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### "Choose the Things That Please Me": On the Selection of the Isaiah Sections in the Book of Mormon

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## **“Choose the Things That Please Me”: On the Selection of the Isaiah Sections in the Book of Mormon**

John Gee

*Verbal markers, interpretive patterns, and explicit statements of purpose help modern readers appreciate why the Nephites included certain precise passages in their writings.*



Moroni exhorts his readers to “search the prophecies of Isaiah” (Mormon 8:23). “And behold, I would write it also if I had room upon the plates” (Mormon 8:5), he says, telling us that had he had the time and the room, he would have written and expounded all the prophecies of Isaiah. Anytime everything is not or cannot be included in a record, the writer must choose<sup>1</sup> what to include and what to exclude (see 3 Nephi 7:17). That the choice of Isaiah selections in the Book of Mormon was deliberate is shown by Jacob’s statement in 2 Nephi 6:4: “I will read you the words of Isaiah. And they are the words which my brother has desired that I should speak unto you.” Not all the chapters of Isaiah are included in the Book of Mormon, and certainly not all are explained. But “the Lord had a purpose in preserving the prophecies of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, notwithstanding they become a barrier to the casual reader.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps understanding why certain Isaiah passages have been chosen rather than others may prevent the prophecies of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah from looming “as a barrier, like a roadblock or a checkpoint beyond which the casual reader, one with idle curiosity, generally will not go.”<sup>3</sup>

Our purpose in this chapter is to explain four points: first, how the text of Isaiah is divided into blocks; second, why

certain blocks of text are chosen over others; third, how the Nephite prophets used and interpreted these blocks of text in their discourses; and fourth, how the Nephite writers signaled to readers their main reason for quoting a particular Isaiah passage. General guidelines to recognizing textual divisions are given, along with distinctive illustrations, to aid readers with their own analyses of the remaining quoted texts.

## **Textual Divisions**

It should hardly surprise us that Nephi's and Jacob's quotations of Isaiah in the ancient text of the Book of Mormon do not break at our current chapter and verse designations. The Isaiah Scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as Greek and other ancient biblical manuscripts, show that chapter and verse breaks were not present in ancient manuscripts.<sup>4</sup> More recent hands, following the traditions of the rabbis and doctors, placed artificial divisions into the texts of these ancient scriptures. The division into chapters and verses that we now employ can be a subtle impediment to understanding the scriptures. A close examination of the Book of Mormon reveals the section divisions of the Nephite version of Isaiah.

### **Phrasal Markers Using Verbs**

When quoting lengthy passages, Book of Mormon prophets intentionally start and stop in certain specific places, reflecting natural breaks in Isaiah's text. Nephite writers normally marked breaks in passages through a syntactic or phrasal marker at the beginning of a new section.<sup>5</sup> One of these is a statement of acknowledging the presence of a quotation; such statements are common in ancient authors and we will refer to them as "inquit" statements, after the most

common Latin phrase *inquit*, “he said.” The most common *inquit* statement in Isaiah (occurring 66 times) is “(Thus) saith the Lord.” A rhetorical question or an exclamation may also mark a section division (for example, see Mosiah 12:21; 14:1; 2 Nephi 27:25–35), as might other constructions, such as a simple noun phrase. Let us now examine how these syntactic and phrasal markers show how Nephite writers divided the text of Isaiah into sections.

*Inquit Statements.* Jacob chose with care the long Isaiah passage that he quotes in 2 Nephi 6:6–8:25 (see 2 Nephi 6:4); he is not simply rambling on until he gets tired. *Inquit* statements mark the boundaries of the passage he quotes. The selection Jacob quotes from Isaiah contains four sections, each of which begins with the phrase “Thus saith the Lord” (Isaiah 49:22, 25; 50:1; 51:22, parallel to 2 Nephi 6:6, 17; 7:1; 8:22), and the final section ends just before a fifth “Thus saith the Lord” (Isaiah 52:3).

*Imperative with Vocative (Change of Addressee).* Nephi also quotes part of this passage (1 Nephi 21:22–26, parallel to Isaiah 49:22–26), but he stops earlier. The words immediately after his stopping point are “Thus saith the Lord” (Isaiah 50:1, parallel to 2 Nephi 7:1), and he began with a phrase just as distinctive: “Hear ye this, O house of Jacob” (Isaiah 48:1, parallel to 1 Nephi 20:1). This phrase includes the imperative (command) “Hear” and its accompanying vocative (addressee) “ye”—and more specifically the “house of Jacob.” The phrase indicates a shift to direct speech and a shift in the subject addressed; it also serves to mark the beginning of a new section. The same construction also applies to a passage from Isaiah that Jesus quotes, which begins “Sing, O barren” (Isaiah 54:1, parallel to 3 Nephi 22:1) and ends just before “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters” (Isaiah 55:1). Other relevant passages that use an imperative to mark the beginning of a section are given in Table 1.

