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12

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S. Brent Farley

Isaiah (meaning “The Lord is Salvation”) served as a prophet in Jerusalem from about 740-701 BC. He is “the most quoted of all the prophets, being more frequently quoted by Jesus, Paul, Peter, and John . . . than any other O. T. prophet. Likewise the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants quote from Isaiah more than from any other prophet” (LDS Bible Dictionary 707). Of the prophet Isaiah, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

Between Moses, the man of God, and the one like unto Moses, who is Christ, the prophet in Israel who had the greatest spiritual stature, fame, renown, and enduring influence was Isaiah. His prophetic language, filled with poetry and imagery, was written to his fellow Israelites, to the Nephites, to the Jews of Jesus’ day, and, above all, to latter-day Israel—to Israel in the day of her gathering and Millennial triumph. . . . *He is the prophet of the restoration, for the great burden of his message deals with the Lord’s work in the last days* (*New Witness* 535; emphasis added).

Nephi cherished the writings of Isaiah and seemed to have a great bond with him. Since both had been residents of Jerusalem, they shared a common cultural background and geographical origin. Both were familiar with the manner of teaching among the Jews, and had special insight into the understanding of the words of the ancient prophets (see 2 Nephi

25:5). Paramount in their bond were their special seeric insights, particularly highlighted in their prophetic visions of the Savior. Nephi pointed this out when he bore witness that Isaiah “verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him” (2 Nephi 11:2-3). Though many think the words of Isaiah are difficult to understand, Nephi (who was also filled with the spirit of prophecy) loved them, and frequently quoted them so that his people might be more fully persuaded to believe in the Lord, their Redeemer (1 Nephi 19:23). He regarded Isaiah’s prophetic writings as having pertinent application and fulfillment in the Nephite/Lamanite culture.

Nephi, like Isaiah, would become a “prophet of the restoration,” as many of his inspired writings dealt with latter-day events leading to the establishment of the kingdom of God upon the earth and the eventual destruction of evil. The prophet who would open that latter-day mission, whose role was foreseen by both Nephi and Isaiah, was another great seer who would add his witness to their vision of the Redeemer (JS-H 1:16-17; D&C 76:20-23). Joseph Smith, the prophet of the dispensation of restoration, would bond with Nephi and Isaiah, the predictors of that restoration. The Lord explained that when Isaiah echoed the command for Zion to “put on [her] strength” (Isaiah 52:1), “He had reference to those whom God should call in the last days, who should hold the power of priesthood to bring again Zion, and the redemption of Israel . . .” (D&C 113:7-8). Joseph Smith was the first of those so called, and his mission, in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, would be inextricably meshed with the coming forth of the records produced on the American continent by the Nephite/Lamanite cultures.

Another bond shared by Nephi and Isaiah was a clear view of the rebellion of Israel against God and the rejection of the words of his prophets. Isaiah saw the captivity of the ten northern tribes. Nephi came from the rebellious Judean section of once-great Israel, his own father’s life having been threatened

because he had testified against the wickedness of the people. Nephi saw his own people led to a land of promise, then divided into two warring factions reminiscent of his Israelite ancestors. Yet, the prophetic hope always seems to be anchored to a knowledge of the eventual triumph of Israel, as Jacob, brother of Nephi, prophesied: “When they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 6:11).

When Nephi addresses the theme of Israel’s hope, he, like his brother Jacob, calls upon the words of Isaiah for additional evidence. The chapter heading to 2 Nephi 12 clearly identifies for the reader the latter-day fulfillment of prophecy as voiced by Isaiah. A latter-day motif is not apparent in 2 Nephi 11, but careful analysis would indicate that it may also contain material germane to the latter-day prophecies of Isaiah which follow. Nephi states in 2 Nephi 11:3 that he will send forth the words of Isaiah and Jacob to his children as a testimony of the truth of his own words. Knowing that Joseph in Egypt had predicted the coming forth of a record through his loins, and that Lehi’s posterity were of the seed of Joseph (2 Nephi 3:4, 12), Nephi was aware of the prophecy of a great latter-day seer who would be named Joseph (2 Nephi 3:15). He had also seen in vision that the records of his seed would be combined with the Judean scriptures of the Bible as a witness for Christ (1 Nephi 13:39-41). He even prophesied that the time would come when all the tribes of Israel would have the words of the Nephites (2 Nephi 29:12-13), yea, even all the ends of the earth (2 Nephi 33:13). Fulfillment of these prophecies would be possible only through the latter-day restoration by the predicted prophet Joseph Smith, who would translate the gold plates.

