming princes like a potter walks on clay ([41:25](#)). He will cause Jerusalem and other Judean cities to be rebuilt ([44:26](#)) and dry up rivers ([44:27](#)). He will also subdue nations ([45:1](#)). He is the Lord's shepherd, doing the Lord's will in rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple ([44:28](#)). He is the Lord's anointed ([45:1](#)); the

Lord opens the paths for him and gives him treasures (45:2-3). In 48:14-15, the Lord declares his great love for this man and declares that he “called him” and “shall make his way prosperous.” And why is this done? It is a pure act of grace and love; it is for Israel’s sake (45:4). Finally at the end of chapter 44 and the beginning of 45, we get his name: “Cyrus” (44:28; 45:1).

But wait—Cyrus is the Lord’s anointed? That term means he is a messiah (the meaning of messiah is anointed one). But he’s a gentile, pagan king; how can he be the long-awaited messiah? In fact, Cyrus is just the agent of the true Messiah, Yahweh himself. Calling Cyrus a ‘messiah’ emphasizes God’s power over all nations and all people; if he can direct a pagan king to return his people to their home land according to his promises, then he is truly in control of the whole earth.

This leads to Isaiah’s second point in these chapters—what does it mean to be the Lord’s chosen people? Isaiah wants us to understand that being “chosen” is not a position of privilege but one of responsibility. Israel as servant starts in 41:8-9; God calls them to his work and promises never to cast them away. He teaches that he did not give his people over to their enemies because he is weak but because “they would not walk in his ways” (42:24). But he declares, “I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by my name; thou art mine” (43:1). Israel will not be forgotten (44:21). We might invoke the image of the sacrament where we take upon ourselves the Messiah’s name, going back to our baptismal covenants. We are charged each Sunday to always remember him. Here he promises the inverse: he calls us by his name (makes us part of his family) and promises that we will never be forgotten by him.

And what does it mean to redeem a servant in the Old Testament? The word “servant” in the Old Testament is typically *ebed*, with a meaning closer to ‘slave’ than ‘servant.’ Redemption is the act of paying the price for another person or thing, to free that person from prison or bondage when that person cannot pay the price. If a person fell into debt and was thus forced into slavery, a redeemer (a *go’el* in Hebrew, a legal term) who was a brother or other close relative had the responsibility to buy that person’s freedom (see Leviticus 25:47-49).

Chapters 43-44 are full of the language of redemption, promising a new life for Israel after their servitude. But in these chapters, the Lord takes that metaphor further, declaring that Israel is so precious that he will give entire kingdoms for them and that “men” and “people” will be given for Israel’s life (43:3-4). Yahweh declares himself to be Israel’s redeemer—the price is not paid in gold or silver but by a miraculous act he alone instigates (44:22). He calls their name out at the slave auction (and the name he uses, “Israel,” means ‘God prevails,’ a reminder of *his* great and miraculous power to deliver them against all odds). He purchases them and declares himself their new owner (43:1).

Starting in 43:3 and repeated again in 43:15 and 44:6, the Lord gives himself four names or titles in a row. First it is: The Lord (Yahweh), God (Elohim), the Holy One of Israel (set apart), and Savior (deliverer). In 43:15 it is The Lord (Yahweh), your Holy One (set apart), the creator of Israel, your King. Finally in 44:6, we see: the Lord (Yahweh), the King of Israel; the Redeemer; the Lord of Hosts (*Yahweh tsaba’ot*). All these names serve to remind us of the greatness of the Lord, and his power to keep his promises and take care of Israel.

44:21 reminds Israel that they/we are the slaves of the Lord; he formed us and redeemed us, making us his slaves—but he will not forget us. Ever. He has personally paid the price for our sins and blotted them out (44:22), which act causes the earth and trees to sing praises to God.

But Isaiah is clear that the Lord’s salvation message is not just for Israel but the whole world (45:22-23).