Table 1

### Selection of Isaiah Passages: Beginning and Ending Statements

Passages marked as follows: *Imperative with vocative*, INQUIT STATEMENT, **noun phrase**, exclamation, rhetorical question

Book of Mormon reference	Isaiah reference	End of previous Isaiah passage	Beginning of quotation	End of quotation	Beginning of following Isaiah passage
1 Nephi 20-1	48-9	... none shall save thee.	<i>Hearken and hear this, O house of Jacob . . .</i>	... I, the Lord am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.	THUS SAITH THE LORD, . . .
2 Nephi 6:6b-7, 16-8:25	49:22-52:2	... Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?	THUS SAITH THE LORD GOD: . . .	... loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.	FOR THUS SAITH THE LORD, . . .
2 Nephi 9:50-1	55:1-2	... and their righteousness is of me, SAITH THE LORD.	<i>Come, my brethren, every one that thirsteth . . .</i>	... and let your soul delight in fatness.	<i>Incline your ear, and come unto me: . . .</i>
2 Nephi 12-24	2-14	... and none shall quench them.	<b>The word that Isaiah, the son of Amos, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: . . .</b>	... and poor of his people shall trust in it.	<b>The burden of Moab . . .</b>
2 Nephi 27:2-9, 15-19, 25-35	29:6-24	... it shall be at an instant suddenly.	they shall be visited of the Lord of Hosts, . . .	... and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.	<u>Woe to the rebellious children, SAITH THE LORD, . . .</u>

Book of Mormon reference	Isaiah reference	End of previous Isaiah passage	Beginning of quotation	End of quotation	Beginning of following Isaiah passage
Mosiah 12:21–4	52:7–10	. . . in that day that I am he that doth speak: behold, it is I.	<u>How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; . . .</u>	. . . and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.	<i>Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, . . .</i>
Mosiah 14	53:1–12	. . . that which they had not heard shall they consider.	<u>Who hath believed our report, . . .</u>	. . . and made intercession for the transgressors.	<i>Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; . . .</i>
3 Nephi 16:18–20	52:8–10	. . . Thy God reigneth!	Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; . . .	. . . and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God.	<i>Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, . . .</i>
3 Nephi 20:32–46	52:1–3, 6–15	. . . and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them then went over.	<i>Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; . . .</i>	. . . and that which they had not heard shall they consider.	<u>Who hath believed our report? . . .</u>
3 Nephi 22	54	. . . and made intercession for the transgressors.	<i>Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear . . .</i>	. . . and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.	<i>Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, . . .</i>

### Phrasal Markers Using Nouns

Similar markers are found in the longest of the passages of Isaiah quoted in the Book of Mormon (Isaiah 2–14, parallel to 2 Nephi 12–24). In these chapters, simple noun phrases mark section boundaries. The list of these phrases forms an almost complete atlas of Isaiah’s world (collecting prophecies against various nations is a common feature of the preexilic prophets): “The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:1); “the burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see” (Isaiah 13:1); “the burden of Moab” (Isaiah 15:1); “the burden of Damascus” (Isaiah 17:1); “the burden of Egypt” (Isaiah 19:1); “the burden of the desert of the sea” (Isaiah 21:1); “the burden of Dumah” (Isaiah 21:11); “the burden upon Arabia” (Isaiah 21:13); “the burden of the valley of vision,” or the Hizayon valley (Isaiah 22:1); “the burden of Tyre” (Isaiah 23:1); and “the beasts of the south” (Isaiah 30:6). All these phrases are designated burdens (*maśśā*), with the exception of the first phrase, which is designated a word (*dābār*). This word, however, is also linked with the other phrases because it and the next one are modified by the phrase “that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.”<sup>6</sup> These phrases should thus be grouped together. These then are the major divisions in the first part of Isaiah (chapters 1–35). Each of these textual divisions in Isaiah discusses the word of the Lord to the various nations in question. The approach is tailored specifically to the nation in question: Judah receives a “word” while the rest receive “burdens,” and Assyria is omitted because the Assyrians are going to conquer or destroy all the kingdoms with burdens (Isaiah 13:19–22; 15:1; 17:1; 19:2–4; 20:4; 21:2–3; 21:15–17; 22:4; 23:1). Jerusalem, which received a “word” rather than a “burden,” is the exception; she is told that she will ultimately be spared (Isaiah 8:7–8). The entire book of



Isaiah is divided into three sections by a historical passage in the center of the book (Isaiah chapters 36–39).

