

Studying Isaiah I.

Background of Isaiah and his prophecies; compositional theories; Book of Mormon keys for understanding Isaiah; the “Book of Judgment”

2 Nephi 25:1–8; Isaiah 1–5; 7 and 9 (messianic applications); 11–14, 24–27.

Isaiah’s Background Reviewed

- **A man of high social status in the kingdom of Judah**
 - Son of Amoz
 - Isaiah = “The Lord is Salvation”
 - Had free access to the royal court and perhaps the temple
 - Prophesied to the kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah between c. 740–701 BC
 - One legend suggests that he was the father-in-law of Hezekiah
 - Married with at least two children (with symbolic names; more later)
 - **Witnessed the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians** and **saw the southern kingdom of Judah threatened**
- **Wrote his prophecies in a highly literate, symbolic style**
 - employed Hebrew poetic forms of parallelism, metaphor, and elevated language
 - Focused on the status and future of Israel as God’s covenant people
 - **Prophecies have multiple interpretations and applications: to Judah in Isaiah’s time, to the people of the Book of Mormon** (this is why Nephi and Jacob quote Isaiah), **to the Restoration, to readers in every age** (sc. us!), and **at the Second Coming**

Observations about Isaiah

- The Book of Isaiah seems to have two, and perhaps three, distinct sections: **chs. 1–39, 40–55, and 56–66**
- The second and third sections do not mention Isaiah by name
- **Historical situation seems to be different**
 - Babylon, not Assyria, is the major power
 - The temple and many cities of Judah seem to be destroyed
 - A Persian king, Cyrus, is mentioned by name
 - Incidentally, he is the only figure in Isaiah ever described as a *messiah* or “anointed one!”
- Shift in theological perspective from **judgment** to **reconciliation**
- **Literary style changes between sections**

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3

Compositional *Theories*

- Isaiah was supposedly written over a long period of time by different prophetic and literary figures
- **Isaiah of Jerusalem:** The Son of Amos lived c. 740–700 B.C. and was attached to the royal court of Judah (First Isaiah, chs. 1–35 supplemented with material from Kings in chs. 36–39)
 - Dictated or wrote prophecies that frequently castigated Israel and Judah and promising destruction
- **Isaiah of the Exile:** lived in Babylonia during the captivity that followed the destruction of Jerusalem in c. 586 B.C.
 - Wrote oracles promising hope and the restoration of Judah (Second Isaiah, chs. 40–55)
- **Isaiah of the Restoration:** lived in Jerusalem after the return from captivity
 - Preached and wrote to the post-exilic community that was disappointed and looked forward to a better revival of their nation (Third Isaiah chs. 56–66)

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4

Responses to the Authorship of Isaiah

- By the time of the LXX translation of Isaiah (early 2C B.C.) and Isaiah Scroll (a DSS that is the earliest surviving manuscript of Isaiah, late 2C B.C.), **Isaiah was considered one book**
 - *The Book of Mormon prophets quoted freely from both First and Second Isaiah (chs. 40–55 ostensibly not having been written until after Lehi left Jerusalem)*
- Many of the historical arguments against the unity of Isaiah do not accept **predicative prophecy**
 - *Moroni and other Book of Mormon prophets “saw our day” see Mormon 8:35; similarly, Isaiah of Jerusalem could have seen the situation of his countrymen in various periods of their history*
- The shift in style and theological perspective could be a result of **changes in topic as much as authorship**
 - *Further, Isaiah may have been an anthology as much as a book → it is a collection of Isaiah’s oracles, prophecies, and material about his that may well have been collected later and edited several times*

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5

Sections of Isaiah

- While judgment, comfort, restoration themes—as well as prophecies for the Last Days—are present throughout the book, the different sections of Isaiah **can** be seen as focusing particularly on specific themes
 - *These are collections of Isaiah for various situations rather than by a different Isaiah of a various times and places*
- **Part 1: Denunciation (1:1–39:8; “Isaiah for Jerusalem?”)**
- **Part 2: Consolation (40:1–66:24; “Isaiah for the Exile?”)**
- **Part 3: Admonitions to Restored Judah and Future Israel (56:1–66:24; “Isaiah for the Last Days?”)**

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17. Studying Isaiah I.

