

# 2 NEPHI 11-25 – S03E08

“We Rejoice in Christ”

The ancient new world prophet Nephi included long passages of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah in his engravings. We’ll discuss why he did this, and what good it does us, in this episode “We Rejoice in Christ.”

I’m Mark Holt, and this is Gospel Talktrine.

Thank you for joining me again for Gospel Talktrine. This week’s episode covers 2 Nephi chapters 11 through 25, including the dreaded Isaiah chapters. And as always. If you should care to ask a question, please send me an email at gt@gospeltalktrine.com.

## Listener Questions

This week’s question comes from Alexa in Idaho Falls, who asks, “Why are the Dead Sea Scrolls of Isaiah different from what Joseph Smith has written in the Book of Mormon?” And the second part of the question is, “Was Christ born in Jerusalem or Bethlehem? Joseph Smith mentions he was born in Jerusalem, but most historians for the middle-east would say Bethlehem is not Jerusalem but a city 6 miles away.”

Thank you for your questions, Alexa. So to answer your first question, there are several sources that we have in the modern world for ancient Old Testament writings. The first, the most important, is what’s known as the Masoretic Text, which is the main version of the Old Testament which has been translated into many languages. And the second version is what is called the Septuagint, which is an ancient Greek translation; so the Old Testament, written in Hebrew, translated into Greek about 300 years before Christ, and then translated into… from the Masoretic Text, translated into many languages, from Hebrew in the Renaissance era.

And so, two very different traditions for these scriptures to arrive to us today. The Catholic Church, for example, uses the Septuagint tradition, primarily, and the Protestant denominations use the Masoretic Text. In modern times, the Dead Sea Scrolls, in the last hundred years, the Dead Sea Scrolls were uncovered, and we find they have copies, if not complete copies, of most of what the other traditions of the Old Testament contain.

So that’s very helpful, and by comparing and contrasting these versions we can learn a lot about the process of how this text was transmitted to us.

And the Book of Mormon is no different. It’s yet another modern version of ancient scripture, and it was transmitted to us, we know there were at least three intermediaries. Whoever took the scroll of Isaiah and engraved it onto the brass plates; and then Nephi transcribed it onto his plates; and then Joseph Smith translated those plates into English.

And each of those transmissions may have introduced subtle differences. Now it may be that the brass plates, even if Isaiah engraved them personally and it was a perfect copy, I mentioned last week or the week before that I believe that Nephi introduced small changes on purpose. He knew that his people would have access to the original writing of Isaiah in the brass plates, and he wanted to liken, he speaks several times about “likening” the scriptures to himself and to his people, so it could be for their profit and learning.

And he tells us that we should liken the scriptures to ourselves.

So, many times in church you’ll hear, “Put your name in the scripture,” and say, “Verily I say unto you, Mark, that you should be faithful,” or whatever. So there’s one example that I gave, where Nephi adds a half of a verse at the beginning of one of the Isaiah chapters from last time, specifically emphasising that they lived on the “isles of the sea.” And this was him personalising the scriptures to his people, in my opinion.

And so it may have been that some of these changes, they’re all very minor changes, that exist between the Book of Mormon chapters of Isaiah and the Old Testament chapters, that they were introduced by Nephi on purpose. It may also be that Joseph Smith, as he was translating the Book of Mormon… the Book of Mormon came through his mind and through his experience, and having an extensive experience with the King James Version, that would’ve been the language that he naturally chose.

But it may be that he just didn’t get it perfect. And it may also be that he was discovering genuine and important changes in the text that he’s preserved for us. There is a lot of scholarship on this topic. There are sceptical views, and there are apologetic views, on either side of arguments about what was Joseph Smith thinking. So this is a very rich area for enquiry, and I encourage you to get online and start typing your questions into a search engine, and report to us what you find. But that’s my answer to your first question.

To your second question, “Why does Alma chapter 7:10 say that Jesus will be born of Mary at Jerusalem, at the *land* of Jerusalem, rather than in Bethlehem?” And there’s [an interesting article](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1984/08/i-have-a-question/why-does-the-book-of-mormon-say-that-jesus-would-be-born-in-jerusalem?lang=eng) on the Church website by Kelly Ogden who used to be one of the Directors at the BYU Jerusalem Centre. And he writes basically that for people who were far enough removed from Jerusalem, saying “the *land* of Jerusalem” is sort of like including the entire area, which you would expect.

By the way, the ancient land at that time was not known as Israel. The kingdom of Israel had already been conquered. It was known as the Kingdom of Judah, but also be accurately called the land of Jerusalem. So that’s one point that Brother Ogden makes.

The other point is, he doesn’t say “*in* Jerusalem,” he says “*at* Jerusalem.” And this is significant he argues, because Nephi uses a similar word to describe where their home is. And when they go to their home, it’s not *in* Jerusalem, it’s somewhere outside, they had to go *down* to it. So the word *at* as he uses it, may mean that it was nearby, but not exactly *in*. So good question. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and this just wasn’t an important enough detail for Alma to get specific about it. What he was trying to say was that Jesus was born in the land that we left, not in lands that we today can visit. That’s my opinion. So thank you for those questions, Alexa.

Secondly, I want to mention some people who have been helping with transcriptions. Specifically, Paul Castro and Janelle Bents, who have been transcribing episodes of the podcast. And they do this on a total volunteer basis. There are other people who have volunteered as well, and we’ll mention them as we put their transcriptions up. Those transcriptions should begin to go up this week.

## This week’s lesson material

Ok, so to jump into today’s lesson, these are the dreaded Isaiah chapters in the Book of Mormon. And there are 15 chapters in today’s lesson, and all but two of them are Isaiah chapters. And I remember when I was younger, thinking “Ok, I’ve just go to get through these, I’m called upon to read the Book of Mormon, but I’m basically going to let these words go, metaphorically, in one ear and out the other as I just read, in order to say that I’ve done it. And once I’m through these I can breathe a sigh of relief, and move on.”

My goal for this lesson today is to show you how you can be very sad when the time comes for you to leave the Isaiah chapters behind. And it would be fun for me, in fact, if we had done another week of study on these Isaiah chapters.

However, if you like… now the wonder of the Internet, and the way my podcast works, is that it stays around for ever. So if you want to, you can go back, and you can review what we taught about these chapters in Isaiah at the time. Today I’m going to pick and choose, and we’re going to jump around in the meaning of the actual Isaiah chapters, and what I’m gong to talk about instead is the actual process of how you can do this for yourself.