### **Nephi's Selection of Sections**

Nephi seems to indicate that he is aware of the narrative structure of Isaiah as well as its content when he says that he understands Isaiah because “I, of myself, have dwelt at Jerusalem, wherefore I know concerning the regions round about; and I have made mention unto my children concerning the judgments of God, which hath come to pass among the Jews, unto my children, according to all that which Isaiah hath spoken, and I do not write them” (2 Nephi 25:6). But the question of why Isaiah 2–14 is quoted in particular remains unanswered. Of all the quotations Nephi could have used, he purposefully gave us what Isaiah saw of Jerusalem, or Zion (2 Nephi 12–22, parallel to Isaiah 2–12) and Babylon (2 Nephi 23–24, parallel to Isaiah 13–14). These chapters are impressively relevant to Nephi's main messages.

In his long explanation in 2 Nephi 25–30, Nephi notes that “Jerusalem shall be destroyed again; for wo unto them that fight against God and the people of his church. Wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered among all nations; yea, and also Babylon shall be destroyed” (2 Nephi 25:14–15), but he mainly discusses the contrast between Zion and the churches that fight against Zion. The contrast between Zion and Babylon mirrors Nephi's angelic guide's statement that there are “two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil . . . which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth” (1 Nephi 14:10).

Babylon is a fitting symbol for the great and abominable church. The angel tells Nephi that “the gold, and the silver, and the silks, and the scarlets, and the fine-twined linen, and



the precious clothing, and the harlots, are the desires of this great and abominable church" (1 Nephi 13:8). In a parallel revelation to John (see also 1 Nephi 14:18–28), when "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" falls (Revelation 17:5), it is "the kings of the earth" (Revelation 18:9) and "the merchants of the earth" who "weep and mourn over her" (Revelation 18:11). Thanks to the thousands of tablets unearthed in the last century or so, we now have a better idea of what that civilization was like. John Oates explains that "by far the greatest number of these documents are economic in content, dealing with such mundane transactions as sales of land and loans."<sup>7</sup>

Knowing that the Babylonians were astronomers who dreaded eclipses because of their dire indications—usually the death of the king<sup>8</sup>—helps us better understand Isaiah 13:10, parallel to 2 Nephi 23:10: "For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine." Isaiah, in his Babylonian prophecies, makes two clear allusions to two well-known pieces of Babylonian literature, the *Gilgamesh Epic* and the *Descent of Ishtar*. His statement that "the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us" (Isaiah 14:8, parallel to 2 Nephi 24:8) recalls the expedition to the cedar forests in *Gilgamesh* tablets II-V,<sup>9</sup> only in Isaiah's case it is the Babylonian king, not Humbaba, who is felled. Isaiah's comparison of the king of Babylon with the morning star descending into hell (Isaiah 14:12–16, parallel to 2 Nephi 24:12–16) compares well to the *Descent of Ishtar*, in which Ishtar, the morning star, descends to the netherworld.<sup>10</sup> In the Babylonian version, however, Ishtar emerges from the netherworld, while in Isaiah the king is brought down to hell, where he remains.

In two sections (Isaiah 2–12 and 13–14, parallel to 2 Nephi 12–22 and 23–24) Isaiah contrasts Judah and Babylon. One is interested in “the mountain of the Lord’s house” (Isaiah 2:2; 11:9, parallel to 2 Nephi 12:2; 21:9), while the other is interested in the “mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north” (Isaiah 14:13, parallel to 2 Nephi 24:13). Judah has “the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee” (Isaiah 12:6, parallel to 2 Nephi 22:6), while in the midst of Babylon reigns “Lucifer, son of the morning” (Isaiah 14:12, parallel to 2 Nephi 24:12). The “remnant of Israel” shall return to Jerusalem (Isaiah 10:20–22; 49:18–25, parallel to 2 Nephi 20:20–22; 1 Nephi 21:18–25), but the Lord shall “cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew” (Isaiah 14:22, parallel to 2 Nephi 24:22). The two countries have different reactions to the banner lifted “upon the high mountain” (Isaiah 2:2–5; 11:10–14; 13:2–5, parallel to 2 Nephi 12:2–5; 21:10–14; 23:2–5); the “day of the Lord of hosts” befalls each, but for one it is great and the other it is dreadful (Isaiah 2:10–22; 13:6–22, parallel to 2 Nephi 12:10–22; 23:6–22). Like the Gadianton robbers, the guerrilla warriors of the Book of Mormon,<sup>11</sup> Marduk-apla-iddina II (Merodach-baladin), a crafty and cunning guerrilla warrior, ruled Babylon in Isaiah’s day (Isaiah 39:1–2, parallel to 2 Kings 20:12–13).<sup>12</sup> Nephi’s division of the world into two camps is not unusual, although the lines upon which he divides them are. The division is the burden of Nephi’s quotation of Isaiah and his explanation of the passages he quotes.