With such amazing promises, can we trust the Lord to fulfill them? He declares through Isaiah a mighty “yes!” in chapter 46 (46:5). He has no equal. Therefore, if he desires to call “a ravenous bird from the east” to perform his will (as he called Cyrus, in 46:11), he can do so! And what will this conqueror do? Destroy the “virgin daughter of Babylon” (47:1), whom the Lord used to punish Judah but now will be punished by Cyrus and his armies for their own sins, “and none shall save thee” (47:15).

The Lord offers his redeeming love and power to all, but too many will reject it and suffer for their own decisions. However, in his infinite mercy and tender love, with Israel as the archetype of that love, Yahweh pays the greatest price possible for our sins that we might experience redemption, forgiveness, and righteousness: (46:12-13). It is his righteousness that saves us, so it is his salvation. Indeed, Jesus’ mortal name, Yeshua, means ‘salvation.’

Thus we see from Isaiah that Hezekiah was a messiah; Cyrus was a messiah; but both were types of THE Messiah, who came to redeem all people. 2 Nephi 2:6-8.

## SECTION 3: THE SUFFERING SERVANT AND SANCTIFICATION (ISAIAH 48-66)

### INTRODUCTION

Isaiah is at his finest when he speaks of the Messiah in four suffering servant songs. These messages are tied in with words of hope through the redemption of Zion and the transformation of Israel (and us), going from people barely distinguishable from their neighbors to the full achievement of their potential as children of God.

The outline is:

- Servant songs and the daughter of Zion (42, 49-53)
- Seek the Lord (55)
- Transforming Israel (56-60)
- Deliverance of Zion (61-64)
- The Lord answers Israel’s prayer (65-66)

### SERVANT SONGS AND DAUGHTER OF ZION (42, 49-53)

Scholars typically recognize four ‘servant songs’ in Isaiah, 42:1-4; 49:1-12; 50:4-11; and 52:13 – 53:12. Each of these has different characteristics. The one in chapter 42 portrays a gentle servant in whom God

delights, and who shall give his law and judge the earth, but the identity of this servant is thought by even LDS scholars to be possibly the house of Israel. But the three in 49, 50, and 52-53 are more of a unit to be taken together.

In Acts 8, Philip was led by the Spirit to the road south of Jerusalem. There he encountered a eunuch from Ethiopia sitting on the side of the road in his chariot reading Isaiah. Perhaps knowing the answer before he asked it—it was Isaiah, after all—Philip asked the man, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” Turns out he was reading Isaiah 53. The eunuch asked Philip, “I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?” Philip’s response was to immediately teach the man about Jesus (Acts 8:26-35).

In another scene, a prophet named Abinadi was standing bound in King Noah’s court. One of the priests questioning Abinadi quoted Isaiah 52:7-10 and asked the prophet for an interpretation (Mosiah 12:20-24). In response, Abinadi quoted the commandments from Exodus 20 and declared that the Law of Moses was designed to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah, when God himself would come down among men (Mosiah 13). Then to explain that teaching of God coming down, Abinadi quoted the entirety of Isaiah 53 (Mosiah 14), explaining afterwards “that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people” (Mosiah 15:1), going on to tell of the life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God (Mosiah 15).

While Philip’s and Abinadi’s interpretations of the servant texts may seem obvious to us today, it clearly wasn’t to the eunuch and would not have been to many other people of their days, or ours. The common Jewish interpretation of the servant songs is that they are about the house of Israel with some messianic implications, especially in Isaiah 53. The common Latter-day Saint interpretation is like Philip’s: they’re all about Jesus. But let’s look at how these scriptures might have a broader message for our day.

First, let’s consider the interpretation that it is the house of Israel. Isaiah 49:3 states plainly that the servant is, in fact, Israel. Isaiah 41:8 also calls Israel the Lord’s servant, as discussed in the previous section. So we can see how viewing the servant as a group of people would be easy to do. The faithful remnant so often mentioned in Isaiah suffers for their sins (paying double in 40:2, which is according to Exodus 22:4, 7, and 9), is chastised by the Lord, and then gathered in by the Lord’s mercy.

