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# **“How Beautiful upon the Mountains” The Imagery of Isaiah 52:7–10 and Its Occurrences in the Book of Mormon**

Dana M. Pike

*Many writers quote Isaiah’s rejoicing at the messenger who will bring the beleaguered city victorious news, a prophecy that rewards close analysis and primarily refers to Christ.*



Nestled in the middle of Isaiah 52 is a passage that contains intriguing imagery and brims with joyous hope:

How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings,  
that publisheth peace;  
that bringeth good tidings of good,  
that publisheth salvation;  
that saith unto Zion,  
Thy God reigneth! (Isaiah 52:7)<sup>1</sup>

This beautiful passage has been frequently quoted or paraphrased, often along with the three verses following it, by later prophets in other passages of Latter-day Saint scripture. What is it about this passage that has had, and still has, so much appeal? A study of what the prophet Isaiah intended by these words and an exploration of how other prophets—especially those whose teachings are contained in the Book of Mormon—have understood and employed them will allow us to appreciate the impact of this prophecy in the lives of past saints, as well as its significance for our time.

## **The Context**

In order to understand the imagery and significance of Isaiah 52:7–10, it is important to appreciate how this passage fits into the larger text of which it is a part. As with

many ancient prophetic texts, Isaiah 52, with the exception of verses 3–6, is written in poetic form, although this is not apparent in the King James Version. Most modern English translations preserve the poetic versification of this and other similar material. Because of its poetic nature, this text is filled with wonderfully vivid imagery but is at the same time ambiguous in many respects.

For example, in Isaiah 52:1–2, Zion—that is, Jerusalem—is urged to “awake, awake; put on thy strength . . . , shake thyself from the dust, . . . loose thyself from the bands of thy neck.”<sup>2</sup> Latter-day Saints often consider Jerusalem and Zion to be names applied to distinctly different locations, Jerusalem in Israel and “Zion (the New Jerusalem) . . . upon the American continent” (Article of Faith 10). This is true, but in addition to referring to “the pure in heart” (D&C 97:21) wherever they may be, the term *Zion* has been applied in the scriptures to specific places where the pure in heart have gathered, such as Enoch’s city (see Moses 7:18) and the so-called Old Jerusalem, especially the area originally captured by David from the Jebusites and the area that later became the temple mount (see 2 Samuel 5:6–7; 1 Kings 8:1; Isaiah 2:1–3; and so on).<sup>3</sup> For the present purpose, it is sufficient to know that the name Zion has been applied to Old and New Jerusalem, just as both of these cities are called Jerusalem.

Many, if not most, of Isaiah’s contemporaries would have viewed his use of the names Zion and Jerusalem in Isaiah 52:1–2 as a function of the interchangeability of a poetic pair of terms both of which referred to Jerusalem in Judah. These names are often used in the Bible in just such a way.<sup>4</sup> Such use is illustrated here in Isaiah 52 verses 1 and 2:

put on thy strength, O Zion;  
put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem . . .  
arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem:

loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive  
daughter of Zion.

Such statements as these actually refer to Jerusalem and those Israelites living there at any given time. But these passages can function typologically in the scriptures, so that, conceptually, they apply by extension to other Israelites in different times and places.

Pronouncements by Joseph Smith recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 113:7–10 make it clear that these prophetic promptings at the beginning of Isaiah 52 apply to such events as the latter-day gathering and redemption of Israel:

Questions by Elias Higbee: What is meant by the command in Isaiah, 52d chapter, 1st verse, which saith: Put on thy strength, O Zion—and what people had Isaiah reference to?

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; and to put on her strength is to put on the authority of the priesthood, which she, Zion, has a right to by lineage; also to return to that power which she had lost.

What are we to understand by Zion loosing herself from the bands of her neck; 2d verse?

We are to understand that the scattered remnants are exhorted to return to the Lord from whence they have fallen; which if they do, the promise of the Lord is that he will speak to them, or give them revelation. See the 6th, 7th, and 8th verses. The bands of her neck are the curses of God upon her, or the remnants of Israel in their scattered condition among the Gentiles.

The word *Jerusalem* is not used in these verses in Doctrine and Covenants 113, but it is clear from Joseph's answers concerning this passage that he had a much broader vision of Zion in mind than just the city of Jerusalem in Judah.