### **Interpretation of Passages**

When Nephite prophets quoted Isaiah, they followed a regular pattern. The pattern they used in citing and interpreting Isaiah in the Book of Mormon (see 1 Nephi 19–22;

**Table 2**  
**Outlines of Passages Quoting Isaiah**

**Nephi addresses his brethren**

**Introduction**

1 Nephi 19:22–4  
**Quotation** of Isaiah 48:1–49:26  
1 Nephi 20:1–21:26

**Explanation**

1 Nephi 22:1–31

**“The words of Jacob, which he spake unto the people of Nephi”**

**Introduction**

2 Nephi 6:1–5  
**Quotation** of Isaiah 49:22–3  
2 Nephi 6:6–7

**Explanation**

2 Nephi 6:8–15

**Quotation** of Isaiah 49:24–52:2

2 Nephi 6:16–8:25  
**Conclusion** of discourse  
2 Nephi 9:1–54

**Nephi writes more of the words of Isaiah**

**Introduction**

2 Nephi 11:1–8  
**Quotation** of Isaiah 2:1–14:32  
2 Nephi 12:1–24:32

**Explanation**

2 Nephi 25:1–27:2  
**Quotation** of Isaiah 29:7–11  
2 Nephi 27:3–6  
**Explanation**  
2 Nephi 27:7–16  
**Quotation** of Isaiah 29:11–12  
2 Nephi 27:17–19  
**Explanation**  
2 Nephi 27:20–24  
**Quotation** of Isaiah 29:13–24  
2 Nephi 27:25–35

**Conclusion** of discourse  
2 Nephi 28:1–30:10  
**Quotation** of Isaiah 11:5–9  
**The End**  
2 Nephi 30:16–8

**Abinadi’s discourse**

**Question** on Isaiah 52:7–10  
Mosiah 12:20–4

**Question and answer**

Mosiah 12:25–32  
**Quotation** of Exodus 20:2–4  
Mosiah 12:34–6  
**Explanation** of Exodus 20:2–17

Mosiah 13:25–35  
**Quotation** of Isaiah 53:1–12  
Mosiah 14:1–12  
**Explanation**  
Mosiah 15:1–28

**Quotation** of Isaiah 52:8–10  
Mosiah 15:29–31  
**Conclusion**  
Mosiah 16:1–15

2 Nephi 6–8; 2 Nephi 11–30; Mosiah 12–15) may be standardized as follows:

- (A) Introduction
- (B) Citation of a passage of scripture
- (C) Quotation of parts of the text and interpretation of the passage by explaining and defining terms
- (D) Conclusion by quoting the closing verses of the section

This pattern is a general working paradigm; like any other verbal paradigm, there are lots of individual exceptions to the general paradigm. Table 2 shows the full pattern.

### **Jacob's Interpretation: Substitution of Phrases**

Jacob illustrates this interpretive pattern in 2 Nephi 6. Isaiah passages are in quotation marks, with square brackets marking variations between the Masoretic text and the Book of Mormon; underlined passages of the Isaiah text (part B) correspond to *italicized* quotations of those passages in the text (part C). Verses have been kept standard for reference purposes.

#### **A. Introduction**

5. And now, the words which I shall read are they which Isaiah spake concerning all the house of Israel; wherefore, they may be likened unto you, for ye are of the house of Israel. And there are many things which have been spoken by Isaiah which may be likened unto you, because ye are of the house of Israel.

#### **B. Quotation**

6. And now, these are the words: "Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

7. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their faces towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me."

### C. Explanation

8. And now I, Jacob, would speak somewhat concerning these words. For behold, the Lord has shown me that those who were at Jerusalem, from whence we came, have been slain and carried away captive.

9. Nevertheless, the Lord has shown unto me that they should return again. And he also has shown unto me that the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, should manifest himself unto them in the flesh; and after he should manifest himself they should scourge him and crucify him, according to the words of the angel who spake it unto me.

10. And after they have hardened their hearts and stiffened their necks against the Holy One of Israel, behold, the judgments of the Holy One of Israel shall come upon them. And the day cometh that they shall be smitten and afflicted.

11. Wherefore, after they are driven to and fro, for thus saith the angel, many shall be afflicted in the flesh, and shall not be suffered to perish, because of the prayers of the faithful; they shall be scattered, and smitten, and hated; nevertheless, the Lord will be merciful unto them, that when they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance.

12. And blessed are *the Gentiles*, they of whom the prophet has written; for behold, if it so be that they shall repent and fight not against Zion, and do not unite themselves to that great and abominable church, they shall be saved; for the Lord God will fulfil his covenants which he

has made unto his children; and for this cause the prophet has written these things.

13. Wherefore, they that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord shall *lick up the dust of their feet*; and the people of the Lord shall *not be ashamed*. For the people of the Lord are they who *wait for him*; for they still *wait for* the coming of the Messiah.

14. And behold, according to the words of the prophet, the Messiah will *set* himself again the second time to recover them; wherefore, he will manifest himself unto them in power and great glory, unto the destruction of their enemies, when that day cometh when they shall believe in him; and none will he destroy that believe in him.

15. And they that believe not in him shall be destroyed, both by fire, and by tempest, and by earthquakes, and by bloodsheds, and by pestilence, and by famine. And they shall know that the Lord is God, the Holy One of Israel.