But when we consider other details of the songs, the language is much more applicable to an individual, not a group. Just before the servant song in Isaiah 49, the servant says, “...the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me” (48:16). After this verse, we see the experiences of the servant and the tasks the Lord gives to him grow progressively more challenging: (49:4-9; 50:5-7; 52:14; 53:2-9).

In 53:4 and 53:8, the word “stricken” is the Hebrew *naga’*, which is found most often in Leviticus and typically associated with commands not to touch unclean things, particularly leprosy. In other words, this servant becomes unclean and afflicted, even sickened, which causes him to be cut off from other people like a leper cast out—and this condition is caused by God himself. In the end, the servant who has done no violence nor deceived anyone is severely abused and dies violently at the hands of wicked liars.

Amazingly, all of this is pleasing to the Lord because the servant's undeserved suffering is the means of making others justified or righteous. Indeed, the whole incident is reported in the first person by the witnesses: "we hid...our faces"; "we did esteem his stricken"; "he was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities"; "with his stripes we are healed"; "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of *us* all."

So the servant songs do indeed speak to us of Christ and his Atonement. But if you have not noticed, there are gaps between the three songs in Isaiah 49, 50, and 52/53. What's between the songs?

In the third movie of the *Lord of the Rings*, Frodo and Sam are working their way toward Mordor to destroy the ring, but we also have the story of men, elves, and hobbits battling Sauron's forces of evil. The movie moves back and forth between those two stories as each progresses, building tension in each until the amazing climax. Likewise, in Isaiah 49-54, we move back and forth between two intersecting stories—the suffering servant and the daughter of Zion.

The daughter of Zion texts are found in 49:13 – 50:3; 51:12 – 52:12; and 54:1-17. Like the servant, the daughter suffers. Like Hosea, Jeremiah, and Lamentations, Isaiah uses a household metaphor to reflect the Lord's relationship with Israel. In Hosea, for example, Israel is an unfaithful wife who leaves Yahweh for other men, even bearing children in these extra-marital relationships. The Lord patiently and faithfully tries to bring her back but finally has no choice but to divorce her for her sins, according to the formalities of the Mosaic Law. Her situation is bad—the lovers (meaning, other gods and nations) that she has gone after, strip her, enslave her, and take away her children. She is left barren and destitute in the end. This disturbing scene reflects what will happen (from Isaiah's perspective) when Judah is carried away captive by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.

As we looked at in the previous section, the Babylonian captivity is what Isaiah is looking toward in chapter 40 when he declares, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (40:1-2).

In the first daughter of Zion section, Isaiah declares that the Lord has indeed comforted his people but the daughter complains she has been forsaken: (49:13-14).

The Lord's tender response is in the next verses: (49:15-16). As she is restored, like Job, she receives more abundantly than she had before the desolation, under the protection of the Lord: (49:20-25).

When the daughter of Zion wonders at these blessings, the Lord answers that though the punishment was self-inflicted, he has the power to undo it all: (50:1-2a).

The Lord comes to the rescue of Israel in 51:22-23. Then we see the great homecoming event, where the daughter of Zion is redeemed and returned to her former place—in fact, to a much better place—52:1-3, 7-10.

Finally, the full blessings of family and home are restored in 54:1-8. In the rest of the chapter, Zion is rebuilt in a grand way, and protected from all enemies by the God of the universe.



Do you see how these two texts play off each other? The servant starts with praise but soon is being afflicted, punished, and finally killed. At the same time, the daughter of Zion—who is every one of us who has ever committed acts contrary to the will of God—suffers for her sins but begins to be redeemed and restored until she is even greater than before, more blessed than she ever imagined possible. It is only through the sufferings of the servant that the daughter of Zion receives this redemption and these blessings: [53:4-5](#).

## SEEK THE LORD (55)

Chapter 55 is a celebration and an invitation that naturally follows on the stories of the suffering servant and the daughter of Zion. The Lord declares that salvation, resurrection, and other great and eternal blessings are freely given. He invites us to partake of these gifts as we would food, and give up sinful ways to hearken to the Lord's teachings: [\(55:1-3, 12-13\)](#).