So first of all, I’m going to skip to the end. At the very end of our lesson today, in chapter 25, what Nephi says is that… now I want you to open 2 Nephi 25. He says why it’s important that we would study the words of Isaiah. So one of the most important verses in today’s lesson is [2 Nephi 25:8](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/25.8?lang=eng#p8), when he’s talking about the words of Isaiah, he says:

“8 Wherefore, they are of worth unto the children of men, and he that supposeth that they are not, unto them will I speak particularly…”

And so I was the person – as I skip over these Isaiah chapters – I was the one supposing that the Isaiah chapters are not really of worth unto me. So what I wanted to do was get through it as fast as possible, say that I did it, check off a box, and be done, And what Nephi is saying is, “These ancient writings are actually relevant to you,” and I’m going to continue here:

“…[I’m going to] confine the words unto mine own people; for I know that they shall be of great worth unto them in the last days; for in that day shall they understand them; wherefore, for their good have I written them.”

Nephi included these chapters of Isaiah here in the Book of Mormon for me! And he knew that I would be able to understand them. He saw our day in prophetic vision, and he knew that we would have the tools and the resources at our disposal to get what Isaiah was talking about, in a way that his own people could not. Because they’d left the land of Jerusalem, they didn’t understand the geography, they didn’t understand a lot of the other writings of the Old Testament, they didn’t understand the way the prophets worked.

So the Nephites, they needed “plain and precious.” And what Isaiah is, is pure poetry. So you and I, because we have the benefit of so many modern resources, we can understand Isaiah, and Nephi knew that we would be able to. And he knew that it would be very important, very worthwhile, for us to understand Isaiah, specifically these chapters.

And you’re probably thinking, “Great, but the question is, how?”

We’ll, in the past, I’ve talked about, we, when we read the scriptures, we go on a journey. The people who wrote the scriptures, they’re living in a different time. So we’re separated from the writers of the scriptures by time, we’re separated by geography, we’re separated by great distance, and we’re also separated by a cultural barrier. So those are at least three huge barriers that the language has to surmount, in order to convey a message to us. And to go on a journey of that length, to travel through time, to travel through space, and to travel across cultures, it’s necessary for us to pack our bags.

So what things do we want to put in our bags, before we read Isaiah? So we can have a greater chance of understanding it?

First of all, Isaiah is, like every other prophet, he’s steeped in the scriptures himself. What scriptures did Isaiah have, but the scriptures that came before? So one thing that’s necessary to understand Isaiah is to have a general understanding of the scriptural history of the nation of Israel, the Israelites.

So, the books of Moses, the creation, the story of Abraham, and then the story of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph in Egypt, the story especially of Moses and the Exodus. And then the way that the children of Israel came into the land of Canaan, conquered it, and then what you’ll want to know is - what were for Isaiah - future events. Specifically, the way that the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered and scattered by the Assyrians. And some of the politics just surrounding that time period. Because this was right during the lifetime of Isaiah where all of this stuff happened. And so, he’s prophesying to his people very near future events of their destruction. Understanding the way that exile came about will be very helpful to you.

And also, the Babylonian exile which would come about a hundred years later. And the return from Babylon, as would be prophesied by every prophet, not just Isaiah. So these are the things that are very important to him.

I’ll make specific mention here also of the Davidic covenant. So this is in the Book of Kings.

So if you were to understand the basic outline of the story of the Bible, from Genesis to 2 Kings, then you kind of know the historical context of Isaiah. And I don’t mean that you’ve got to get every detail, although the deeper you know it, the better off you will be. But just a broad outline of the storyline.

And so, one of the details you might want to know is called the Davidic covenant. And this is when David is praying to God about the Temple, and saying, “I would like to build a temple.” And God says, “You won’t build a temple, but your son will. And your son will have a kingdom, that your son will be like a son to me.” And David understands at this point that God is talking not about Solomon, but about a *quote unquote* “son”, meaning a descendant. “You will have a descendant, who will be a king, and his kingdom, his kingship, will never fail. And he will reign for ever and ever. He will be a son to me.”

This is the promise of a messiah that every Old Testament prophet thereafter would be excited about. And they couldn’t stop talking about it. And then the day when the Messiah would come, then certain changes would take place in the land of Israel, as well.

Now one of the confusions, obviously at the time of Jesus was, that there would not just be one visitation of this messiah figure, but that it would happen twice. And the first time he would come, would not be what they expected. They were expecting a king, just like David, who would redeem them, or would militarily free them, from their surrounding countries. And Jesus wasn’t obviously that, in his mortal ministry.

And so in Isaiah, when he talks about the Messiah, for him, they get a little jumbled in his mind, because it wasn’t important to the people of his time period, that Jesus would manifest himself differently at different periods. To him, he was talking about the many wonderful gifts that we would receive from the Messiah.

So those are some of the things that you’ll want to put in your bags.

Now, part of the difficulty in understanding Isaiah, is not Isaiah’s fault. I mentioned last week what “Jacobean” language is. Jacob and James actually come from the same name. And so when people want to talk about the language of the King James Version of the Bible, they call it “Jacobean” language. And Jacobean language can be very difficult to interpret, it can be almost impenetrable, especially when we are talking about words that are not in common usage, or ideas that are not in common usage today.

For that reason, and I don’t suggest this so you can get doctrine from other translations, but so you can get comprehension from other translations. Any serious scholar of the Old Testament would read Isaiah in more than one translation, would never dream of confining him or herself to the King James translation of Isaiah, because, it doesn’t provide the greatest comprehension for a modern English speaker.

So if you want to know exactly what Isaiah is saying, one place to start is to read a clear translation. Now translations run the gamut, they’re on a spectrum, from idiomatic to intra-linear. Intra-linear is where word-for-word the words are rendered from one language to another. Now you wouldn’t want to read a pure intra-linear translation. But if you read a pure idiomatic translation, you might miss some of the details, some of the linguistic tricks, I shouldn’t say tricks, but poetic expressions that are in Isaiah, because they’ve been translated conceptually. And some of the deeper language things have been lost.

So there’s a trade off as you read different translations, and you should read more than one.

If you were to take, and I would recommend this, if you were to take the Isaiah chapters of the Book of Mormon, and say, “I’m going to spend an hour on this chapter,” I don’t suggest you do it with all of them, but do it with at least one. Take an hour on this chapter and say, “I’m going to read this chapter in more than one translation, and I’m going to really understand what modern scholars, what modern translators think that it means,” and then there are a couple of more lenses that we’ll look at it through.

So if you want to understand this, [biblehub.com](https://d.docs.live.net/98831e09044fadc9/LDS/New%20folder/biblehub.com) is a great place, it’s a great resource where you can read as many translations of the Bible as are publicly available. So you go to [biblehub.com](https://d.docs.live.net/98831e09044fadc9/LDS/New%20folder/biblehub.com), and you look at the verse of the chapter you want to read, and in the upper left there’s a simple navigation where you can choose that, and then the whole navigation of the website is a different translation for each link, and you can read those verses in all the ways that they’ve been translated into English. It’s a fantastic resource.

