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THE PROPHECIES OF THE PROPHETS

Robert E. Parsons

Shortly after the Lehi colony arrived in the promised land, the Lord commanded Nephi to make plates of ore and engrave on them the record of his people. Then, in 570 B.C. Nephi received another commandment to make a second set of plates (the small plates of Nephi), to record the ministry of his people. Obedient to this counsel, Nephi recorded on those plates that an angel had told him that Christ would be born six hundred years from the time the Lehi colony left Jerusalem (1 Nephi 19:8). He then proceeded to cite prophets of old who had also prophesied concerning Christ, his ministry, and the Lehi colony. It is in this setting that we find some of the prophecies of Zenos, Zenock, Neum, and Isaiah in the Book of Mormon. And indeed, it is because they testified of Christ that Nephi included them in his record (1 Nephi 19:10). It is my intent here to review their teachings as they appear in the Book of Mormon and to offer some help in understanding Nephi's quotations of Isaiah 48–49 (1 Nephi 20–21).

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The Testimonies of Zenos, Zenock, and Neum

First Nephi chapters 19 through 22 introduce us to Zenos, Zenock, and Neum and give us our first quotations from Isaiah. Little is known of the prophets Zenos, Zenock, and Neum, although their importance to the Book of Mormon prophets is evident in that Nephi, Jacob, Alma, Amulek, Nephi the son of Helaman, Samuel, and Mormon all quote from them. They are important to the Nephites for at least three reasons:

First, the Nephites appear to be descendants of these prophets and of Joseph who was sold into Egypt (3 Nephi 10:16–17).

Second, these prophets spoke of that which would happen to all the house of Israel as well as to Lehi's seed (1 Nephi 19:16–17; Helaman 15:11).

And third, and probably most important, they testified of Christ, and hundreds of years before his birth prophesied in detail of his atonement and the circumstances surrounding it (1 Nephi 19:10–12; Alma 33:12–17). We also learn that these messianic prophets gave their lives for their testimonies of Christ (Alma 33:17; Helaman 8:19).

Exactly when and where Zenos, Zenock, and Neum lived is not known except we do know that they lived prior to Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, otherwise their writings would not have appeared on the brass plates. It is likely that they lived after the time of Abraham and before the days of Isaiah, and that Zenos preceded Zenock. This assumption is based on the following scripture, and assumes that since Isaiah and Jeremiah are listed in chronological order, the other prophets are also.

And now I would that ye should know, that even since the days of Abraham there have been many prophets that have testified these things; yea, behold, the prophet Zenos did testify boldly; for the which he was slain.

And behold, also Zenock, and also Ezias, and also Isaiah, and Jeremiah, (Jeremiah being that same prophet who testified of the destruction of Jerusalem) and now we know that Jerusalem was destroyed according to the words of Jeremiah. O then why not the Son of God come, according to his prophecy? (Helaman 8:19–20.)

Since these prophets were descended from Joseph, it is postulated by some that they may have lived in the north of Israel, rather

than in Judah and that is the reason their prophecies were not recorded in Jewish scripture. It may also be possible that these plain and precious prophecies were deleted by unrighteous Jews who did not want these statements on the death of Christ in their scriptures (see 1 Nephi 19:13–14). Until the Lord reveals more information, however, we won't know the whole story.

The Teachings of Zenos, Zenock, and Neum

It is of some interest to summarize the teachings of Zenos, Zenock, and Neum as we have them in the Book of Mormon.

ZENOS	ZENOCK	NEUM
<i>1 Nephi 19:10–13</i>	<i>1 Nephi 19:10</i>	<i>1 Nephi 19:10</i>
Christ to be buried in a sepulchre	Christ to be “lifted up”	Christ to be crucified
Three days of darkness will be a sign of his death		
Following his death he will visit all house of Israel; righteous will hear his voice and wicked will be visited with fire, smoke, darkness, and earthquakes		
Jews to be scourged because they crucify Christ		
<i>1 Nephi 19:16–17</i>		
Israel to be gathered from the four quarters of the earth		
Every nation to be blessed and see salvation of the Lord		
ZENOS	ZENOCK	
<i>Jacob 5</i>		
Allegory of tame and wild olive tree with its teachings on scattering,		