On a different occasion, Joseph quoted Isaiah 52:8, “thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion,” when he spoke of the Lord designating the spot in Jackson County, Missouri, where the city of Zion would someday be built.<sup>5</sup> This should not be understood as an indication that Isaiah 52:7–10 exclusively applies to or is to be fulfilled only by events in Missouri; it is rather an example of the prophetic application of an earlier prophetic statement to one particular circumstance.<sup>6</sup>

Whether one understands the primary sense of the terms *Zion* and *Jerusalem* in Isaiah 52:1–2 as restricted to Old Jerusalem—the likely view with which most of Isaiah’s audience would have understood his teachings—or whether one prefers the broader application of some latter-day prophets, it is clear that Joseph’s declaration concerning these verses indicates that the primary focus of the prophecy in Isaiah 52 is the last days. The latter-day content of Isaiah 52 is also indicated in the first verse by the promise that “henceforth there shall no more come into thee [that is, Jerusalem] the uncircumcised and the unclean,” a condition that has yet to be fulfilled. Compare the similar language in Joel 3:17 in which it is stated that after the (second) coming of the Lord, “shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more.”<sup>7</sup>

In Isaiah 52:3–6 the Lord also speaks of a future time. He reminds the Israelites that even though “ye have sold yourselves for nought” (verse 3), and though some have been, and others would yet be, exiled (verse 5), “in that [future] day” he would fulfill all his promises to them—“my people shall know my name” (verse 6). The Jews who were exiled to and returned from Babylonia (about 597–535 B.C.) probably applied this and similar passages to their circumstances. However, the historical context of the Jews returning from

exile to a land dominated by foreigners (Judah was then a province of the Persian empire; Jerusalem was hardly redeemed) and our understanding of the latter-day focus of verses 1–2 indicates that verses 3–6 have not yet been fulfilled. The primary occurrence of this redemption and renewed knowledge is the latter days, when Israel as a people will be a faithful, covenant partner with Jehovah.

Similarly, Isaiah 52:7–10 beautifully conveys the (yet-future) exultation in Jerusalem created by the “good tidings” that “God reigneth” (Isaiah 52:7) and that he is about to “comfort his people” and “redeem Jerusalem” (Isaiah 52:9). This news causes the city’s “watchmen” to “sing” for joy (Isaiah 52:8). According to verse 9, however, Jerusalem is still in ruins. The messenger announces the *beginning*, not the completion, of the process of redemption and comfort that commences because “the Lord hath made bare his holy arm . . . and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (Isaiah 52:10). Compare the similar message in Isaiah 40:1–2: “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.”

Isaiah 52 continues with an exhortation to Israelites: “go ye out” (verse 11) from your places of dispersement and “gather” (as verse 15 in the JST reads for “sprinkle” in KJV). They are instructed to be clean (see verse 11) and promised that “the Lord will go before you” (verse 12). Once again, the latter days seems to be the time of the primary fulfillment of these instructions (compare 2 Corinthians 6:17 and D&C 133:5–15, especially verses 14–15).

Verses 13–15 tell of the Lord’s “servant” who will “deal prudently,” who will be “exalted and extolled” (verse 13), although “his visage was so marred more than any man” (verse 14), and whose works will cause kings to “shut their



mouths” (verse 15) because they had not previously heard of nor understood the things accomplished by the servant. But who is this servant? An identity is not clearly specified in the text. Proposed identifications include, first, the nation of Israel, referred to as Jehovah’s servant in Isaiah 49:1–3; second, the mortal Lord, especially suggested by those who prefer to connect these last verses of Isaiah 52 with the prophecy of the mortal Messiah that follows in chapter 53 (see verse 11, “my righteous servant”); third, the resurrected Lord, who, though “marred more than any man” in the sense of the atoning load he bore (compare Isaiah 53:2–5), will be powerful and exalted at his second coming (an interpretation in keeping with the latter-day focus of this chapter, specifically verse 10); and, fourth, Joseph Smith, an identification especially based on Jesus’ use of this passage in 3 Nephi 20:43–45 and 21:7–10 (discussed below).<sup>8</sup> The first option is the least likely in this context; the latter two are the most likely and may both apply (some people see multiple fulfillments in many of Isaiah’s prophecies).<sup>9</sup>

### The Particulars

The imagery embodied in the poetry of Isaiah 52:7–10 is that of watchmen on a city wall who witness the approach and arrival of a messenger who travels on foot. Walled cities were commonplace in ancient Israel and throughout the ancient Near East, and watchmen, or lookouts, were regularly posted above city gates. The job security and probably the life of a watchman depended on his ability to remain alert to anyone or anything approaching his city, especially things appearing suspicious in nature.<sup>10</sup>