So also a man named Avraham Gileadi, who is a Latter-day Saint, and he has rendered the Book of Isaiah into modern English in the way that he thinks it should be done. [[Isaiah Explained with Avraham Gileadi](http://www.isaiahexplained.com/)] He is an Israeli, and native speaker of Hebrew. So that’s an interesting resource as well. It’s not a perfect answer to what does Isaiah mean, it’s one more link in the chain to help us understand it.

Finally, you want to understand the Temple, the ordinances of the Temple. And I don’t mean necessarily the modern Temple, but specifically the Tabernacle of Moses. You want to know how that worked. And I could spend a little bit of time talking about it, but I will say very briefly, that it included three spaces. It included the Holy of Holies, which held the Ark of the Covenant, and was only entered by one person, by one man, on one day of the year. And it was covered by a veil.

And there was a Holy Place outside of that, which was larger, and the walls were embroidered or painted, depending on the temple, with Garden of Eden imagery. And there were artefacts inside that room, like a candlestick, a table of shewbread, an altar of incense, and other things that had specific meanings.

And outside all of this, there was the structure of the Temple. Outside there was an outer court, with an altar where sacrifices were performed. And the sacrifices were meant to symbolically forgive the sins of Israel. So this was the nature of the temple, to carry man from his ordinary world, his fallen world, and enter bit-by-bit, grow closer to God, and undo the effects of the Fall, as you travel along the path of these ordinances in the Temple.

The Tabernacle of Moses was a very clear metaphor for the path we would take to return to God, and to forgiveness.

The final thing to note, is that the scriptures are a feast, and if that’s true, then Isaiah is like eating a very rich desert. It’s a very rich cheesecake you might say. It’s delicious, but you can’t just take the whole thing in one bite and gulp it down and be satisfied. You have to take those bites slowly and let them dissolve in your mouth because they are so rich that otherwise they will not be enjoyable. And you’ll just be reading through it like I did, so many times, without any comprehension or any retention.

What Nephi says is, “These things are of worth to you.” So it’s worth doing this.

So that’s a long introduction, but I think it’s worthwhile, so you’ll get motivated to really understand the words of Isaiah.

Now, I want to also introduce you to an idea that I had a special episode about a couple of years ago. And I call it “The Six Antecedents of Isaiah.” I made mention of it last time. And what this means is, the pronouns in Isaiah, and some of the references, they have antecedents, in other words, they have concepts and people, for whom these things in Isaiah are mere symbols.

So the word *antecedent*, I’ll give you a brief definition. An antecedent of a pronoun is the original noun. So when I say, “He went to the store,” but you know that I’m talking about my friend John, then *John* is the antecedent, and *he* is the pronoun.

Now the problem with Isaiah is, we don’t always know what the antecedents are. Sometimes he switches. He’ll say, “God will do this,” and then immediately he’ll say, “Behold, I have said it.” And you don’t know that now it’s God speaking, unless you’re paying attention. So one of the important things is to pay attention to what the antecedents of the pronouns are, and when they’re not clear, then you can use what I’m about to talk to you about, the six antecedents of Isaiah.

And what they are, are six interpretive layers, that you can put on top of what Isaiah is writing, to get what his point was, and to maybe understand that there’s more than one meaning going on.

Now the first layer is the easy one. It is the events of Isaiah’s time, the events in his life, the warnings that he’s giving to the contemporary Israelites of his day. And that is the surface layer that anyone would have if they were writing anything. They would write, “I warn you that you should repent,” everyone would know that I’m talking to a specific person, and that’s the surface meaning.

So the first antecedent is just the people of Isaiah’s time.

The second antecedent is the Israelite history as a whole. Now I’ve referred to this already, it’s the broad strokes of the history of the Bible. So if you understand the Exodus, if you understand the people coming into the land of Canaan, you understand that Jerusalem and the northern kingdom of Israel would be conquered and carried away in exile. And then you understand that they would be gathered again. And as Nephi puts it, they would be gathered a second time, so they would be scattered and gathered again.

And eventually they would be gathered into their ancient homeland in a new creation, what was called in some places the New Jerusalem, in other places it was called Zion, and they would be gathered forever. And the whole nature of reality would change at that point, to where the lamb would lie down with the lion.

So this is the broad nature of the history of Israel, from the beginning to the prophesied end. From the past for Isaiah to the future for us. And that’s the second antecedent.

The third antecedent is the life of the person we know as Christ, who he saw as the son of David. So this future messiah, this future king, who would come into being. His life, and his ministry, both mortal and post mortal, would mirror the history of the nation of Israel. And so that’s the third antecedent. And really, what they both were mirroring, was our eternal progression through the plan of salvation.

So the plan of salvation, that’s a fourth antecedent. And what that means is, your premortal life, your time you spent as a spirit child of your Heavenly Father, the fact that you made covenants to come to earth and you have a mission here, the fact that you come into a fallen world, and you accept the Fall by nature of your birth, and during your earth life you make choices, you accept the atonement, you are baptised, you live your life and you die, and you are resurrected and eventually judged, and then exalted on a throne to sit down with God forever. This is the plan of salvation, this is your eternal life.

And interestingly, the progression of Israelite history, the people of God, and the life of Jesus Christ, they mirror this plan of salvation in several important ways. And there are a lot parallel points that you can attach and understand. Either, understand in one direction by learning about Christ and understand your own eternal progress. Or, by learning more about the plan of salvation you understand more about Christ. And so these parallels are very useful to us.

And all of those things are reflected in the Tabernacle of Moses. So that’s a fifth antecedent.

And finally, all of these lessons that we might learn from the scriptures, and learn about the history of God, and learn about the plan of salvation, all of them reflect on the choices that we need to make from day to day, and from week to week. So that’s the sixth antecedent, it’s what I call our daily walk, our daily walk with God.

And I’ll give you an example. I’m going to take [2 Nephi 12](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/12?lang=eng), which is a parallel chapter to [Isaiah 2](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/isa/2?lang=eng). It’s a very well-known chapter, and we’re going to deconstruct this chapter through the lens of the six antecedents of Isaiah. And I going to go, not verse-by-verse, but mini-passage by mini-passage, and we’re going to go through all six antecedents, and see how this would be done.

So open your scriptures… so this is very close reading. This is not loose reading where you can just phone it in, you’ve got to be paying attention to the text here. Open your scriptures if you have them, if you can, to 2 Nephi 12.

Now right away, verse 2, this is the best-known verse in this chapter:

“2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, when the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it.