#### D. Conclusion

16. For “shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?

17. But thus saith the Lord: Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for [the Mighty God shall deliver his covenant people. For thus saith the Lord]: I will contend with them that contendeth with thee—

18. And I will feed them that oppress thee, with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine; and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.” (2 Nephi 6:6–18)

The Book of Mormon offers glosses on various phrases from Isaiah, interpreting the phrases by re quoting them and replacing certain terms with equivalent terms. This is a venerable Jewish interpretive practice<sup>13</sup> that can be used to understand



the book of Isaiah as the Nephites understood it. Isaiah 49:22–23 contains the following pronouns: “I” = “the Lord God”; “they” = “the Gentiles” / “kings and their queens”; “thou” = undefined. The Book of Mormon reuses these phrases from Isaiah (see the quotation section of 2 Nephi 6, above), defining them more specifically and thus giving them more meaning: “I” = “the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel,” “the Messiah”; “they” = “they that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord”; “thou” = “the people of the Lord.” Furthermore, the “Standard to the people” that the Lord sets up is “the Messiah . . . himself.” The Book of Mormon’s interpretation is self-consistent and makes sense of the Isaiah passage. In the concluding passage, it is difficult to determine whether the bracketed words that differ from those of Isaiah in the Masoretic text reflect an earlier text or an interpretation by the Book of Mormon.

### **Nephi’s Interpretation: Adding Explanations**

Different parts of this same Isaiah section (Isaiah 49:22–23) are also explained in 1 Nephi 22, which uses several other techniques besides substitution of key phrases. In addition to quoting the phrase, the Nephite interpreter might provide an explanation: “they shall be nursed by the Gentiles . . . and it meaneth us in the days to come, and also all our brethren who are of the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 22:6). Also a verbal phrase might be added in order to define the previous phrase: “The Lord God will proceed to make bare his arm in the eyes of all nations, in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 22:11). To Nephi, for the Lord “to make bare his arm” means that he brings his covenants and his gospel to the Nephites.



### **Abinadi's Interpretation: Definition of Terms**

In other places, a term might simply be defined. Abinadi explains to king Noah and his priests the meaning of Isaiah 53:10, which reads “when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his seed*, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” (emphasis added):

whosoever has heard the words of the prophets, yea, all the holy prophets who have prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord—I say unto you, that all those who have hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins, I say unto you, that these are *his seed*, or they are the heirs of the kingdom of God. (Mosiah 15:11, emphasis added)

### **New Covenant, New Interpretive Pattern: Jesus on Isaiah**

Interestingly, when Jesus visits the Nephites, he uses another pattern of interpretation of the scriptures. Christ's quotations on the second day of his visit (3 Nephi 19–26) do not follow the general Nephite pattern of quotation and interpretation of Isaiah that exists in the previous quotations in the Book of Mormon. An examination of the material quoted and its context shows how the Savior's purpose differs. After the people were baptized, and during the ministration of angels, “Jesus came and stood in the midst and ministered unto them” (3 Nephi 19:15). After prayers (3 Nephi 19:16–20:1), the Nephites partook of the sacrament (3 Nephi 20:3–9) and then Jesus proceeded to “finish the commandment which the Father hath commanded me concerning this people” (3 Nephi 20:10). The Savior reminded the Nephites that he had quoted Isaiah 52:8–10 the day before (3 Nephi 20:11),<sup>14</sup> then,

picking up where he had left off in his discourse of the day before, he began to quote passages relating to the gathering of Israel and the part the Western Hemisphere plays in it, interspersed with his own comments and clarifications (see Table 3).

Christ uses a series of basic texts with slight changes to clarify his intent, continually alluding to these texts in his explanations by picking up the wording from the passages. He also introduces the writings of prophets that were not part of the Nephite canon (3 Nephi 23:6, 13; 26:2). In this fashion, Jesus “expounded all the scriptures in one” (3 Nephi 23:14; see also 26:1, 3–4), but because he said so much, Mormon was

**Table 3**  
**Passages Quoted by Jesus in 3 Nephi**

Isaiah 52:8–10	3 Nephi 16:18–20
Micah 5:8–9	3 Nephi 20:16–17
Micah 4:12–13	3 Nephi 20:18–19
Deuteronomy 18:15–19	3 Nephi 20:23
Genesis 12:3	3 Nephi 20:25, 27
Isaiah 52:8	3 Nephi 20:32
Isaiah 52:9–10	3 Nephi 20:34–35
Isaiah 52:1–3	3 Nephi 20:36–38
Isaiah 52:6–7	3 Nephi 20:39–40
Isaiah 52:11–15	3 Nephi 20:41–45
Isaiah 52:15	3 Nephi 21:8
Isaiah 29:14	3 Nephi 21:9
Habakkuk 1:5	3 Nephi 21:9
Deuteronomy 18:19	3 Nephi 21:11 (allusion)
Micah 5:8–15	3 Nephi 21:12–18, 21
Deuteronomy 18:19	3 Nephi 21:20 (allusion)
Isaiah 52:12	3 Nephi 21:29
Isaiah 54:1–17	3 Nephi 22:1–17
Malachi 3:1–4:6	3 Nephi 24:1–25:6