Chapter 55 has the distinction of being the last chapter referenced in the Book of Mormon. Nephi and Jacob both drew on the first two verses in their teachings in 2 Nephi 9:50-51 (both verses) and 2 Nephi 26:25 (first verse only).

## TRANSFORMING ISRAEL (56-60)

This last section of Isaiah, chapters 56-66, are what some scholars consider to be written by a potential third author, called 'trito-Isaiah.' As previously discussed, because of the Book of Mormon and other factors, we might argue for single author of Isaiah 1-55. But 56-66 are never quoted or even paraphrased in the Book of Mormon. Given the difference in tone and style, I don't believe that any of us would have our testimonies shaken if it turned out that these last chapters were authored by another person and attached to Isaiah's book at a later date. I am not saying that is the case because it could be that no one in the Book of Mormon had a reason to quote from these chapters even though they were on the brass plates, but its absence in the Book of Mormon at least leaves the door open for a second hand.

To an ancient Israelite, Gentiles were the enemy because they attacked and enslaved the people of Israel. So for Isaiah to say in this section (and elsewhere) that Gentiles would become part of the covenant, worship in the temple, and be part of the family of Israel would have sounded outrageous. Isaiah said what Gentile converts (which includes most members of the Church in our day) should do in verse 4, then gave a promise in verse 5: [56:3-5](#).

Two things of note with this last verse. First, there should really be some punctuation after "place," separating it from the next phrase about a name; the person is blessed with a 'place' in the house, then receives a new name, "better than of sons or daughters."

Second, the word translated 'place' actually is the word 'hand,' which symbolism is readily recognized by those who have been to the temple. The universality of temple admittance here represents a huge difference from temple worship in Isaiah's day, where Gentiles were not allowed into the temple at all and even most Jews were not permitted beyond the courtyard. Only priests on certain days and under

certain circumstances could enter the building itself, and only the high priest could go into the most holy part once each year! But now all people who “take hold of my covenant” (56:4) will come into the Lord’s house and receive his greatest blessings.

56:7 should sound familiar: Jesus quoted it as he cleansed the temple (Luke 19:46).

The wickedness of the leaders is made clear through many metaphors in verses 56:9-12—blind, dumb dogs, loving to slumber, greedy dogs, and shepherds without understanding. They spend their time getting drunk and indulging in life’s pleasures. This may remind us of some people who live for the weekend where they can party, play, gamble, etc. “How was your weekend?” for them means talking about their great adventures and entertainment, whereas for many Latter-day Saints it is often a time of much service.

The first half of chapter 57 is about the wickedness of the people under these wicked leaders. They practice sorcery and adultery; they mock the righteous, spend their time worshipping false gods and participating in the sexual rituals associated with that worship. The Lord declares that their works shall not profit them.

In contrast to the previous verses that portray the wickedness of the leaders and the people, the rest of chapter 57 outlines the great blessings given to the faithful, those that trust in God.

57:13-14 The Dead Sea Scrolls add “the road,” which matches the parallel phrase in the second half of this verse. This hearkens back to 40:3-4 where the messenger goes before the king to prepare the way, but in this case, the road is being cleared for the righteous people that the King is bringing back.

57:15 God dwells in temples which are holy places on earth, and in the celestial temple in heaven (compare Revelation 4). With him dwell those “of a contrite and humble spirit.”

57:18-21 The faithful are promised healing and peace, with the Lord leading them and repaying their efforts with comfort. In contrast, the wicked are only promised turmoil, like a wave that churns up the dirt and provides no clean water.

Chapter 58 is about two elements of covenant worship—the fast and the Sabbath. A fast in Isaiah’s day was not just a time to go without food, as we typically practice it today. Fast days were national Sabbaths, such as *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) or Passover, usually followed by feast days or celebrations. That pattern is described in these verses in chapter 58. Our responsibilities are outlined in 58:6-7 with the blessings that come from obedience in 58:8-11.