3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

Incidentally that’s a classic example of parallelism. “Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” The word *law* meant *Torah*. Or in the reverse; *Torah* meant *law*. “Out of Zion shall come the *scriptures*, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

This is two ways of saying the same thing, this is Isaiah reinforcing his point by repeating it. That’s part of his poetic language, it’s an ancient Hebrew poetic form called parallelism. And there’s some other examples of parallelism just in these couple of verses.

But “the mountain of the Lord,” that’s a phrase that has great significance to Latter-day Saints, in fact there’s a movie called “Mountain of the Lord.” It’s about the construction of the Salt Lake Temple. So when Latter-day Saints read these verses, they imagine the Salt Lake Temple. When we read “the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains,” many of us, we imagine in our heads, we picture the Wasatch Front, and this wonderful temple that is placed there with this dramatic backdrop of snow-capped mountains behind it. So that’s what we think of as “the mountains of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains.”

Now in Isaiah’s time, he’s obviously talking to them about a future time, so there’s not necessarily a first antecedent meaning here. He saying, “It shall come to pass in the last days.” So that’s the first antecedent; there’s not much going on.

But in the history of the nation of Israel, this is the time when there’s a New Jerusalem. “Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” This is part of that new creation, when all things are new. In the life of Christ, we don’t have much about this, except Christ will be part of the establishment of that New Jerusalem. But in our understanding of the plan of salvation, this is a millennial time, it’s a time associated with the first resurrection. And obviously, as we understand the Temple, specifically the Tabernacle, these verses are symbolic of the fact that the ancient prophets would travel up to a mountain, and then they would come down with the word of the Lord.

So part of the definition of an Old Testament era temple, was a place where vision occurred. And I wish I could go into that; there’s a whole lesson there. But basically, you’ve heard the verse “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” The temple was the place where that occurred. And Moses would often receive his most powerful revelations at the door of the Tabernacle. So that is the significance from a temple layer of these two verses.

And then finally, in our daily walk with God, we are being called upon in these verses, we’re being called upon to wait upon the Lord, because eventually he will speak to us. It will come to pass that for each of us, we will have God living in our hearts, as Jeremiah promised in chapter 31, I think it’s [verse 33](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/jer/31.33?lang=eng#p33), that “God will write the law in our hearts.”

And so the day will come, if we wait upon the Lord, the day will come when revelation flows from within us, if we can have faith and exercise it, and prepare ourselves for that day.

So what I’ve just done is taken verses 2 and 3, and I went through, one by one, each of these six layers, and I showed you what was going on. So that’s what I consider to be a horizontal reading, because if you were to take a piece of paper and you were to graph it out, and you were to write on the left column, you were to write verses 2 and 3, and you were to write at the top of each column each of the six layers, then you would go horizontally across.

You also want to be understanding this vertically, which is verses form 1 to the end. What does the whole chapter mean? This entire chapter is basically God calling Israel to repentance. In fact, 2 Nephi 12, or in other words Isaiah 2, is part of one long discourse. This discourse is four chapters long, so 12, 13, 14 and 15, they’re part of one big concept. It’s one speech, it’s one writing. The fact that it’s divided into chapters is mostly irrelevant. We’re only going to examine this one chapter, but you really could keep right on going.

What Isaiah does in each chapter is, he follows a pattern which almost every ancient prophet follows, which is, he alternates back and forth. “Israel is wicked today.” “One day there will come a marvellous restoration of all things,” and then “Israel is wicked again.” And there’s an inflection point, chapter 14 is where he starts talking about this marvellous day, when God will live personally upon the earth. And then, “Look at how wicked you are today, look at how much you’re in need of repentance.”

So Hebrew prophets were constantly alternating between these two extremes. How much God hopes that you will change, and then exactly what he is going to change you into. And then back again. This chapter is the beginning of one of those long discourses where he follows this pattern. In this chapter he’s specifically outlining their wickedness, and how much they’ll wish they had changed when the day of judgement comes.

So a very common theme, and really not that hard to understand, once you get what’s going on. It’s a pretty simple message. You need to repent.

So, ok, verse 4, now let’s do another horizontal reading. Verse 4 says:

“4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks…”

In other words, there will be peace. This is, now he’s looking forward. So, Isaiah’s time again, he’s already saying, “I’m prophesying now. I’m not talking about a present time.”

But the second layer, the nation of Israel. Beating swords into plowshares means the nature of the whole world has changed. And peace now is more valuable than warfare. And understanding how to bring prosperity is more valuable than how to defend yourself. You won’t have to defend yourself. Love will reign. This is a change to the nature of the world. That’s an important concept, in the spiritual history.

Isaiah saw things. He didn’t see himself as the present, and then things spread out into the future. He saw everything all at once, just as God lives. God lives outside of time, and Isaiah’s vision was so complete, of human history, that he saw it as one continuous span, the he happened to occupy a particular place in.

And so, this layer of the history of Israel; when I say history, I don’t just mean the past, I mean the future as well.

Now Christ will be our judge, so the Christ layer, the third antecedent, is that God will one day judge us, and “he shall judge among the nations.” And obviously he’ll find Israel worthy, or he wouldn’t change them the way he does.

From a plan of salvation perspective, the fourth antecedent, this is a time when both the earth, and people who live upon the earth, are being resurrected. I don’t see a temple interpretation in this verse.

But in our daily walk, I want to bring up a lesson from the ancient Old Testament prophet Joseph. Now Joseph, at the end of his life, his brothers came to him and said, “Now that our father is dead, we don’t want you to take revenge on us for the way we treated you.” And he said, “Look, the fact that you sold me into slavery, has actually brought about a huge amount of good.” And you take evil, and you turn it into good. This is a lesson that is repeated throughout the scriptures. This is *the* lesson of the Old Testament.

And here it is repeated for us. God wants us to take evil, to take our swords, and turn it into good, beat it into plowshares, things that can be used to create food and prosperity for us today, bring happiness to us today. Rather than to bring suffering to people. So let’s take all of these things, this sword is actually a huge resource, it has valuable metal in it. We can melt it down, and we can make it an implement for making everyone happy.

So God wants us to take the swords of our nature, and turn them into plowshares. So it maybe that you are very good at arguing, for example. You might even be a lawyer, I’ll just use an example of a lawyer. You’re very good at arguing. And there will come a day when that intelligence that you have will be put to use in nurturing people, in building them up, rather than going to court and proving your case. And that’s just one small example. I don’t want to single out lawyers. But God wants us to take the swords of our nature, and turn them into pruning hooks and plowshares, so we can help each other, and build each other up spiritually.

So each of those layers now, has an interpretation, from the words of this verse. And we can do that for every passage throughout this chapter.

Verse 5:

“5 O house of Jacob, come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord; yea, come, for ye have all gone astray, every one to his wicked ways.”

Now this has a very concrete meaning in the first antecedent. Isaiah is calling for them to repent. “You have gone astray, O house of Jacob.”