unable to copy all the material into his abridgement (3 Nephi 26:6–8). We are fortunate to have what he was able to give us, however, because the New Testament reduces the resurrected Christ’s scriptural sermon to a single statement: “Then opened [Jesus] their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:45) “which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms” (Luke 24:44).<sup>15</sup> It is clear that Jesus’ way of interpreting the scriptures left an impression on the Nephites; Moroni seems to have used the same method of interpreting scripture when he opened this dispensation.<sup>16</sup>

### Statements of Intent

Fortunately, in many cases, the Book of Mormon prophets tell us why they choose to quote the passages they do. These statements of intent are often found in the introductions to the Isaiah quotations, and phrases in the statements are reflected in the passages they quote. These introductory remarks help the modern reader to understand the significance of these quoted passages in the Book of Mormon.

#### Nephi’s Directives

For example, Nephi writes that in order to “more fully persuade them to believe in the *Lord their Redeemer* [he] did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah” (1 Nephi 19:23). In the Isaiah passage he then quotes the phrases “the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel” (1 Nephi 20:17), “the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One” (1 Nephi 21:7), and “I, the Lord, am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob” (1 Nephi 21:26). In the introduction to the passage, Nephi tells us what he

wants his readers to look for in the passage and expands this in the following commentary: “Hear ye the words of the prophet, which were written unto all the *house of Israel*, and liken them unto yourselves, that ye may have hope as well as your brethren” (1 Nephi 19:24). The Isaiah passage begins with the phrase “hear this, O house of Jacob” (1 Nephi 20:1) and addresses Israel six times (1 Nephi 20:1, 12; 21:1, 3, 12, 15), thrice explicitly as the “house of Israel” (1 Nephi 21:1, 12, 15) (the phrase *house of Israel* does not occur in the corresponding passages as they have been preserved in the Masoretic text of the Bible [Isaiah 49:1, 12, 15]). Nephi ends the passage that discusses the restoration of the house of Israel through the Gentiles with a statement of intent: “that ye may have hope as well as your brethren” (1 Nephi 19:24).

### **“For He Verily Saw My Redeemer” (2 Nephi 11:2)**

In order to appreciate the clarity of these statements of intent, readers need to follow the complex structure of Isaiah and think about how the Isaiah passage functions in its original context. For example, Isaiah chapters 7–12 are one succinct unit, a prophecy given to king Ahaz sometime in the first three years of his reign (see Isaiah 7:1, parallel to 2 Nephi 17:1; compare 2 Kings 15:27; 16:1). The dialogue can be confusing unless we keep track of who is speaking. The entire prophecy in Isaiah 7–12 is given to the faithless and vacillating king Ahaz.<sup>17</sup>

The first person to speak is the Lord, who tells Isaiah to tell Ahaz that impending war with Syria and Israel will not occur (see Isaiah 7:3–9). No record indicates that Isaiah said this directly to Ahaz; we are to assume that the message was delivered. The Lord then tells Ahaz to ask for a sign (see Isaiah 7:10–11), but Ahaz refuses (see Isaiah 7:12). Isaiah then

tells Ahaz that the Lord will give him a sign: Immanuel, meaning “God with us,” will be born of a virgin,<sup>18</sup> and before Immanuel knows good from evil, Syria and Israel will have been destroyed by the Assyrians (see Isaiah 7:13–25). Isaiah then recounts how the birth of his son Maher-shalal-hash-baz was prophesied, and how the Lord foretold that Judah’s enemies would be conquered before the child could speak. Maher-shalal-hash-baz thus is a type of Immanuel (see Isaiah 8:1–4); his birth is an indication of God’s love, a sign that God is protecting His people. Isaiah quotes the Lord about the coming of Assyria (see Isaiah 8:5–8) and tells Ahaz that joining a confederacy would be a disastrous mistake (see Isaiah 8:9–16). Isaiah again points to the sign of the children, noting that “I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel” (Isaiah 8:18), and Ahaz should therefore turn to the Lord instead of to the wisdom of men (see Isaiah 8:17–10:4). Isaiah points out that although the Assyrians are coming, they are a tool of the Lord and will be brought down by their own hubris. God will provide his people a righteous ruler (see Isaiah 10:5–34) who will usher in an era of peace (see Isaiah 11:1–16), “and in that day” even Ahaz will acknowledge, “God is my salvation” (Isaiah 12:1–2). The key figure in this prophecy is Immanuel, the babe born of a virgin (see Isaiah 7:14). This babe shall have the government; he is “The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), and the stem of Jesse (see Isaiah 11:1), and “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end” (Isaiah 9:7). All this explains why Nephi quotes this passage, and why he says that Isaiah “saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him” (2 Nephi 11:2). Nephi, living after the Assyrians had destroyed both Israel and Syria and later destroyed themselves, knew that this child had yet to be born, and he thus

introduces this passage: “There is a God, and he is Christ, and he cometh in the fulness of his own time. 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” (2 Nephi 11:7–8).