The second element of covenant worship mentioned is the Sabbath: 58:13-14. How many of us find the Sabbath a delight, as President Nelson has invited us to do?

To end this section, chapters 59-60 take Israel through the transformation the Lord has in mind. First, she is sinning (59:1-8), then repenting (59:9-15a), then delivered (59:15b-21), gathered (60:1-9), rebuilt (60:10-13), enjoying posterity (60:14-18), and is finally in the Lord’s presence (60:19-22).

59:16 At first, the Lord finds “no intercessor” for sinful Israel. But then he brings “salvation” (*yeshua*) to them, whose righteousness sustains him.

59:17 We usually give Paul credit for the metaphor of the armor of God, but Paul got it from Isaiah! In this case, the “intercessor” (59:16) puts on the armor of God in order to defend himself and do battle with the wicked and even the sins of the covenant people.

59:20 The Savior will visit the repentant in Zion, the New Jerusalem. This is one of the scriptures Moroni quoted to Joseph Smith when he appeared to him.

One of the key themes of the last chapters of Isaiah is that the Gentiles will be part of the covenant people in the last days. In D&C 109:60-65 (dedication of the Kirtland temple), Joseph Smith defined ‘Gentiles’ as the early members of the Church in this dispensation, and called for blessings to come to the scattered remnants of Israel. Isaiah would call us Gentiles, yet many of us are part of scattered Israel or at least have some Israelite blood. In other words, a Gentile in Isaiah’s day is someone not of the house of Israel; in our day, it is anyone who has not yet entered into the covenants of the Lord.

Chapter 60 outlines the responsibilities and the blessings of the Gentile converts in the latter days—meaning us. It is addressed to the city of New Jerusalem and should be compared with D&C 45:65-71 and Ether 13:4-10. 60:1-9 describe the great gathering that brings “thy sons from far” (60:9). In verses 10-13, the New Jerusalem is built, with gates that never close (compare Revelation 21:25) and a glorious temple.

60:14 Israel’s former enemies will come in humility, bowing down out of respect.

60:17 Redeemed Israel will bring their meager offerings and the Lord will upgrade each one—gold for brass, silver for iron, brass for wood, and iron for stones.

60:18 The KJV translators understood the reference here and capitalized it. Salvation is *yeshua*, the mortal name of the Savior.

60:20 Mourning for her sins, Israel has suffered for many years, bringing great sadness upon her. The Lord promises that it will end as his light comes into their lives.

D&C 45:65-67 summarizes the vision of this New Jerusalem in the last days.

## DELIVERANCE OF ZION (61-64)

As we move to the end of the book, the prophet continues a view of the future blessed state of Zion and her deliverance from all her enemies.

61:1 The opening verses of chapter 61 are best known as those quoted by Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth (see Luke 4:16-22). The setting was near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He returned to his home town of Nazareth and was invited to read in the synagogue. He chose (or had handed to him) the Isaiah scroll, and in Hebrew he read what we call Isaiah 61:1-2a. Then he sat down to teach and told them the scripture was fulfilled in himself. He taught much more (see their reaction in Luke 4:22—if that

was all he said, they wouldn't have been impressed at his gracious words), and as they understood what he was claiming, they deemed it blasphemous and tried to stone him, but he miraculously passed through them and escaped, never to return to Nazareth again. Notice where Jesus stopped the quotation—he didn't mention the vengeance and mourning part, nor verse 3 about the blessing of Zion in the last days, because those are things that belong to the Millennial Messiah.

61:6 Unlike Isaiah's day, many will hold the priesthood in the latter days.

61:10-11 This is Zion or Israel speaking of what the Lord will do. The clothing relates to the temple, of course, but also picks up again the metaphor of the wedding; the words "salvation" and "righteousness" are again present, a constant theme in Isaiah but especially these chapters. Remembering back to 60:18; these words are written on the walls and gates there, but here in the very earth and garden.

Chapter 62 begins and ends with the personification of Jerusalem. It focuses on the gathering of the last days, which leads right into the discussion of the Second Coming in chapter 63.