Now at the second antecedent level, the history of Israel, they always go astray! It’s not that they went astray now. Moses was constantly telling them that they’re going to sin and fall away. Don’t follow after the gods of the people that surround you.

And here’s this wonderful little phrase here, “let us walk in the light of the Lord.” This is a clear reference to the Messiah. So this is a third antecedent meaning. Jesus Christ will be our light. This messiah that comes is not just a king, but he’s also a light for us. In our eternal progression, this verse is talking very specifically about the fact that we live in a fallen world, and we have a need for a saviour. We need somebody to redeem not just us, but the entire world.

Now the interpretation of this is, we, as the high priest on the Day of Atonement, would slaughter this flawless lamb, and carry his blood through the temple. Symbolically he was carrying Israel. He is carrying Israel from their fallen world through the Garden of Eden, and into the celestial glory where God himself dwells. And then he would sprinkle his blood towards the altar, and he would say the name of the Lord, symbolising that it was God himself, and not any earthly thing that the Israelites would do that would secure them forgiveness for their sins.

This was a free gift. The ancient Israelites, they understood the gift of grace. It was undeserved. And that’s the message in this, that there is grace for Israel. And that’s the temple message, right?

Then our daily walk. This is God calling us to humble ourselves, and rely on him. We have to realise that we are imperfect beings, and that we need him in order to perfect ourselves.

Now do you see, I’ve taken each of these six layers, and I’ve found a meaning in that layer that is… this verse is just two short lines in the way that my scriptures are aligned on my screen right now. And I’ve found six different meanings in it. And you can do this quite often throughout Isaiah. And if you were willing to do this, it would take you about an hour to go through chapter 12, and by the end of it, you would feel much richer. You would feel like, “Wow, Isaiah is constantly speaking, he wasn’t just speaking to the Israelites of his day, but he was speaking to people who would look back from the distance of history, like we are, and understand a lot more about what would happen to Israel.”

And only today, really, can we put all of this into perspective, because we know, number one, they would be exiled and that they would return and rebuild their temple, and their Messiah would come to them, and then they would be exiled again, and they would eventually… now with modern revelation we know, they will eventually be returned, that a prophet will come to them and they will live in a millennial reign. We understand all of that history, which they had to learn in Isaiah’s time, only through his metaphors. They didn’t have the understanding of it that we have today. They didn’t know who Christ was.

And so, it’s only now that we can put all of these six layers into perspective.

So, verse 6. I wish I could do all of this chapter, but I think I’m going to have to abbreviated it somewhat.

“6 Therefore, O Lord, thou hast forsaken thy people, the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and hearken unto soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers.”

So *strangers*, in the Old Testament, usually means people who are not Israelites. *Strangers* means foreigners. And it was a commandment that they not inter-marry with other tribes that surrounded them, with the Canaanites, because they would lead them to idolatry. So this is a verse about idolatry.

“They be replenished from the east, and hearken unto soothsayers like the Philistines.” So this is them inter-marrying, disobeying the commandments, perverting the faith, diluting what they believe, and “hearkening unto soothsayers.” Going after practices and beliefs that would take them away from the God of Israel, the God of their fathers.

So obviously, there is a very clear interpretation, in just the people of Isaiah’s time. But this is also a pattern on the greater history of the nation of Israel. This was the warning they received time and time again, and this was the reason for their exile. Now if you take a parallel of the life of the nation of Israel, their history, and you superimpose it over the life of Christ, exile is similar to death. And when they return from exile, that is a form of resurrection. We talked about that last week.

So anytime he’s saying that they are wicked and it’s going to lead to their destruction, you can think about Christ walking towards Golgotha where he would be crucified.

Now, there’s a contrast there, because Christ did not deserve what he got, but Israel certainly did. And that contrast is deliberate. We are meant to contrast Israel with it’s eventual king, and to understand their unrighteousness and his righteousness. The fact that they parallel each other in many other respects is only highlighted in the fact that Christ did not deserve his suffering, and Israel does. So that’s on purpose.

So when it says, “O Lord, thou hast *forsaken* thy people,” that word should evoke in your mind Jesus on the cross: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.” Because in the case of Christ, he absolutely did not deserve to have God desert him. However, he had to suffer, he had to tread the wide press alone, as we know.

So in our eternal progression, this is our spiritual death, right? We suffer spiritual death. Adam and Eve, when they went through the Fall, they experienced spiritual death, and each of us experience spiritual death when we are born on the earth and pass through the veil.

And in the temple, we learn about this as well. There are two veils in Moses’s temple. The outer veil that leads to the Holy Place, and the double veil, the inner veil, that leads to the Holy of Holies.

Now in my daily walk, these are the consequences when I sin. That God has to withdraw, or in other words I have withdrawn from him.

Now I’m going to skip the rest of this chapter. I’ve done a fair portion of it. You can understand how you would do a horizontal reading. You can take one verse, and if you were to write down each of the six antecedents, you can say, “Does this verse have a meaning?” It doesn’t always, but “Does this verse have a meaning on this layer? And if it does, what is it?”

And you can do a vertical reading. What is the main idea of this chapter? Or what is the main idea of this group of chapters.

So we’re going to go quickly now, through chapters 12 to 15.

So finally, we’re going to skip quickly down to the end of 2 Nephi 12. This is the final verse, verse 22:

“22 Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?”

Now I’ve written a note in my scriptures, that I don’t remember writing this, but as I was studying the scriptures for today’s lesson, I found it and I thought it would be very appropriate to read.

“The man spoken of here is the natural man. As the earth will be eventually purified, though fallen, and as Israel will eventually be gathered and forgiven, so we have reason to believe that Christ can truly save us, in spite of all of our pride and wickedness. This is why Isaiah should give us cause to lift up our hearts and rejoice.”

So that takes me back. We skipped chapter 11, and I want to read one verse from chapter 11. This is Nephi’s introduction to his Isaiah chapters. He says: [[2 Nephi 11:8](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/11.8?lang=eng#p8)]

“8 And now I write some of the words of Isaiah, that whoso of my people shall see these words may lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men.”

So, this final verse here in chapter 12…

“22 Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?”

…this is Isaiah’s call for us to leave behind the natural man. Now there are six layers right here in these short words, in this short verse, that we could go through. But we’ll skip that. But that’s an important verse.

Alright. Chapter 13. I want to just point out something cool. If you read in chapter 13 verses 10 and 11:

“10 Say unto the righteous that it is well with them; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.

11 Wo unto the wicked, for they shall perish; for the reward of their hands shall be upon them!”

So this is classic parallelism as well. I just want to point out, when you see something that’s kind of repeated, but with a contrast. Now normally parallelism is, they’re almost like synonyms. The two times that the ideas are expressed, they’re almost the same. This is a more rare example, not super rare, but more rare, of antonymic parallelism, where it’s a contrast. So I’m going to read them again, verses 10 and 11, 2 Nephi 13:

“10 Say unto the righteous that it is well with them; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.