Similarly, to show “that God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and . . . he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted” (Mosiah 13:34–35), Abinadi also quotes Isaiah, saying that the Savior “was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth” (Mosiah 14:7, parallel to Isaiah 53:7). Abinadi explains that he quoted this passage “that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people” (Mosiah 15:1).<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

Examining how and why the Book of Mormon prophets used Isaiah reveals that the Nephites explained scripture using a basic pattern<sup>20</sup> that they developed gradually over time. It also shows that the Isaiah selections are not simple filler,<sup>21</sup> but an integral part of Nephi’s, Jacob’s, Abinadi’s, and Christ’s discourses, which all serve to fulfill the Book of Mormon’s stated purpose: “to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations” (Book of Mormon title page). The Nephite prophets chose sections of Isaiah that would underscore their conviction that Jesus is the Christ.



## Notes

1. The quotation in the title comes from Isaiah 56:4 and was suggested to me indirectly by Glen Cooper.

2. Boyd K. Packer, "The Things of My Soul," *Ensign* (May 1986): 61.

3. *Ibid.*

4. The Isaiah Scroll in the Dead Sea Scrolls uses indents and paragraphing to mark different sections. These sections are independent of our chapter and verse divisions. They are sometimes consistent with the divisions of the Book of Mormon, and they sometimes are not. See Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St. Mark's Monastery* (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1950).

5. There are also subdivisions within these sections: Isaiah 2–12 seems to be broken into the following prophecies: Isaiah 2–4, 5, 6, and 7–12, with the last two sections being separately dated. Isaiah 13–14 is also divided into at least two separate prophecies (13:1–14:27 and 14:28–32), the last of which is dated.

6. Amos prophesied against Damascus (Amos 1:3–5), the Philistine cities (1:6–8), Tyre (1:9–10), Edom (1:11–12), the children of Ammon (1:13–15), Moab (2:1–3), Judah (2:4–5), and Israel (2:6–8). The last to do this is Zephaniah, who prophesied against the land of the Philistines (Zephaniah 2:4–7), Moab and the children of Ammon (2:8–11), the Nubian kings of Egypt (2:12), Assyria (2:13–15), and Jerusalem (3:1–20).

7. Joan Oates, *Babylon*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 15; compare Seton Lloyd, *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia: From the Old Stone Age to the Persian Conquest*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 90–1.

8. Usually a solar eclipse signified the death of the king, but sometimes other catastrophes could be involved. For a general discussion see Oates, *Babylon*, 187–90. The basic texts are available in Ch. Virolleaud, *L'Astrologie Chaldéenne*, 14 fascicles (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1908–12); Hermann Hunger and David Pingree,



MUL.APIN: *An Astronomical Compendium in Cuneiform*, Beiheft 24 of *Archiv für Orientforschung* (Horn, Austria: Ferdinand Berger & Söhne, 1989); these might now be read in the light of Johannes Koch, *Neue Untersuchungen zur Topographie des babylonischen Fixsternhimmels* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1989). Other implications (disturbance, grief, fright, apprehensiveness, fear, awe) can be found in *The Assyrian Dictionary* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1954–present), s.v. “adāru.” For example, “If on the first of the month of Nisan the sun is darkened the king of Akkad will die” (Virolleaud, *L’Astrologie Chaldéenne*, 2:24; compare 6:15).

9. Translations available in Maureen Gallery Kovacs, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 19–47; and Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 61–77.

10. Translations in Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL, 1993), 1:403–9; Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 154–62; and E. A. Speiser, “Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World,” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 106–9. For Ishtar as the morning star, see Foster, *Before the Muses*, 2:505.

11. See Daniel C. Peterson, “The Gadianton Robbers as Guerrilla Warriors,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 146–73.