gathering, restoration, and
Millennium

Alma 33:3–11

Pray and worship in all
places
Judgments are turned away
because of the Son

Alma 33:15–16

Mercy comes because of
the Son

Alma 34:7

Redemption comes through
the Son of God

Alma 34:7

Redemption comes through
the Son of God

Helaman 15:11

Lamanites to be restored
to knowledge of the truth

3 Nephi 10:16

Death and destruction to
come upon wicked at
crucifixion of Christ

3 Nephi 10:16

Death and destruction to
come upon wicked at
crucifixion of Christ

This listing shows the extent to which Zenos is quoted. It also shows that while his teachings center around Jesus Christ they also speak extensively about the house of Israel and its restoration in the latter days. The volume and content of his teachings were probably the basis for the following comment by Elder Bruce R. McConkie.

I do not think I overstate the matter when I say that next to Isaiah himself—who is the prototype, pattern, and model for all the prophets—there was not a greater prophet in all Israel than Zenos. And our knowledge of his inspired writings is limited to the quotations and paraphrasing summaries found in the Book of Mormon.¹

Why Does Nephi Quote Isaiah 48 and 49?

Having quoted Zenos', Zenock's, and Neum's very plain teachings that Christ will atone for our sins and that salvation is found only in the Son of God, Nephi says he has written these things to persuade his people to remember that God showed the prophets of old all things concerning the Jews and also that God showed many prophets what would befall Lehi's colony in the promised land (1 Nephi 19:20–21). He then says:

Now it came to pass that I, Nephi, did teach my brethren these things; and it came to pass that I did read many things to them, which were engraven upon the plates of brass, that they might know concerning the doings of the Lord in other lands, among people of old.

And I did read many things unto them which were written in the books of Moses; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah; for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning. (1 Nephi 19:22–23.)

The two chapters which follow, Isaiah 48 and 49, contain significant differences from the King James text. The Book of Mormon text contains a more accurate rendition of the original Isaiah text than the King James Version, since the brass plates would have been an older and better record than the later manuscripts used in the King James translation.

These two chapters do testify of Christ, but not as plainly as Zenos, Zenock, and Neum did. Is it possible that when Nephi says, “but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah,” he has in mind that a belief in Christ comes not only through what the scriptures say of him per se, but also by understanding the covenants he has made with Israel and how they will be fulfilled? Certainly Isaiah 48 and 49, which Nephi now quotes to help his people believe in Christ, deal mostly with the covenants to Israel and their eventual fulfillment.

Nephi’s Explanation of Isaiah 49

While most Book of Mormon readers follow Nephi’s teachings in 1 Nephi 22 and recognize he is interpreting Isaiah, they often cannot determine where he finds his source material for the interpretations in his Isaiah quotations.

If we go back and check 1 Nephi 20–21 (Isaiah 48–49) for the basis of Nephi’s teachings in chapter 22, we realize that in addition to what Isaiah says, Nephi has added some of his own understanding to make his commentary as plain as it is. We must remember that Nephi had an extensive knowledge of scripture; not only had he read Isaiah but also Zenos, Zenock, and Neum. He had also had his own visions in which he had seen the time of Christ (1 Nephi 11), his own people in the promised land (1 Nephi

12), the restoration of the gospel (1 Nephi 13), the building of Zion (1 Nephi 13), the destructions preceding the Second Coming (1 Nephi 14), and the establishment of the Millennium (1 Nephi 14). Consequently, Nephi could clearly elaborate on and explain much of what he quoted from Isaiah.

Since Nephi concentrated on Isaiah 49, as recorded in 1 Nephi 21, I would like to do the same. Verse one is a long sentence not found in the Old Testament account. This sentence is important because it tells us to whom Isaiah is speaking, namely scattered Israel.

And again: Hearken, O ye house of Israel, all ye that are broken off and are driven out because of the wickedness of the pastors of my people; yea, all ye that are broken off, that are scattered abroad, who are of my people, O house of Israel (1 Nephi 21:1).