11 Wo unto the wicked, for they shall perish; for the reward of their hands shall be upon them!”

Now as you hear that, or as you read that, which would you rather be? Would you rather eat fruit, or would you rather perish? As we mentioned before, this is a very powerful way to get across a complicated idea to an audience that has an aural tradition, that doesn’t have a written copy of what you’re going to say. If you repeat it in this way and change it slightly, it helps in retention and it helps in comprehension.

So that is one of the points of parallelism.

Alright, when you get to chapter 14, this is the inflection point of this discourse of Isaiah, that takes place over these several chapters. So he’s talking about…

“1 And in that day, seven women shall take hold of one man, saying: We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by thy name to take away our reproach.”

In other words, men will be so rare, because they’ve all been killed in warfare, that women will be willing to support themselves, if seven women can marry one man, and take his name, to take away the reproach of singlehood.

This is Isaiah’s way of describing the desolation that will come upon them, because of how bad they will be destroyed. And this was fulfilled once, when the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom, and it was fulfilled again when the Babylonians conquered the southern kingdom. There are many times when Daniel talks about the abomination of desolation, which is when the land is left desolate. There are not enough people to receive the blessings of living in the land of Israel. And they’ve been killed, they’ve been carried away, they’ve suffered in horrendous ways. And that’s what he’s saying. He’s talking about the judgments that will come upon them.

By the end of the chapter, here in chapter 14,

“4 When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning.

5 And the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory of Zion shall be a defence.”

Now, what is a “a cloud and smoke by day and a shining by night?” This is a reference back to the Exodus, when the children of Israel, walking through the wilderness, they have this pillar of smoke by day, and a pillar of fire by night to guide them. Incidentally, this is also what prevented Pharaoh’s chariots, their pursuit, from reaching them before they could all get into the floor of where the Red Sea had been, when the sea was parted. This was their defence.

So if you remember that story, then you’ll read this and you’ll say, “Wow, this is a clear reference to the Exodus, the history of the nation of Israel.” And it’s also a future reference, it’s also a reference of what will happen to us. Miraculously we can be protected from our enemies, when we allow God to wash away the filth of all of the terrible choices that we’ve made.

Now chapter 15, I actually want you to go back, and go two years ago and listen to my podcast, I wish I had more time to do it. This is the story of… I’ll read the first verse:

“And then will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved, touching his vineyard.”

Now this is metaphoric on the surface. There is no easily interpreted meaning. He’s talking about a vineyard. But once you get the metaphor, it’s not like it’s a complicated metaphor, but it’s very, very powerful. I want to point out one verse, and then we’re going to go on. Verse 7:

“For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for judgment, and behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry.”

Now, without reading this in the original Hebrew, you would totally miss an important part of what Isaiah has just done. “He looked for justice,” the word for that is *mis-pat*, “but behold bloodshed,” in the original Isaiah, which is *mis-pah*. So he looked for “mis-pat”, but he found “mis-pah.” “He looked for righteousness,” which is *se-da-qah*, “but behold a cry,” which is *se-a-qah*.

So, he looked for *mis-pat*, but he got *mis-pa*. He looked for *se-da-qah*, but he got *se-a-qah*.

So, this is what’s called paronomasia. It’s another form of this antonymic parallelism. And this is an English word, by the way; paronomasia, you can look that up.

So it’s similar to Christ’s statement about money changers in the Temple, from Matthew 21. He saying, “This was meant to be a house of refuge, of righteousness, but you have made it a den of thieves.” So God looked for righteousness, but behold, a den of thieves. So Christ was doing the same thing, he was using parallelism to contrast what the Israelites had done, versus what God wanted them to do.

So this verse 7 here, this is why they all Isaiah poetry, because Isaiah is constantly doing little things like this. And so, it’s not poetic in the sense of rhyme and metre, that we would define poetry by in modern English, nevertheless, it’s clear as we read it that it rewards a very dense, a very close reading, the way that poetry does, and that’s why people call Isaiah poetic.

In most modern renditions, modern translations of Isaiah, they have it indented, like you would poetry, and that’s a recognition of how poetic the language is.

Finally in verse 24, Isaiah makes reference to fire.

“Therefore, as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, their root shall be rottenness…”

He is talking about how people, the wicked, shall be burned up.

This is meant as a deliberate contrast to the fire that purifies. Now the chapter of Isaiah that Nephi skipped was Isaiah 1, but you might remember that it talks about “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as wool.” [[Isaiah 1:18](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/isa/1.18?lang=eng#p18)] So you can have your sins remitted to you, if you will go through the purifying fire, (that’s verse 25 I believe, of Isaiah 1), if you go through the purifying fire. So here’s a contrast; the burning fire, or purifying fire. Again, that parallelism and the contrast.

Now in Isaiah 1:18, God says, “Let us reason together, let us prove our knowledge.” When God says prove, what he means is “I’m going to put it to the test.” So, “Let’s put our knowledge, let’s put our reasoning to the test. Let’s put my admonishments to you, and my promises to you, let’s put them to the test, and let’s reason together.”

And that’s the inflection point, over which the two kinds of fire will change. If we will reason with God, and allow him to reason with us, then we get one kind of fire. And if we don’t, then we get the destroying fire. So that’s the message there in 2 Nephi 15, Isaiah 5.

Now, the next chapter, very notable chapter, it’s what’s called the theophany of Isaiah. And this is a throne theophany; he sees God on his throne. Isaiah’s actually called to go and witness God in the Temple, and see him surrounded by his angels. You’ll remember this from, I believe it’s chapter 1 of 1 Nephi (it might be chapter 2). [[1 Nephi 1:8](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/1-ne/1.8?lang=eng#p8)]

But Lehi sees this. He sees God surrounded by angels, and they’re in the attitude of worshipping him. So many of the Old Testament prophets had this very experience, as did John in the Book of Revelation. They had a throne theophany, where they see angels in the attitude of worshipping God, and the see God in all his glory, or at least as much as they can stand.

In the case of Isaiah, he was specifically in the Temple, meaning the Temple on the Temple Mount, the Temple of Solomon. And Isaiah immediately says, “How can I be here?” Number one, I’m not one of the priests or Levites that’s authorised to be in the Temple, and therefore I must be killed. And number two, I’m not worthy to be in God’s presence. God’s glory is going to consume me, and so he says, “Woe is me, wicked man that I am.”