In citing the additional witnesses of Jacob and Isaiah (2 Nephi 11:3), Nephi validated his own prophecies according to the law of witnesses. But it was also possible that there was a prophetic purpose to this verse, to foreshadow the three witnesses to the latter-day Book of Mormon. “Wherefore, at that day when

the book shall be delivered unto the man of whom I have spoken . . . *three witnesses shall behold it*" (2 Nephi 27:12, emphasis added). Today, we know that these witnesses were Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris. After referring to "three" earlier in the verse, Nephi continued, "Nevertheless, God sendeth *more witnesses*, and he proveth all his words" (2 Nephi 11:3; emphasis added). This foreshadows the eight witnesses, especially when correlated with the later Isaiah passage regarding the Book of Mormon witnesses of the future: "There is none other which shall view it, *save it be a few* according to the will of God, to bear testimony of his word unto the children of men . . ." (2 Nephi 27:13; emphasis added).

This would establish a scriptural pivot point between Nephi's time and the time of the restoration, as Nephi then quotes Isaiah who denotes a latter-day sign of import in the establishment of the earthly kingdom of God. "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, . . . all nations shall flow unto it" (2 Nephi 12:2). "The Lord's house" is another name for the temple (Ps. 65:4). The promised sign would be the latter-day establishment of the gospel including the temple ordinances. The prophecy was couched in symbolism meaningful to the Jews. The symbolism of the mountain in approaching God was well known to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, particularly from the record of the experiences of Moses, who "went up into the mount of God" (Ex. 24:13). "And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel" (Ex. 24:17).

Nephi, who was quoting Isaiah's words, had himself been "caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain . . ." (1 Nephi 11:1) where he had great spiritual experiences. Other prophets have had spiritual experiences in mountains, particularly when a temple was not available (Moses 7:2-3; 1 Kings 18:8).

Isaiah's prediction, recorded by Nephi, would begin its glorious fulfillment in the land of the Nephite/Lamanites in the latter days. According to Harold B. Lee, Orson Pratt explained that "with the coming of the pioneers to establish the Church in the tops of the mountains, our early leaders declared this to be the beginning of the fulfillment of that prophecy [Micah 4:1-2; Isaiah 2:2-3]" (15). Elder McConkie stated that the temple in this prophecy

is first and foremost the temple, capped with six spires and crowned with an angelic ministrant [representing Moroni, a Book of Mormon prophet] sounding the trump of God, that now stands in Salt Lake City in the tops of the mountains of America. All of the temples now built or that may be built in the high mountains of America also do or will fulfill this prophetic word (*Millennial Messiah* 276).

He emphasizes, "it has a general reference to the temple yet to be built in the New Jerusalem in Jackson County, Missouri" (*New Witness* 539). Applying Isaiah's imagery to the entire world, Elder McConkie taught that:

all of the holy temples of our God in the latter days shall be built in the mountains of the Lord, for his mountains—whether the land itself is a hill, a valley, or a plain—are the places where he comes, personally and by the power of his Spirit, to commune with his people (*Millennial Messiah* 275).

Such an interpretation explains how "all nations" could flow to the temple of the Lord, for it is quite impossible that they could all come to the temples in the mountains of America.

In the unfolding fulfillment of this Judean prophecy confirmed by the prophet Nephi, it was to be that "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 . . ." (2 Nephi 12:3). With the establishment of the headquarters of the Church in the Rocky Mountains, many converts from many nations gathered with the Saints in the valleys of the west. Then, as the gospel spread throughout the world, the gatherings of the Saints were anchored within their own countries. Elder Mark E. Petersen

explained that the Saints then came to learn of the Lord's ways by means of modern communication from Zion, " 'in the tops of the mountains' from the very block where the 'house of the Lord' has been 'established in the tops of the mountains,' the temple being only a few hundred feet from the pulpit in the tabernacle" (200).

Continuing Isaiah's prophecy, "for out of Zion shall go forth the law . . ." (2 Nephi 12:3), Elder Petersen said:

What goes on in a conference . . . is a direct fulfillment of the prophets of old.

What our speakers give is the law of the Lord, it is the Gospel of Christ. It is the way of life, the straight and narrow way.

When Isaiah spoke of this, so long ago, who could have realized the means of fulfillment? Who could have known how extensive would be the coverage? (200).

The extensiveness of this prophecy would also include the establishing of America, land of Nephite apostasy and gospel restoration, with its code of freedom, as the home center for the headquarters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Lord revealed: "I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose . . ." (D&C 101:80). In the dedicatory prayer for the Idaho Falls temple, delivered by President George Albert Smith on 23 September 1945, the following was voiced:

We thank thee that thou hast revealed to us that those who gave us our constitutional form of government were men wise in thy sight and that thou didst raise them up for the very purpose of putting forth that sacred document. . . .