In verses 1–3 we meet the pronoun *me*, identified as the “servant” of God. Scholars generally identify this “servant” as Isaiah or Christ. I believe *servant* has a dual meaning, namely Christ and Israel, with the work of Ephraim, who holds the birth-right in Israel, being emphasized. Thus, the meaning of verses 1–3 would be as follows:

The Lord hath called me [Ephraim] from the womb [and] from the bowels of my mother [Ephraim was called in the pre-existence] and he hath made my mouth [Ephraim’s latter-day message of the Restoration] like a sharp sword [the word of God; see D&C 6:2; compare 1 Nephi 16:2];

[He hath] made me [Ephraim and specifically Joseph Smith who is from Ephraim] a polished shaft.

This is clarified by the Prophet Joseph’s teaching.

I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else, striking with accelerated force against religious bigotry, priestcraft, lawyer-craft, doctor-craft, lying editors, suborned judges and jurors, and the authority of perjured executives, backed by mobs, blasphemers, licentious and corrupt men and women—all hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty, who will give me dominion over all and every one of them.²

Isaiah continues his analogy with “in his quiver hath he hid me” (1 Nephi 21:2). This is also clarified in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Therefore, thus saith the Lord unto you, with whom the priesthood hath continued through the lineage of your fathers—
For ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God. (D&C 86:8–9.)

The work of Ephraim and Christ in the last days is dually outlined in verses 5–9.

1. Both Ephraim and Christ were called in pre-earth life to bring Jacob or Israel to God (verse 5).
2. Ephraim, the servant of the latter days, will raise up the tribes of Jacob—that is, Ephraim will teach and gather the Lamanites, the Jews, and the lost tribes (verse 6).
3. Ephraim will also restore the preserved of Israel—that is, Ephraim will gather those who have the blood of Israel but have been scattered among all the nations of the earth and have lost their identity (verse 6).
4. They, Christ and Ephraim, are to be a light to the Gentiles (verse 6):
 - a. Christ is the light of the world and offers himself and his gospel as that light.
 - b. The restored Church is the custodian of Christ’s true teachings and offers the Gentiles the light of salvation which they do not have.
5. The prisoners shall go free—free from the spirit prison when Christ opens the doors there following his crucifixion, and free from the prison of sin and spiritual ignorance when Ephraim preaches the restored gospel to them in the last days (verse 9).

As Ephraim does his latter-day work, Israel will be gathered both spiritually and temporally, and Jerusalem and Zion will be established (verses 10–13).

When Zion, specifically scattered Israel (Jews, Lamanites, ten lost tribes), shall think that God has forsaken and forgotten the covenants he made with them, he will show them that he has not. He will fulfill his covenants to gather and establish scattered Israel in Zion. Although Zion is a term applied to the Americas, the complete fulfillment of restoring scattered Israel to Zion will include the restoration of the Jews and the ten lost tribes to the Holy Land, for they are also part of Zion who hath said, "The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." However, all that God has promised Zion, both in America and in the Holy Land, is constantly before him as if engraved on the very palms of his hands. (Verses 14–16.)

One possible meaning of "engrave thee upon the palms of my hands" is that the marks in his hands which will be shown to the Jews when he appears to them are a token of the covenants he has made with their fathers as well as a sign that their fathers crucified the very Son of God (D&C 45:51 and Zechariah 13:6).

As latter-day Israel is gathered and restored, she will fill up the land and marvel where all gathered Israel has come from, since it seemed she had lost all her children long ago (verses 18–21).

This great restoration will be done through the restored gospel which will come to the Gentiles (most of whom are a combination of Israel and gentile blood descent) through Joseph Smith and through members of the Church. These Gentiles will nurse Israel (Jews, Lamanites, ten lost tribes) (verses 22–23).

Israel (the restored Church) will consist of the Gentiles, who are mainly a mixture of gentile and Israelitish blood descent, and of Jews, Lamanites, and the ten lost tribes who will no longer be trodden down by the world. The house of Israel who have been captives and have been the prey of mighty nations will be saved by the Mighty God of Jacob and will have power over those who once oppressed them (verses 24–26).

If we now go to Nephi's commentary in chapter 22, we can see that he drew at least ten of his thirteen points from Isaiah 49. These thirteen points are listed below, followed with references showing Nephi's source in chapter 21, followed by a slash and his comments in chapter 22.

1. The scattering of Israel (1 Nephi 21:1 / and 1 Nephi 22:4–5).
2. The nursing of Israel by the Gentiles (1 Nephi 21:22–23 / and 1 Nephi 22:6).