And this idea springs from the law of Moses idea of ritual. There’s this thing called ritual purity. So are you pure, or are you clean, are you ritually clean to go into the temple? Priests and Levites specifically had to worry about this, but every Israelite worried about it. Am I in a state of ritual purity? And if not, there were very well understood and clearly defined ways by which you could regain your ritual purity. And it usually took some time, and it usually took the intervention of a priest.

And the interesting thing was, that if a substance or a person was unclean, they could infect, as it were, or they could sully other people with whom they came in contact. So if I was ritually impure, and I touched you, then you might be ritually impure as well, then you were ritually impure and you touched another person… it was almost like a virus that could spread. So they would be put out of the village until they could cleanse themselves, and take care of whatever the problem was.

Now this was very symbolic, and it showed the infectious nature of sin. The interesting thing was, that was the paradigm that governed ancient Israel.

And what Isaiah gets here is a new paradigm. Because he is the one that is impure in this situation, and one of the seraphim, one of the angels worshipping God, picks up a coal from the altar of incense, and puts it on his mouth, and then all of a sudden Isaiah is purified.

And now he understands the nature of the holiness of God. On the one hand we have the unholiness, the uncleanness of man, which is infectious. And if we want to be clean, we have to do a lot of work, and we have to slowly regain our ritual purity before we can arrive in the temple.

And what Isaiah witnessed here was that the purity of God, the holiness of God, (what’s called *ka-doosh*, holiness), can also be infectious. And again, in Jeremiah 31, he says “I will write it on their hearts, I will have a new covenant with my people and I will forgive their sins.” This is Jeremiah talking about the holiness of God that would infect his people one day. Holiness is spread, rather than unholiness, cleanliness rather than uncleanliness, purity rather than impurity, would spread. And that is the nature of the atonement of God, and when he calls Isaiah as a prophet, he teaches him symbolically this… the first thing that God teaches Isaiah is this concept. That even though the unholiness of man is infectious, the holiness of God is more infectious. God is powerful enough to forgive his people, through his grace.

And then he says to Isaiah; I’ll just make one more reference to something that happens here in chapter 6, Isaiah 6, 2 Nephi 16. He says, “Go and make the heart of the people fat.” Now in Hebrew there’s a certain grammatical form that’s called the *Hiphil stem*, and it is declarative. So it’s not so much that you *make* the heart of the people fat, but that you *declare* it to be fat.

The heart of the people is fat. Isaiah is called upon to bring their attention to this. He also calls them blind and deaf. They’re hearing and they don’t hear. They’re seeing and they don’t see. They are witnessing but they don’t understand, and it’s because of the choices that they’re making. So he’s calling Isaiah to make them aware of these choices, and to the fact that it’s making them blind and deaf to the words of the prophets, and to this very grace that has just purified Isaiah. They’re not eligible to receive that blessing. So that’s the fatness. When you read that “make the heart of the people fat,” that’s what that means. And most modern translations render it that way.

Now the next few chapters, they have to do with political things going on at the time of Isaiah. So that’s why the history can help you out a lot there. One of the constant, reiterated messages of Isaiah was, “Let’s avoid alliances with countries that are wicked. Let’s rely on God to do our protecting.” But the temptation for the people of Judah at the time was, “Let’s make an alliance because we’re so weak.” We’re right between the empires, Assyria and Egypt, and the northern kingdom of Israel was constantly making alliances, and God was advising them against it. And here’s Isaiah saying… this chapter is basically about Isaiah saying, “Don’t get involved with wicked nations, they’ll drag you down with them.”

And as we mentioned before, you can do a horizontal reading of that, and find all kinds of profitable lessons for yourself, to learn about Jesus Christ, to learn about the teachings of Christ, to learn about the Temple, there’s a horizontal reading that can be done in that chapter as well.

In Isaiah 8 and 9 [2 Nephi 18 and 19], Isaiah continues this line, but also starts talking messianically. Now when you see in the chapter heading “Isaiah speaks messianically,” it always makes me chuckle a little bit, because as we’ve mentioned, as we’ve learned just in this lesson today, there’s rarely a time when Isaiah is not speaking messianically. Isaiah is constantly talking about the Messiah. But here he talks about him more explicitly.

First of all, you might notice that there’s a footnote in [2 Nephi 18:1](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/18.1?lang=eng#p1). Isaiah is called upon to name his son *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*, which means “quick to the spoil and hasten to the prey.” It basically means that the armies that are coming in to destroy Israel will not hesitate to destroy them. And to get across this message he engaged, as many ancient Hebrew prophets did, in an object lesson, which was to name his son the very penalty that would come upon Israel. This is talking about his object lesson, and getting across the idea that they shouldn’t entangle themselves with these alliances.

Now there’s a very well-known verse in the next chapter, this [2 Nephi 19:6](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/19.6?lang=eng#p6):

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given…”

And this verse is a continuation of a verse from a couple of chapters earlier, which is “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.” And this was a specific sign given to a king in Isaiah’s time.

In one of the battles of the ancient kingdom of Israel, Isaiah is called upon to go and stand along the side of the road, and ask the wicked king as he rides to battle, “What sign will you have of what’s going to happen in this battle?” And this king, being not a total idiot, said, “Look, I’m not going to tempt God and ask for a sign.” And Isaiah says, “Here’s the sign I’ll give you. Unto us a child is born.” So that’s the context of that verse. He’s telling him the sign of Israel’s eventual victory will be that a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and we’ll receive this child, and he, the child that is born to us, shall be the everlasting Father.

So an interesting parallelism, it’s a little bit of a contrast, and he makes it clear that this is to be the Messiah. [[2 Nephi 19:7](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/19.7?lang=eng#p7)]

“Of the increase of government and peace there is no end…”

This is Davidic language, and he says specifically now,

“…upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.”

So this is Isaiah reiterating the Davidic covenant, that there will come a king from the line of David that will reign over Israel forever, and restore them to their great place on the world stage.

Now that’s a very attractive lesson to the Israelites in the position they were in. The Syrians (not the Assyrians) are coming down and threatening destruction on the northern kingdom. And here’s Isaiah talking about the victory of the Son of David, who will eventually come.

So you notice that Isaiah now has gone from destruction, and now he’s talking about the joy that will come, that God will reign forever. And then he goes back into destruction in chapter 20; and then in 21, back into new creation. In 22 he continues that. I’ll mention one verse, 2 Nephi 21:1:

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”

This word branch is actually capitalised I think in the Book of Zachariah. So this becomes a name for the Messiah in the Old Testament. One of the ways in which he’s known is the Son of David; he’s also known as the Branch; he’s also known as the root of Jesse. So a lot of names from Isaiah have become part of the general Hebrew understanding, the ancient Israelite understanding, of who this king will be.

A lot of it comes from Isaiah chapter 11, which is quoted here.

Now in chapter 23, I think the chapter heading actually does a fantastic job of telling you what’s going on.