Lacking the technological advances available in our era, people of the ancient Near East regularly entrusted messengers with communications. We learn a great deal about

messengers in the ancient Near East from a variety of documents that span more than two millennia before the Christian era. For instance, messages were given to messengers for delivery sometimes in oral but often in written form.<sup>11</sup> Two very important qualities of a good messenger were speed and accuracy in delivering a message. Accurate delivery was especially a concern when the message was in oral form only.<sup>12</sup>

The Hebrew word that is most often used to designate a messenger is *mal'āk*, from *L'K*. While *mal'āk* is usually translated as “messenger,” the translation is “ultimately context-sensitive: ‘envoy,’ ‘messenger,’ ‘representative,’ ‘ambassador,’ ‘agent’ all may comfortably apply depending on the situation.”<sup>13</sup>

Messengers and watchmen are mentioned in a number of passages in the Bible. The text that best illuminates the present discussion is 2 Samuel 18:19–28. Ahimaaz, a son of Zadok the priest, requests of Joab the general that he be allowed to deliver news from the battlefield to King David in Jerusalem. The subsequent actions of the watchman in Jerusalem who observes the approach of Ahimaaz, and David’s anticipation of what he thinks will be good news, are clearly recounted:

Let me [Ahimaaz] now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the Lord hath avenged him of his enemies. . . . And he [Joab] said unto him, Run. . . . And the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall [of Jerusalem], and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running alone. And the watchman cried, and told the king. . . . And the watchman said, Me thinketh the running . . . is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings. (2 Samuel 18:19, 23–25, 27)<sup>14</sup>



Such real-life activities clearly provided the imagery of a messenger and watchmen that are incorporated into Isaiah's prophecy, especially verses 7–8 of chapter 52.

The role of a watchman on a city wall was used in Israelite literature to represent a significant aspect of a prophet's duty. In Ezekiel 33:1–9 the Lord clearly draws an analogy between the critical function of an actual urban watchman and that of a "spiritual" watchman, reminding Ezekiel, "I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me" (verse 7).<sup>15</sup> In this passage, the Lord functions as the messenger. Ezekiel is the watchman who receives the message from the messenger and conveys it to the leadership or to the inhabitants of the city.

Israelite prophets also functioned as spiritual messengers to the inhabitants of ancient Israel, delivering Jehovah's message to the people.<sup>16</sup> This role is illustrated by the description of the prophet Haggai as "the Lord's messenger [*mal'āk*]" who delivered "the Lord's message unto the people" (Haggai 1:13). Note also the chronicler's observation, made while indicating that the sinfulness of those living in Jerusalem and Judah had led to their destruction by the Babylonians, that

the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers [*mal'ākāyw*] . . . ; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers [*mal'ākê*] of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until . . . there was no remedy. (2 Chronicles 36:15–16)

The Hebrew word commonly used to designate a human messenger, *mal'āk*, is the same word that is translated "angel" when used in referring to a heavenly messenger. Angels are "messengers" commissioned by the Lord to de-

liver a message from the divine realm to the human one.<sup>17</sup> An interesting coincidence of these uses of *mal'āk*, in reference to both human and divine beings, is found in the narration of Jacob's departure from Laban's house to return to the land of Canaan: "And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God [*mal'ākê 'ēlōhîm*] met him. . . . And Jacob sent messengers [*mal'ākîm*] before him to Esau his brother" (Genesis 32:1, 3).

The Hebrew word used in Isaiah 52:7, however, is not the common noun *mal'āk*, "messenger," but the masculine singular active participle *mēbaśśēr*, "one who brings news, a herald," derived from *BŚR*, "to bring news."<sup>18</sup> The term itself is neutral, not revealing the nature of the news. Sometimes it was tragic, as illustrated in 1 Samuel 4:17: "And the messenger [*mēbaśśēr*] answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people" (see verses 12–18 for the context). In Isaiah 52:7 the news is good. The text clearly states that the *mēbaśśēr* brings "good tidings."<sup>19</sup> Actually, the term *mēbaśśēr* occurs two times in Isaiah 52:7:

How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings  
[*mēbaśśēr*],  
that publisheth peace [*mašmîa' šālôm*];  
that bringeth good tidings [*mēbaśśēr*] of good,  
that publisheth salvation [*mašmîa' yěšû'â*];  
that saith unto Zion,  
Thy God reigneth!

An alternative, more literal rendition of this verse follows:

What beauty on (or over) the mountains:  
the feet of a herald  
announcing peace,  
declaring (heralding) good,

announcing salvation,  
 saying to Zion  
 "your God reigns."