We pray that kings and rulers and the peoples of all nations under heaven may be persuaded of the blessings enjoyed by the people of this land by reason of their freedom under thy guidance and be constrained to adopt similar governmental systems, thus to fulfil the ancient prophecy of Isaiah that ". . . out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (564).

It is interesting to note that Isaiah's prophecy emphasizes two major centers: Zion and Jerusalem. The Lord warned,

Prepare yourselves for the great day of the Lord. Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour. Let them, therefore, who

are among the Gentiles *flee unto Zion*. And let them who be of Judah *flee unto Jerusalem*, unto the mountains of the Lord's house (D&C 133:10-13; emphasis added).

The land of Zion is the Americas and contains the headquarters of the Lord's church. In earlier days, the Saints fled to the American Zion. Emanating from that center, the Gentiles throughout the world are now admonished to gather in their areas with the people of Zion as they seek to achieve the principles attained by Enoch's city (Moses 7:18). Those of Judah are warned to flee not just to Jerusalem, but to speedily seek the gospel principles within the mountains of the Lord's house, thus indicating that the prophecy of Isaiah will have some fulfillment in the land of Judah prior to the Second Coming. In the United States of America, the city of New Jerusalem will be built upon Mount Zion, beginning with the temple lot in Jackson County, Missouri (D&C 84:2-4). The Lord's city of old Jerusalem will be re-established (Ether 13:5, 11; Isaiah 62:7), and will complement its "sister city" in America as a central capital of religious peace and power. These capitals will bond Jerusalem (where Isaiah had prophesied and from whence Lehi came) and Zion (the land inhabited by Lehi's family which would later become the land of the gospel restoration and of the New Jerusalem). Having the word of God going forth from both centers presupposes the presence of saints and temples. These preparations will help to usher in the Second Coming and the Millennium.

Through the Lord's missionary servants the word of God will be spread as predicted by Isaiah in the Nephite records: "And he will lift up an ensign [the holy gospel (*Millennial Messiah* 106-07)] to the nations from far, and will hiss [call (Young 484)] unto them from the end of the earth; and behold, they shall come with speed swiftly; none shall be weary nor stumble among them" (2 Nephi 15:26). The swiftness of travel referred to will aid in both the gathering of Israel and the missionary travels of modern-day Elders. "None shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall

the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken; Whose arrows shall be sharp, and all their bows bent, and their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind, their roaring like a lion" (2 Nephi 15:27-28). Elder LeGrand Richards explained that:

Since there were no such things as trains and airplanes in that day, Isaiah could hardly have mentioned them by name, but he seems to have described them in unmistakable words. How better could "their horses' hoofs be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind" than in the modern train? How better could "Their roaring . . . be like a lion" than in the roar of the airplane? Trains and airplanes do not stop for night. Therefore, was not Isaiah justified in saying: "none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken"? With this manner of transportation the Lord can really "hiss unto them from the end of the earth," that "they shall come with speed swiftly" (236).

If viewed in a proselyting setting, Isaiah's words in 2 Nephi 23:2 fit well within the context of this missionary work: "Lift ye up a banner ['my' banner in JST Isaiah 13:2] upon the high mountain, exalt ['raise' in Hebrew in the LDS Bible 878, fn 2c] the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles." In its historical setting, the chapter in which this verse is found is a warning of the great destruction of Babylon, which became a world power under King Nebuchadnezzar (604-561 BC) and which became the epitome of wickedness in the ancient world. This destruction was used as a type for the destruction of the wicked at the Second Coming of the Lord, warning that "the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. . . . He shall destroy the sinners thereof" (2 Nephi 23:6, 9). Hence, the invitation to avoid that which brings destruction. The standard raised by the disciples to draw the righteous from among the wicked is referred to as the "banner" of the Lord, or the "ensign" (see Isaiah 13:2, fn 2a); either term may refer to the holy gospel. They may also refer secondarily to the standard of freedom which nurtured the restoration, for Joseph Smith referred to the constitution of the

United States as a “glorious standard” and a “heavenly banner” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 147).

Those who raise the warning voice by offering the gospel are instructed to “shake the hand.” One of the forms of the Hebrew word for “shake the hand” notes a vibrating up and down, a fitting description for the process of handshaking (Strong, “A Concise Dictionary of Words in the Hebrew Bible” 77). A possible interpretation taken in that context as well as in the plain context of modern language might suggest that those who listen to the voice of warning are invited to literally shake the hand in gospel fellowship. Hence, they could be “going into the gates of the nobles” by joining with the saints, the word “noble” connoting the stature of faithfulness as used in Abraham 3:22, and the word “gates” referring to an opening or entry into the kingdom of God through baptism and confirmation.