*“The destruction of Babylon is a type of the destruction at the Second Coming”*

So right there it explicitly ties two of the layers of the antecedents that we’ve been talking about. And we can tie the rest of them in, if we do a little bit of work.

*“It will be a day of wrath and vengeance.”*

So there will come a day when each of us is called to account for our deeds, just as ancient Babylon is, and just as the world will be at the second coming. So all of these things have a personal application as well. That’s the final layer, that each of us should be looking for an application in our daily lives. And that’s a job for each of us.

So many Sunday school lessons, they talk about this application. “Ancient King David wasn’t very humble. How can we be humble in our lives?” Right? And I think that’s an important thing to do, but it’s so personal that I find it difficult to do in a lesson. I find it more profitable to do on my own. So I try to give you everything but that, and I rely on you to go and say, “I’m going to take this last layer, and I’m going to find it myself. How can I apply the lessons that we’re learning in the scriptures, and the people in the scriptures, the lessons they’re learning, how can I apply those lessons to me?”

That’s the final layer in every scripture, is that it has an application to me today.

The final Isaiah chapter in the Book of Mormon, [2 Nephi 24](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/24?lang=eng). This is again made more explicit; the metaphor of Babylon for the world. And then it says, in the chapter heading:

*“Israel will be gathered and will enjoy millennial rest… Israel will triumph over Babylon (the world).”*

So when Israel triumphs over the rest of the world, (or Babylon), that means that you and I triumph over our sinful nature, it means that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, it means that the priest reaches the Holy of Holies in the Temple, it means a time shall come on earth when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ. And it also means this king that Isaiah met on the road, riding forth to battle, will return victorious.

So it has all these different meaning, chapter 24 does, and all of these metaphors come home in one.

So I hope that this has given you a little bit greater appreciation for the method of teaching of Isaiah. It’s so powerful.

So we turn the page to the next chapter, [2 Nephi 25](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/25?lang=eng).

“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.”

And then, as we said before, he would go on in verse 8 and talk about how one day we will understand it. So he’s saying his people don’t get it. And yet… Imagine how difficult it was; this was referred to in the “Come Follow Me” manual. How hard it is to engrave things on plates of metal! And yet he took thirteen of these chapters here and he took other chapters of Isaiah in other places, and he went through the painstaking job of just transcribing them, from one set of plates to another, when they already had them. That should tell you just how important it is, and again, he’s saying explicitly here, “My people don’t get it. And yet I’m going to go to all this work to do it. And the reason I’m going to do it is because *it is of worth to you*. In the latter-days you will understand it.”

So that tells you, everybody listening, it tells you it’s worthwhile to you, in your life, to get Isaiah, to understand Isaiah. It is really important to do the work, to go back and get a broad understanding of the broad strokes of the history of Israel, so that you will be able to take the lessons of the history of the Old Testament and apply them in your lives.

It’s worth understanding the Tabernacle of Moses, so that you’ll get the fact that God, his grace has been active from the beginning of the world. It’s worth it, so that you will know, that the life of Christ actually parallels the struggle that I have every day. That when Adam and Eve fell, that I have analogues that I can see in my life to that every morning when I wake up, and every night when I go to bed. I can understand that the atonement is active for me, at every minute, and the resurrection is a real promise, and the world itself, the changes that I can see happening in the world, they’re mirroring what are happening in my heart.

This is the lesson from Isaiah, and it’s so powerful. And it’s the lesson that God wants everyone to get. And it’s the deepest lesson that’s possible from the scriptures. It’s God showing all of us, that all of us are his creation, and all of us are important, and all of us are a reflection of the Saviour.

Later on, in chapter 2 Nephi 25, it goes deeper into this message. Now I’m not making all of this stuff up, (I did make up the name “the six antecedents of Isaiah,”) but every one of these layers is referred to in these scriptures, before and after the Isaiah chapters, both in this lesson, and in last week’s lesson. The prophet, last week it was Jacob, this week it’s Nephi, will make some explicit tie between Christ and the people of Israel, or between the people of Israel and the eternal progression or the Temple. And that is them teaching us, that indeed we are to see ourselves paralleled in the scriptures, we are supposed to liken them to ourselves, and we are all reflections of Jesus Christ.

So here in verse 13, verse 12 and 13 is the perfect example. He’s talking about Israel:

“But, behold, they shall have wars, and rumors of wars; and when the day cometh that the Only Begotten of the Father, yea, even the Father of heaven and of earth, shall manifest himself unto them in the flesh, behold, they will reject him…

Behold, they will crucify him…”

So he talking about their wars and rumours of wars, then he’s talking about the crucifixion in the next verse. He’s likening the Messiah to the people of Israel. Now he does it again in verses 16 through 18, he talks about how Israel shall be scattered. First he talks about the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, then he talks about how Israel will be scattered, and then they’ll be gathered again. And in verse 18:

“Wherefore, he shall bring forth his words unto them…”

He’s talking about the great and marvellous work, “a marvelous work and a wonder” in verse 17,

“…which words shall judge them at the last day, for they shall be given them for the purpose of convincing them of the true Messiah…”

So the conversion of the House of Israel in the latter-days is synonymous with the resurrection of Jesus in the meridian of time.

And finally, there’s this wonderful discourse on the law of Moses. And it’s important for us to understand the Law of Moses. So verse 23:

“For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.”

So they understood this. Ancient people understood this, because they saw, as I mentioned before, they saw that the blood of the lamb actually didn’t do anything for them. They carry it into the temple, and then God forgives them as a free gift. They have to engage in this ritual, and then God takes away their sin. How does that work?

Now they finally understand that Christ is what the law is pointing to. In verse 25:

“For, for this end was the law given; wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith.”

The law is dead because, as I said, this sacrifice of the lamb, this lamb’s blood doesn’t do any forgiveness. It’s God that does this. The law is dead; it’s Christ that makes us alive. Verse 26:

“We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.

27 Wherefore, we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law; and they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given. And after the law is fulfilled in Christ, that they need not harden their hearts against him when the law ought to be done away.”

This chapter right here is one of the plain and precious things taken out of the Bible, because Nephi is saying again and again, “We teach the law of Moses, so people can understand Christ, not the other way round.” The law is actually dead, the law doesn’t save us, the law is just a schoolmaster, as Paul would later say. It brings us to Christ, because it’s a symbol. But it is not itself, the life that God will bring within us. For that, we have to look forward to the Messiah, to the wonderful Holy One of Israel.

And I’ll end as Nephi did, with verse 29 of 2 Nephi 25:

“And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the Holy One of Israel; wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul; and if ye do this ye shall in nowise be cast out.”

So grateful that we get to study Isaiah together, because, as Nephi said, he gives us the words of Isaiah so we can all rejoice in Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.