What is fascinating about Isaiah's use of imagery here is that not only does he mention a messenger or herald, but he also focuses on the messenger's feet with the notation that they are "beautiful." Feet are not generally considered among the more attractive body parts; they are functional, yes, but not beautiful. What did Isaiah intend by this description?

Interestingly, the word rendered "beautiful" in verse 7 is the Hebrew term *nā'wû* (from the rarely attested verbal root *N'H*), the word from which Joseph Smith coined the city name "Nauvoo."<sup>20</sup> This particular form is used only here and in Song of Solomon 1:10, where it is rendered "comely" in the KJV.

Since walking on dirt roads with sandal-shod feet was the major form of transportation for most people in ancient Israel, feet were not only quite visible but required daily washing and attention. The cleansing and care of a guest's feet was long considered a basic act of hospitality.<sup>21</sup> However, despite the importance of foot care in ancient Israel, when Isaiah described the messenger's feet on the mountains as "beautiful," he was probably not suggesting that the arriving herald had remarkably clean and well-manicured feet!<sup>22</sup>

It is not the condition of the feet but their observable activity, their *progress*, that is being emphasized by the description "beautiful." It might be suggested that Isaiah employed metonymy here, using "feet" to represent the whole messenger. Whether viewed this way or not, the emphasis in this passage is on the feet of the messenger because the focus of the passage is on the delivery of the message as well as on the arrival of the messenger. The hope-inspiring

approach of the herald elicits the reaction on Mount Zion that the messenger's feet are beautiful, and the delivery of the anticipated message produces the expression of exultation in Jerusalem (see Isaiah 52:8–10). Some modern translations of Isaiah 52:7 have tried to convey this sense. Consider this rendition: "How welcome on the mountain are the footsteps of the herald announcing happiness" (NJPS). Here Isaiah depicts the arrival of a messenger recognized by watchmen who joyfully anticipate his message. It appears that they already know the message and the messenger; it is the actual delivery of the message, the *fulfillment*, that is so exciting.

Verses 9–10 relate the exhortation to "sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem" because the Lord has "comforted his people" and "redeemed Jerusalem" by baring "his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations." This suggests some type of deliverance that those in Jerusalem could not attain on their own.

### **Three Interpretive Questions**

Readers should ask three questions regarding Isaiah's use of real-life imagery in Isaiah 52:7–10 when considering the fulfillment of the prophecy therein. Given that the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 52:7–10 involves some future event or events through which a message of hope and comfort will be delivered to and welcomed by a people in need of assistance, readers must ask three questions regarding Isaiah's use of real-life imagery in this passage. First, in Isaiah 52:7–10, the messenger with glad tidings for Zion is depicted as arriving alone. As mentioned above, the grammatical form is masculine singular, and the messenger is not named. Is the herald in this passage a specific individual in the latter days, or should he be viewed as a type,

representing many people? The answer is not clear in the passage itself. Second, Jerusalem alone is depicted as the destination of the herald, and Isaiah's imagery draws on Jerusalem's location on a ridge amidst hills ("mountains"). But should Jerusalem also be understood as a type, depicting any city or group of people receiving glad tidings? Third, although the message itself is described in glowing terms and is prophesied as being well received, what is the actual content of the message? Is the message of a political or military nature integral to an actual event that is yet to be, or might this message be spiritual, meant to convey deliverance from a different kind of bondage and destruction? Again, this is not clearly stated by Isaiah.

As noted above, we will specifically address these points focusing first on the prophetic use of this Isaianic passage in the Book of Mormon, and then we will briefly examine how this passage has been utilized by prophets in scriptures other than the Book of Mormon.

### **Isaiah 52:7–10 in the Book of Mormon**

Given the favor Nephi and other Book of Mormon prophets accorded Isaiah's prophecies, it would be very surprising if Isaiah 52:7–10, a passage of such poetic promise, was not mentioned in that volume of scripture. Actually, much of Isaiah 52, including verses 7–10, is given considerable attention in the Book of Mormon.<sup>23</sup>

#### **Nephi's Teachings of Isaiah**

About 125 years after Isaiah, the Lord taught Nephi that

I will manifest myself unto thy seed, that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them . . . behold, these things [the Book of Mormon record] shall be hid up, to come forth unto the Gentiles, by the gift and

power of the Lamb. . . . And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion *at that day*, for they shall have the gift and power of the Holy Ghost; . . . and whoso shall publish peace, yea, tidings of great joy, how beautiful upon the mountains shall they be. (1 Nephi 13:35, 37, emphasis added)

The context of this passage in 1 Nephi 13 indicates that the Lord is referring to the latter-day restoration of the gospel. The imagery and phrasing of this passage clearly draw on Isaiah 52:7, and the perspective is wholly positive: those who participate in this activity will be greatly blessed. However, this passage is quite general, exhibiting neither development nor detail. Since “my Zion” may refer to Jerusalem, the American Zion, or to the Lord’s kingdom in general, it is not clear which, if any one of these in particular, is intended, although the latter is the most likely. Additionally, *beautiful* does not modify *feet* in this passage, but has general reference to those who proclaim the peace of the gospel, and in contrast to Isaiah 52:7, it is explicitly stated that *many* (“they”) will bring glad tidings, not just one messenger.