3. The raising up of a mighty nation, the United States (1 Nephi 21:22/and 1 Nephi 22:7).
4. The scattering of the Lamanites (1 Nephi 21:14, 17, 19, 25/and 1 Nephi 22:7–8).
5. The restoring of the gospel (1 Nephi 21:22/and 1 Nephi 22:8).
6. The fulfilling of the covenants made to the house of Israel (1 Nephi 21:14–16, 18–21/and 1 Nephi 22:11).
7. The spiritual and temporal gathering of Israel (1 Nephi 21:12–13/and 1 Nephi 22:12).
8. The destruction of the great and abominable church (no reference in 1 Nephi 21; see 1 Nephi 22:13).
9. The destruction of all who fight against Zion (1 Nephi 21:17, 25–26/and 1 Nephi 22:14).
10. The destruction of the wicked (1 Nephi 21:26/and 1 Nephi 22:15–16).
11. The preservation of the righteous (1 Nephi 21:12–13, 25–26/and 1 Nephi 22:17, 19, 22).
12. The destruction of churches which belong to the kingdom of the devil (no reference in 1 Nephi 21; see 1 Nephi 22:23).
13. The establishment of the Millennium (no reference in 1 Nephi 21; see 1 Nephi 22:24–26).

If we could have Nephi here to give us his personal insights and interpretations of what he quoted from Isaiah and to comment on it all, we could greatly enlarge our understanding. But since he isn't here, at least this can be a starting point for us to enjoy the Book of Mormon and to avoid the condemnation God mentioned for those who neglect this sacred record.

And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—

Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation.

And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all.

And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written. (D&C 84:54–57.)

A Brief Explanation of Isaiah 48

Since I have basically omitted 1 Nephi 20 (Isaiah 48) up to this point, I will now give a brief summary of that chapter.

First Nephi chapter 20 (Isaiah 48) teaches that ancient Israel participated in the baptismal covenant (verse 1). The phrase *or out of the waters of baptism* is not found in the Bible and apparently was not on the golden plates. It was added in the 1840 edition of the Book of Mormon to clarify the meaning of “come forth out of the waters of Judah.”

The term “or out of the waters of baptism” did not appear in the first edition of the Book of Mormon. It first appeared in the edition of 1840 on page 53, and the sentence in which it appeared was punctuated, as follows: “Hearken and hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, (or out of the waters of baptism,) who swear by the name of the Lord,” etc. It is not absolutely clear who was responsible for the insertion of this phrase, although the title page of this edition indicates that it was the “Third Edition, Carefully Revised by the Translator” and was published in Nauvoo, Illinois.

In the “Committee Copy” of the Book of Mormon that was used by Elder James E. Talmage and his committee in making the changes for the 1920 edition, the words “or out of the waters of baptism” were not printed in the text although they had been inserted in red ink in parentheses. However, the parentheses were crossed out by red pencil. These words are printed in the current edition of the Book of Mormon without the parentheses.³

Israel (Judah) is now in a state of apostasy (verses 1–8). God foretells the future so that his people who are often wicked will not credit God’s work to their idols and images (verses 3–6). Israel, because of wickedness, will be refined in the furnace of

affliction for the Lord's sake (verse 10). History attests to the literalness of this refinement.

Israel (Ephraim) is called by the Lord to gather Judah again that she might be redeemed (verses 12–17). This work is yet to be completed in this dispensation. If Judah had not sinned she would have received the blessings of Abraham and her righteous seed would be as numberless as the sand (verses 18–19).

Israel (Judah) is called to go forth out of Babylon to be redeemed (verse 20). This redemption will take place in the last days and will be done through Ephraim, whose work has already been discussed in the analysis of 1 Nephi 22.

Conclusion

The Book of Mormon prophets considered Zenos, Zenock, Neum, and Isaiah some of the greatest of the messianic prophets. Nephi's commentary on Isaiah gives us some of our clearest and most detailed understanding of Isaiah's writings. His explanation of Isaiah 49 is particularly enlightening as we watch the work of Ephraim unfold in this dispensation and look forward to the redemption of Zion.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet, eds., *The Joseph Smith Translation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), p. 17.
2. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), p. 304.
3. Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), p. 120.