62:2 This new name signifies a new level of commitment or new relationship with God. Examples abound in scripture—Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel, Simon to Peter, just to name three. 62:4 gives two of the new names (replacing the old ones listed; see the footnotes for the meaning). The JST changes these to "Delightful" and "Union," which are excellent Hebrew. This is again the marriage covenant, the Lord taking Israel as a bride. 62:12 then returns to this theme, telling us what some of the names are—the Holy People; the Redeemed of the Lord; the Sought Out; a City not Forsaken.

The first part of chapter 63 is a clear reference to the Second Coming.

63:1 See D&C 133:46-48. "Edom" means 'red' and "Bozrah" means 'fortress' or 'sheepfold.' Both represent nations to the east. Christ will come to Israel from the east, with glorious, red garments, with power and greatness, being "mighty to save."

63:2-3 Crushing grapes to make wine was a community affair because it was a tremendous amount of work. But the Savior did it alone, both symbolizing his Atonement and that he alone has the power to save Israel from sin and punishment. In Gethsemane and the first coming, the blood on his garments was his own. But now in the Second Coming, the blood is that of his enemies, the wicked.

After summing up the Lord's efforts to save them and Israel's rebellious responses in 63:7-14, Isaiah offers a great intercessory prayer (63:15 – 64:12; read 64:1-4, 8, 11-12). This great prayer of Isaiah becomes the prayer of all Israel (see 64 chapter heading) and is echoed in the language of D&C 133:40-45.

## THE LORD ANSWERS ISRAEL'S PRAYER (65-66)

The final two chapters are the Lord's answer to Isaiah's and Israel's prayers. He starts by reminding Israel of their former iniquities but quickly shifts into great promises of redemption and forgiveness.

65:1-2 were changed extensively in the JST, though not captured in our Bible footnotes:

1 I am found of *them* who seek after me; I give unto all them *that* ask of *me*; I am not found of *them that* sought me not or that enquireth not after me: I said unto my servant, Behold me, look upon me, I will send you unto a nation *that was* are not called by my name. 2 For I have spread out my hands all the day to a people, who walketh not in my ways and their works are evil and not good, and they walk after their own thoughts;

The KJV message is that the Lord keeps trying to reach out to Israel even though they are rebellious. That's true, but the JST turns the first verse into a positive message that those who seek the Lord will find him and be blessed by him, while verse 2 retains the sense of the Lord reaching out to a rebellious people, though the message is stronger and emphasizes the evil in their works.

Blessings for the righteous are in 65:8-10 and curses for the wicked in 65:11-12. The two are then compared and contrasted in 65:13-16.

The rest of chapter 65 foretells conditions during the Millennium. If you compare Revelation 19-21, you'll see much of the same language—John clearly knew his Isaiah! In our day, D&C 101:23-31 also uses similar language to speak of that day after the Second Coming: 65:17, 20, 24-25.

Chapter 66 is a fitting conclusion to the entire book. Like chapter 1, it summarizes many of the messages already given but also provides challenges to the faithful as the Lord concludes his answer to their prayer.

66:2 What I really want from my people, says God, is humility, and an acknowledgement that the Lord has made all things.

66:7 Zion will come forth so suddenly and miraculously in the last days that it will be like a woman who had a baby but didn't go through labor. Compare to Revelation 12:1-7, especially with the JST changes.

66:12 I love this image. "peace to her like a river" returns to the language of 48:18, comparing peace to flowing rivers and streams—a clear reference to partaking of living water to obtain the peace of eternal life.

66:19 Missionary work will gather the righteous from all nations, as missionaries go out to the farthest reaches of the earth.

66:22-23 This is the ultimate triumph of God and the righteous with him as all flesh worship the Lord on a fully sanctified earth.

I hope as we conclude this quick tour through the concepts and ideas of Isaiah, that you have gained some additional insight that will help you appreciate and understand his message. I hope that you will study him with new intensity, as I will, and that the spirit of his writings changes your life and inspires you to trust in the Lord and his amazing and immense promises over all other things.