### **Abinadi’s Teachings of Isaiah**

The most extensive development and application of Isaiah 52:7–10 in the Book of Mormon is found in the teachings of the heroic prophet Abinadi, who lived about 150 B.C. Abinadi is brought before King Noah and his court and is questioned by Noah’s priests, one of whom asks: “What meaneth the words which are written, and which have been taught by our fathers, saying: ‘How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace?’” (Mosiah 12:20–21 [verses 21–24 quote Isaiah 52:7–10]). With this question we anticipate a prophetic commentary on the passage just quoted; however,



Abinadi, seizing the moment, begins to castigate his audience: “Are you priests . . . and yet desire to know of me what these things mean?” (Mosiah 12:25). He then proceeds to review basic gospel teachings such as the ten commandments and the coming atonement of the Messiah. Partway through his sermon, Abinadi even reminds them that he has not forgotten their question (see Mosiah 13:3). After teaching that salvation did not come through the law of Moses alone, but that the law was a type to point Israelite minds and hearts toward the one truly efficacious sacrifice (see Mosiah 13), Abinadi quotes Isaiah’s poignant and powerful prophecy of the Messiah’s mortal ministry and atoning sacrifice as recorded in Isaiah 53 (see Mosiah 14).

Finally, in Mosiah 15, Abinadi provides the requested commentary, but in two portions: one in a context of praise and gratitude in which he draws on Isaiah 52:7, and one in a context of condemnation in which he utilizes Isaiah 52:8–10. Mosiah 15 begins with Abinadi’s declaration of the nature and identity of the Son of God and the significance of his sacrifice (see verses 1–9). He then continues in verse 10, employing quotations from Isaiah in his remarks: “And now I say unto you, who shall declare his [Jesus’] generation [see Isaiah 53:8]?<sup>24</sup> Behold, I say unto you, that when his soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed [see Isaiah 53:10]. And now what say ye? And who shall be his seed?” The Savior’s “seed” are those people in all ages who are spiritually reborn through the power of his atoning sacrifice.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Abinadi exclaims that those who obey the Lord and follow the prophets (see verses 11–12), as well as the prophets themselves (see verse 13), are the “seed” of the Lord and thus “heirs of the kingdom of God” (verse 12).

It is at this point in his exposition of the redemptive power of Jesus’ sacrifice that Abinadi employs Isaiah 52:7. Mosiah 15:14 begins with Abinadi’s declaration that “these

are they who have published peace.” While the term *they* might refer exclusively to the prophets mentioned in the verse 13, it seems more likely to me that *they* refers to the saints and prophets to which Abinadi has just made reference in verses 11–13, since he describes both groups as the spiritual “seed” of Christ. Abinadi uses phrases from Isaiah 52:7 as he continues:

And these are they who have published peace, who have brought good tidings of good, who have published salvation; and said unto Zion: Thy God reigneth!

And O how beautiful upon the mountains were their feet!

And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that are still publishing peace!

And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that shall hereafter publish peace, yea, from this time henceforth and forever!

And behold, I say unto you, this is not all. For O how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that is the founder of peace, yea even the Lord, who has redeemed his people. (Mosiah 15:14–18)

Abinadi is here declaring, based on the interpretation just given above, that everyone, everywhere, whoever has or will receive and proclaim the true gospel of Jesus Christ, including and especially the Lord himself, was, is, or will be a messenger with “beautiful feet.” Jesus as the “founder of peace” provides the opportunity for spiritual rebirth, and all who truly embrace this good tiding not only enjoy his peace but proclaim the same. The “good tidings” are identified in this passage as the message of redemption, and the phrase *beautiful feet* is employed to indicate that those who receive this message will consider it welcome and wonderful. While Abinadi clearly refers to *many* people’s feet as

“beautiful,” my reading of this episode suggests that Abinadi, and probably also the priests, viewed the prophesied Messiah as *the* messenger with glad tidings. These tidings were from and about the Redeemer. Remember that Abinadi has just taught that Jesus was the God who would “come down among the children of men, and redeem his people” (Mosiah 15:1) and that Christ alone had the power to save. It is in this context that Abinadi employs Isaiah 52:7 (see Mosiah 15:14–18), thus indicating that Jesus was the primary fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 52:7 of the messenger with glad tidings. His “seed,” by extension, assist in declaring the same message.