6

Book of Mormon Keys for Understanding Isaiah

- Understand **the manner of prophesying among the Jews** (2 Nephi 25:1)
- **Do not be guilty of “abominations” and “works of darkness”** (2 Nephi 25:2; conversely, **be righteous!**)
- **Be filled with the spirit of prophecy** (2 Nephi 25:4)
 - **“the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”** (Revelation 19:10)
- **Be familiar with the regions about Jerusalem** (geography, culture, history; 2 Nephi 25:6)
- **Live in the days that the prophecies are fulfilled** (2 Nephi 25:7)

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17. Studying Isaiah I.

7

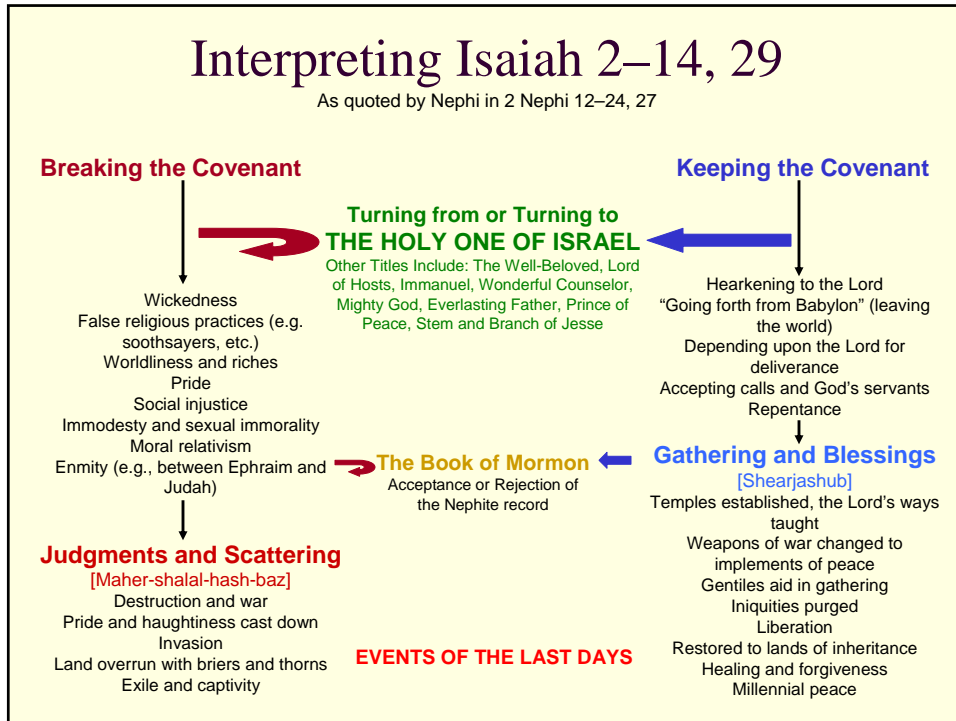
An Interpretive Approach

- The Isaiah prophecies in the Book of Mormon can largely be seen as illustrating the repeated themes of **scattering** and **gathering** (both temporal *and* spiritual), which can be directly connected to the **rejection and acceptance of the Messiah**, along with the **breaking and keeping of covenants**.
- **Levels of interpretation and application**
 - *What did this mean to Isaiah’s original audience, the Jews of the 700’s BC?*
 - *What did it mean to Nephi and Lehi’s descendants?*
 - *How does it apply in the latter-days?*

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17. Studying Isaiah I.

8



The Condemnation of Judah (1:2–5:30)

From Part 1: Denunciation (1:1–39:8; “Isaiah for Jerusalem?”)

- God’s indictment (1:2–23)
 - Wickedness of Judah (1:2–20)
 - The degenerate city (1:21–23)
 - God’s promise of restoration after judgment (1:24–31)
- Contrasts between Future and Present Israel (2:1–22; cf. 2 Nephi 12)
 - **Mountain of the Lord’s House (2:1–4)**
 - *Immediate context: Jerusalem; future contexts, other cities of God*
 - **The Day of the Lord: Judgment to come against Jacob (Israel) (2:5–22)**
- Judgments against Judah (3:1–4:1; cf. 2 Nephi 13:1–14:1)
 - **Judgments against the Leaders of Judah (3:1–15)**
 - Sins include social injustice (grinding the faces of the poor!)
 - **Judgments against the Daughters of Zion (3:16–4:1)**
 - Sins include pride, worldliness and riches, immodesty and sexual immorality
- Hope for Restoration: The Remnant and Jerusalem Will Be Restored (4:2–6; cf. 2 Nephi 14)

3/4/2009
17. Studying Isaiah I.
10

The Parable of the Vineyard (5:1–30; cf. 2 Nephi 15)