Joining with the Saints in the restored gospel, of which the Book of Mormon is the keystone, will provide salvation from the destruction of Babylon in the last days and salvation in the Kingdom of God. As Nephi and Isaiah knew, whether or not the people accepted or rejected the Lord’s prophets determined their safety, for none have been destroyed for their rebellion save they were warned by the servants of the Lord (2 Nephi 25:9).

Those who accept the gospel avoid destruction and gather with the Saints. Reiterating, the latter-day gathering began with the Restoration through Joseph Smith. Isaiah prophesied “And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (2 Nephi 21:12). The outcasts of “Israel” would refer to the portion of Israel known in Isaiah’s day as the “Northern Kingdom,” while “Judah” was the name for the “Southern Kingdom.” The gathering process will eventually restore and reunite all of Israel (2 Nephi 24:1-2).

What role will the Book of Mormon play in the fulfillment of these great prophecies of Isaiah? President Ezra Taft Benson bore witness of the following:

the responsibility of the seed of Abraham, which we are, is to be missionaries to “bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations” (Abraham 2:9). Moses bestowed upon Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple the keys to gather Israel (see D&C 110:11).

Now, what is the instrument that God has designed for this gathering? It is the same instrument that is designed to convince the world that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith is His prophet, and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true. It is that scripture which is the keystone of our religion.

It is that most correct book which, if men will abide by its precepts, will get them closer to God than any other book. It is the Book of Mormon (“The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants” 85).

It will undoubtedly be the case that the great prophecies of Isaiah will be best understood in that millennial day when Israel is gathered in triumph. In the meantime, many Isaiah passages have been illuminated with understanding as they have come to pass in the course of the restoration. Nephi taught that “in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled men shall know of a surety, at the times when they come to pass. . . . I know that they shall be of great worth unto them in the last days; for in that day shall they understand them” (2 Nephi 25:7-8).

We now see clearly that Isaiah prophesied of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon: “And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book, and they shall be the words of them which have slumbered. And behold the book shall be sealed” (2 Nephi 27:6-7). The excellence of hindsight as one continues to read the Isaiah 29 passages in 2 Nephi 27 helps to see the following historical incidents:

- (1) The Book of Mormon records will be delivered to Joseph Smith: “But the book shall be delivered unto a man, and he shall deliver the words of the book, which are the words of those who have slumbered in the dust” (2 Nephi 27:9).

- (2) The Martin Harris/Charles Anthon incident is foreshadowed wherein Professor Anthon asks Martin to bring him the records. When his request is denied with the explanation that part of the records are sealed, he replies that he cannot read a sealed book (2 Nephi 27:15, 17-18).
- (3) As previously cited, the “three” and “eight” witnesses will testify to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 27:12-13).
- (4) Some of the words of the First Vision are noted (2 Nephi 27:25-26; compare JS-H 1:19), including the reference from Isaiah quoted by Nephi regarding the restoration of the gospel “I will proceed to do a marvelous work and a wonder” (2 Nephi 27:26). As the events of the Lord’s kingdom continue to expand in the last days, so shall the understanding of the prophecies of Isaiah continue to increase.

Thus it is that Nephi and Isaiah, “prophets of the restoration,” should have prophecies in the Book of Mormon, “records for the restoration,” which prophecies deal with Joseph Smith and his founding work in the establishment and expansion of the Lord’s kingdom in the latter days. The important role of this Book of Mormon is emphasized by President Benson:

Note where the Lord placed its coming forth in the timetable of the unfolding Restoration. The only thing that preceded it was the First Vision. In that marvelous manifestation, the Prophet Joseph Smith learned the true nature of God and that God had a work for him to do. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon was the next thing to follow (“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion” 5).

Having seen the intertwining of Isaiah’s witness of the restoration and gathering of Israel with the Book of Mormon records in 2 Nephi, and noting the purpose of the Book of Mormon in “the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is

the CHRIST” (title page), it seems fitting to quote Elder McConkie who taught:

As far as the gathering of Israel is concerned, the Book of Mormon is the most important book that ever has been or ever will be written. It is the book that gathers Israel and that reveals, in plainness and perfection, the doctrine of the gathering of the chosen seed. . . . It is the Book of Mormon that causes people to believe the gospel and join the Church, and . . . it is the power that brings to pass the gathering of Israel. If there were no Book of Mormon, from a practical standpoint, the gathering of the Lord’s people in the last days would come to a standstill (*New Witness* 554).

Thus, President Benson stated in a general conference address, “I bless you with increased desire to flood the earth with the Book of Mormon, to gather out from the world the elect of God who are yearning for the truth but know not where to find it” (“The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants” 85). As the Book of Mormon with its testament of Christ is joined with the Bible in a world-wide witness, Isaiah’s words will ring from both; and they will lead one to the latter-day Kingdom of God upon the earth.

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