It is instructive at this point to inquire why Abinadi was asked to explain the meaning of Isaiah 52:7–10 by a priest of Noah. It seems clear from the tenor of the preserved account that the priests were trying to frame, and thus eliminate, this prophet who was troubling them. A likely possibility is that they asked Abinadi to interpret Isaiah 52:7–10 because this passage indicates that a messenger of the Lord would come with *good* tidings, and Abinadi’s tidings to Noah and his priests were anything but good. Assuming this, the priests could then charge Abinadi with false prophecy, for which they, with their twisting of the scripture, would punish him.<sup>26</sup>

Abinadi continues his discourse to Noah and his priests by explaining that Jesus had power over death through his redeeming sacrifice (see Mosiah 15:19–20) and that all those who qualify for redemption will be part of the “first resurrection” (verses 22–25). Having laid this doctrinal groundwork, Abinadi here shifts in his remarks from testifying of the Redeemer and the redeemed to condemning his audience: “But behold, and fear, and tremble before God, for ye ought to tremble; for the Lord redeemeth none such that

rebel against him and die in their sins; yea, even all those . . . that have known the commandments of God, and would not keep them; these are they that have no part in the first resurrection” (verse 26; see also verse 27). Abinadi then teaches that despite the feeble apostate efforts and misguided views of Noah’s priests, “the time shall come that the salvation of the Lord shall be declared to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” (verse 28). He continues,

Yea, Lord, thy watchmen shall lift up their voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. (Mosiah 15:29–31, parallel to Isaiah 52:8–10)

Abinadi instructs the priests, using Isaiah 52:8–10, that the time will come when the wicked who fight against Zion, the Lord’s people, will be destroyed as the Lord demonstrates his power to “all the ends of the earth” (this theme continues into much of Mosiah 16). Thus, Jesus’ suffering at his first coming allows him to exercise justice, to save or destroy, at his second coming, which is the context in which Abinadi places Isaiah 52:8–10. At *that* day, the watchmen of the Lord will rejoice as he arrives to destroy the wicked, redeem the faithful, and establish his millennial kingdom. This all seems intended as a requisite last witness and warning from Abinadi to the priests as he applies a prophecy concerning the last days to the priests and the destruction they will bring on themselves. While there are several facets to the Lord’s work of redemption, it is interesting to see how Abinadi connected Isaiah 52:7 with one facet and 52:8–10 with another.

### **Isaiah's Teachings in the Book of Mosiah**

Portions of Isaiah 52:7 also occur in Mosiah 27:37, although the context is much more restricted than that of Mosiah 15. Mosiah 27 contains the account of an angel visiting Alma the Younger and the four sons of King Mosiah as they were persecuting the church, and their subsequent conversion and efforts to reverse the effects of their spiritually destructive activities. In speaking of Mosiah's sons, the record states that "they traveled throughout all the land . . . zealously striving to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church . . . and thus they were instruments in the hands of God in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth, yea, to the knowledge of their Redeemer. And how blessed are they! For they did publish peace; they did publish good tidings of good; and they did declare unto the people that the Lord reigneth" (Mosiah 27:35–37).

It is not presently possible to determine whether the portion of Isaiah 52:7 that is in verse 37 was originally employed in this context by Mormon, as an editorial comment, or whether he found it an account by Alma the Elder or Alma the Younger. While this abbreviated form of the passage does not contain the imagery of the first part of Isaiah 52:7 (the mountains, the beautiful feet, and so forth), the passage is specifically employed in reference to the four sons of Mosiah as messengers (plural) and their own teaching of the good tidings of the gospel as part of their repentance.

### **Jesus' Teachings of Isaiah in 3 Nephi 16**

The resurrected Lord employed the contents of Isaiah 52 twice in his teachings to the Nephites during his post-resurrection visit to the Americas, as recorded in 3 Nephi. In the first of these, 3 Nephi 16:18–20, Jesus uses Isaiah's



description of rejoicing “watchmen” (Isaiah 52:8–10) in the context of teaching the Nephites of future events that would take place in the Americas. Jesus teaches them that his sacrifice fulfilled the law of Moses (3 Nephi 15:1–10) and reminds them that as a branch of the house of Israel they represented some of his “other sheep” (3 Nephi 15:11–16:3). He further explains that the latter-day gentiles would be intermediaries in bringing these teachings about him to Lehiite descendants as part of the latter-day gathering of Israel, since they would be in a scattered condition “because of their unbelief” (3 Nephi 16:4–7). Jesus also sounds a warning to citizens of the latter-day gentile nations that if they “shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them. And *then* will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them . . . but if the Gentiles will repent and return unto me, saith the Father, behold they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel” (3 Nephi 16:10–11, 13; see also 3 Nephi 16:8–13). The emphasis is clearly on the last days when the process of gathering Israel is well underway.