- Song of the Unfruitful Vineyard (5:1–7)
 - Love song, **judicial parable** (cf. Nathan's parable in 2 Samuel 12:1–12), judgment oracle
 - Cf. with allegory of the Olive Tree (Jacob 5, Romans 11:17–24)
- **Woes and Judgments: Social Injustice Denounced (5:8–24)**
- Judgment Unabated: Invasion Threatened (5:25–30)
 - “Therefore, is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them . . . And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth; and behold, they shall come with speed swiftly; none shall be weary nor stumble among them.”
 - **Isaiah's time:** the Lord musters invading armies to a standard to scatter Israel and Judah
 - **Latter-day:** by analogy to the positive use of “ensign” in 11:10 and 12, the lifted ensign **also refers to the gathering of Israel under the gospel banner**

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11

Messianic Applications for Isaiah 7 and 9

From Part 1: Denunciation (1:1–39:8; “Isaiah for Jerusalem?”)

- **Birth of Immanuel as a Sign (7:10-15)**
 - “Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign—**Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel . . .**” (7:14–16)
 - Immanuel, “God with us”
 - A child would be born as sign that God would deliver his people
 - **A child in Isaiah's day** (perhaps the future king Hezekiah or Isaiah's own son in ch. 18)
 - **This child would be but a type of Christ's own birth** (Matt. 1:18-25)
- **Promise of the Prince of Peace (9:1–7)**
 - Tribal lands of Naphtali and Zebulon are the same as **NT Galilee**
 - Kingdom of Israel will be destroyed and in darkness, but Jesus Christ will minister in that very region while in the flesh
 - **Coming of the Messiah: both in New Testament Times and the Last Days**

3/4/2009

17. Studying Isaiah I.

12

The Lord Will Redeem His People (Isaiah 11:1–12:6; From Part 1: Denunciation)

- **The Rod of the Stem of Jesse (11:1–5)**
 - **Exegesis:** **Promise of the Davidic covenant** (for Christians this has clear Messianic implications)
 - **Exposition:** the “rod” is a tool in the hand of the Messiah, hence the rod can refer to the Lord’s prophets (cf. D&C 113:3–4 for specific application to Joseph Smith)
- **Conditions during the Millennium under Messiah’s rule (11:6–10)**
 - *Note the familiar, positive use of “ensign”*
- **The Gathering of All Israel (11:11–16)**
 - reconciliation of Ephraim (Israel) and Judah (11:13–16)
- **A Hymn of Praise (12:1–6): God Is Israel’s Salvation**

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13

Denunciations Against Other Nations (13:1–23:18 ; From Part 1: Denunciation)

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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Against Babylon (13:1–14:23; cf. 2 Nephi 13–14) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Proclamation against Babylon (13:1–22) ■ Restoration of Judah (14:1–2) ■ Downfall of the King of Babylon (14:3–23) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ “Lucifer” is from the Latin translation → <i>here the king of Babylon can be used as a type of the devil and his fall</i> ■ Against Assyria (14:24–27) ■ Against Philistia (14:28–31) ■ The Lord will establish Zion (14:32) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Against Moab (15:1–16:14) ■ Against Damascus (Aram) and her Ally, Israel (17:1–14) ■ Against Ethiopia (18:1–7) ■ Against Egypt (19:1–20:6) ■ Against Babylon (21:1–10) ■ Against Edom (21:11–12) ■ Against Arabia (21:13–17) ■ Against Jerusalem (22:1–25) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A Warning of destruction of Jerusalem (22:1–14) ■ Denunciation of self-seeking officials (22:15–25) ■ Against Tyre (23:1–18) |
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17. Studying Isaiah I.

14

The Future Tribulation and Kingdom: Isaiah's Apocalypse (24:1–27:13; From Part 1: Denunciation)

- These difficult chapters represent a genre that became more common in later periods of the OT and in the NT (sc. Revelation)
 - **Apocalyptic literature** manifests dense symbolism about the “end of days,” the destruction of the wicked, and the salvation of the righteous
- **Impending Judgment upon the Earth (24:1–23)**
- **Deliverance and Blessing (25:1–12)**
 - Psalm of Praise: YHWH saves the weak from the mighty (25:1–5)
 - God's banquet (25:6–10a)
 - Moab a type of defeated enemies (25:10b–12)
- **Judah's Song of Victory (26:1–21)**
- **Israel's Redemption (27:1–13)**

3/4/2009

17. Studying Isaiah I.

15