12. The standard account is J. A. Brinkman, “Merodach-Baladan II,” in *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1964), 6–53; a popular account may be found in Oates, *Babylon*, 115–7. Merodach-baladan earns the epithet of guerrilla warrior by fitting the following points of Peterson’s essay: a religiously motivated (Brinkman, “Merodach-Baladan II,” 14–7; Oates, *Babylon*, 115; compare 3 Nephi 3:9–10; Hugh W. Nibley, *Since Cumorah* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988], 365–6) political revolutionary (Brinkman, “Merodach-Baladan II,” 12–4, 18–27; Oates, *Babylon*, 115; Peterson,

“Gadianton Robbers as Guerrilla Warriors,” 147–9) who uses conscious retreat into the wilderness (Brinkman, “Merodach-Baladan II,” 19–21, 26–7; Oates, *Babylon*, 116–17; Peterson, “Gadianton Robbers as Guerrilla Warriors,” 149–54) and hit-and-run tactics (Brinkman, “Merodach-Baladan II,” 12–3, 19; Oates, *Babylon*, 116; Peterson, “Gadianton Robbers as Guerilla Warriors,” 154–8) until he can take over at the proper time (Oates, *Babylon*, 117; Peterson, “Gadianton Robbers as Guerilla Warriors,” 159–66).

13. See Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

14. Referring to 3 Nephi 16:16–20, with the last three verses quoting Isaiah 52:8–10. He had to stop his discourse because “my time is at hand. I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words which I am commanded of the Father to speak unto you at this time” (3 Nephi 17:1–2). For further discussion, see Dana M. Pike, “‘How Beautiful upon the Mountains’: The Imagery of Isaiah 52:7–10 and Its Occurrences in the Book of Mormon,” in this book.

15. The parallel is implicit but not explicit in John Gee, “Jesus Christ, Forty-Day Ministry and Other Post-Resurrection Appearances of,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:734–6.

16. Joseph Smith—History 1:34–49. See also *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–92), 1:52–4, 56–60, 62–70, 127, 277–81, 412–5, 429–31; 2:70; *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 76, 203–5, 213–5; and Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:11–3. See also Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons* 3 (1842): 706–7. For further discussion, see Ann N. Madsen, “Joseph Smith and the Words of Isaiah,” in this volume.

17. One indication that the entire section is one prophecy is Isaiah’s statement in Isaiah 8:18 (compare 2 Nephi 18:18): “I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel.” Isaiah has been accompanied by his son Shearjashub (see Isaiah 7:3, parallel to 2 Nephi 17:3), whose name

means “a remnant shall return.” He puns off his son’s name in Isaiah 10:19–22 (compare 2 Nephi 20:19–22) and alludes again to it in Isaiah 11:16 (compare 2 Nephi 21:16). He puns off his son Maher-shalal-hash-baz’s name, meaning “he has hastened the spoil, he has hurried the prey” (Isaiah 8:1, 3, parallel to 2 Nephi 18:1, 3), in Isaiah 8:4 (compare 2 Nephi 18:4) and alludes to it in Isaiah 10:2, 6 (compare 2 Nephi 20:2, 6). Immanuel is referred to in both Isaiah 7:14 and 8:8 (compare 2 Nephi 17:14; 18:8).

Another indication of the unity of these sections is that they are a single chapter in the 1830 Book of Mormon. See Thomas W. Mackay, “Mormon as Editor: A Study in Colophons, Headers and Source Indicators,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (Fall 1993): 92–5, 104–5; Royal Skousen, “Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 137–9.

18. Both George D. Smith and Avraham Gileadi have taken this as a prophecy of the birth of Hezekiah, not Jesus (George D. Smith, “Isaiah Updated,” in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990], 115–9; Avraham Gileadi, “A Holistic Structure of the Book of Isaiah,” [Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1981], 37). This is impossible. Ahaz reigned sixteen years (2 Kings 16:2; compare 2 Chronicles 28:1) to be succeeded by his son Hezekiah who began ruling at the age of twenty-five (2 Kings 18:1–2; compare 2 Chronicles 29:1). The date of the prophecy to “the days of Ahaz . . . king of Judah” (Isaiah 7:1) presents a major chronological problem for this hypothesis. Even though Pekah was in the last three years of his reign when Ahaz took over the Judean kingdom (see 2 Kings 15:27; 16:1), Hezekiah would have been somewhere between nine and twelve years old; it would have been too late for Isaiah to have prophesied his birth or when he would start talking.

19. For further discussion, see Jennifer Clark Lane, “The Lord Will Redeem His People: Adoptive Covenant and Redemption in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (Fall 1993): 53–6; compare Jennifer Clark Lane, “The Lord Will Redeem His People: ‘Adoptive’ Covenant and

Redemption in the Old Testament," in *Thy People Shall Be My People and Thy God My God, The Twenty-second Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 58.

20. Exegetical patterns tend to remain constant as long as the tradition and basic assumptions are intact; for example, see the exhaustive documentation in Thomas Mackay, "Early Christian Millenarianist Interpretation of the Two Witnesses in John's Apocalypse 11:3–13," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 1:222–331.

21. Harold Bloom insists that Joseph "Smith's insight could have come only from a remarkably apt reading of the Bible" (*The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992], 84). It takes a more sophisticated reading of both the Bible and the Book of Mormon, however, to catch what the Book of Mormon does with the Isaiah material; compare Alan Goff, "Reduction and Enlargement: Harold Bloom's Mormons," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 96–108.