It is in this context of latter-day Israelites and gentile nations that Jesus proclaims:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, thus hath the Father commanded me—that I should give unto *this people this land* for their inheritance. *And then* the words of the prophet Isaiah shall be fulfilled, which say: Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing, for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath



made bare his holy arm in the eye of all the nations; and  
all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God.  
(3 Nephi 16:16–20)

It seems quite clear that the expression *this land* is used in reference to the Americas.<sup>27</sup> However, the phrase *this people* may refer either specifically to Lehite descendants, since he is speaking to Lehtes, or it may refer more broadly to other Israelites (especially non-Lehite descendants of Joseph) in addition to Lehtes, given Jesus' repeated use of the title "house of Israel" in the previous verses of this chapter.<sup>28</sup> Either way, these Israelites will be inheriting the Americas as their allotment of promised land during the Lord's millennial reign.

The question thus arises: What is the relationship between the phrases "that I should give unto this people this land for their inheritance" and "and *then* the words of the prophet Isaiah shall be fulfilled"? This may be intended to indicate that the inheritance of the Americas ("this land") by some Israelites is a fulfillment of the words of Isaiah contained in Isaiah 52:8–10. Thus, faithful Israelites in the Americas would be the "watchmen" who rejoice when the Lord's saving power is manifest in this hemisphere as well as in the land of Israel, as he "bring[s] again Zion."<sup>29</sup> This interpretation requires that the reference to Jerusalem in the quotation of Isaiah 52:9 (parallel to 3 Nephi 16:19) be understood as figuratively applying to a branch of Israelites and not to the city itself (unless he intends it to be understood as the *New Jerusalem* to be built in the Americas in the last days, as prophesied elsewhere in the scriptures [see, for example, Ether 13 and Article of Faith 10]). Alternatively, the clauses "that I should give unto this people this land for their inheritance" and "and *then* the words of the prophet Isaiah shall be fulfilled" may indicate that the gathering in the Americas would take place, perhaps as a sign, before the

prophecy in Isaiah 52:8–10 is fulfilled *elsewhere*, without it having specific reference to the activity in the Americas. In that case the name Jerusalem would indicate the actual city. Given the audience being addressed and other statements regarding the gathering in the Americas (such as 3 Nephi 20, cited below), it seems more likely to me that Jesus was here applying Isaiah's words to an American context. This is not to say that such use represents the primary sense of the original prophecy, but it does represent an appropriate application.

### **Jesus' Teachings of Isaiah in 3 Nephi 20**

Jesus' second use of Isaiah 52 is found in 3 Nephi 20:29–46. Following a second administration of the sacrament to the Nephites (see verses 1–10), Jesus reminds his audience that “the words of Isaiah should be fulfilled” when latter-day Israel had been gathered both physically and spiritually (see verses 11–13). He also reiterates that “the Father hath commanded me that I should give unto you [and their latter-day Lehiite descendants] this land [the Americas], for your inheritance” (verse 14) and that “this people will I establish in this land, unto the fulfilling of the covenant which I made with your father Jacob; and it shall be a New Jerusalem” (verse 22). After further comments about the Lehiites being part of Israel and heirs to the covenant blessings (see verses 25–27) and about the latter-day gentiles being accountable since they will have the “fulness of [his] gospel” (verses 27–28), Jesus seems to shift his perspective away from the Americas when he states: “And I will remember the covenant which I have made with my people; and I have covenanted with them that I would gather them together in mine own due time, that I would give unto them again the land of their fathers for their inheritance, which is

the land of Jerusalem, which is the promised land unto them forever, saith the Father" (3 Nephi 20:29).

The emphasis is still on the latter-day gathering, but as Jesus specifically speaks of the "land of Jerusalem," the context is no longer the Americas. Jesus' statement in verse 29 serves as an important contextualizing preface to what follows, including his use of passages from Isaiah 52. He continues, "the time cometh, when the fulness of my gospel shall be preached unto them; and they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (3 Nephi 20:30–31). "Then shall their watchmen lift up their voice, and with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye" (3 Nephi 20:32, parallel to Isaiah 52:8). This clearly indicates that accepting the gospel causes the rejoicing and the unity of perspective among the watchmen. Presumably, the modification of "thy watchmen" in Isaiah's text to "their watchmen" in this passage in 3 Nephi 20 is audience dependent. Jesus is here speaking to American Israelites about future watchmen among non-American Israelites (rather than applying Isaiah's prophecy to Israelites in the Americas, as he did in 3 Nephi 16, as noted above). This suggests that the original or primary sense of Isaiah's prophecy related to the broader house of Israel, who would gather to the land of Israel.

Following these statements concerning the spiritual component of the gathering of Israel, Jesus continues,

*then* will the Father gather them together again, and give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance. *Then* shall they break forth into joy—Sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Father [not "the Lord" as in Isaiah 52:9] hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Father [not "the Lord" as in Isaiah 52:10] hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of

all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of the Father [not “our God” as in Isaiah 52:10]; and the Father and I are one. *And then* shall be brought to pass that which is written: Awake, awake again, and put on thy strength, O Zion . . . [verses 36–38, parallel to Isaiah 52:1–3]. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that my people shall know my name; yea, *in that day* they shall know that I am he that doth speak. *And then* shall they say: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings unto them, that publisheth peace. (3 Nephi 20:33–40)

Jesus then quotes Isaiah 52:11–15 (in 3 Nephi 20:41–45), and observes, “all these things shall surely come . . . *then* shall this covenant . . . be fulfilled; and *then* shall Jerusalem be inhabited again with my people, and it shall be the land of their inheritance” (3 Nephi 20:46).

Although Isaiah 52:7 is rendered with no appreciable differences in 3 Nephi 20:40, Jesus respectfully attributes some of the activities prophesied in Isaiah 52:9–10 to his Father’s power (see verses 33, 35). He also includes a few introductory phrases (such as, “and then shall they say,” just before “how beautiful upon the mountains”) and rearranges the order of the passages from Isaiah 52 that he includes in his remarks.<sup>30</sup> Zion here represents Old Jerusalem, and Jesus’ arrangement of this material suggests that Isaiah’s prophecy will not be fulfilled until he comes again. Jesus’ references to himself in verse 39 (“my people shall know my name” and “I am he that doth speak” [this latter phrase is also found in Isaiah 52:6]) followed by his quotation of Isaiah 52:7 suggests to me that *he* is the primary messenger who will announce deliverance to Israelites who have gathered to Jerusalem at the last day. They will know *his* name and will say how beautiful are *his* feet!

### Quotations of Isaiah without Commentary

There are a few other passages in the Book of Mormon in which portions of Isaiah 52 are quoted but with little or no discussion in the text. For example, Nephi records that Jacob quotes Isaiah 52:1–2 after relating Isaiah 51 to his Nephite audience (see 2 Nephi 8:24, 25). Although there is no explicit commentary on this passage, Jacob employs Isaiah 51, which contains prophecy about the redemption of Zion, in support of his comments concerning the gathering of Israel. Also, in his closing exhortation to readers of the Book of Mormon to “come unto Christ” (Moroni 10:30–32), Moroni creatively paraphrases from Isaiah 52:1–2 (verse 31: “awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion”) and alludes to Isaiah 52:11 (verse 30: “touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing”). He also employs phrases from Isaiah 54:2–4 in Moroni 10:31. The context of Moroni’s remarks indicates that he understands that the passages of Isaiah 52 that he quotes have to do with the Lord’s covenant people in the last days.<sup>31</sup>

Let’s summarize the use of Isaiah 52:7–10 in the Book of Mormon. Isaiah 52:8–10 is consistently employed in Mosiah 15:29–31 and in 3 Nephi 16:18–20 and 20:32, 34–35 in the context of the last days when the Lord will redeem his people by delivering them from the nations of the world. However, Isaiah 52:7 is employed with greater variety. In 3 Nephi 20:40, Jesus relates it to his coming in the last days to declare deliverance for his people. Likewise, in Mosiah 15:18, Abinadi envisions the Lord as the primary messenger who will bring glad tidings because he is the Redeemer, although he also broadly applies this verse to the Lord’s prophets and people in every age (see Mosiah 15:14–17). Phrases from Isaiah 52:7 also appear in 1 Nephi 13:37, where the application is to the many who will assist in the latter-



day restoration, and in Mosiah 27:37, where they are applied to the sons of Mosiah and their own gospel teaching.

### **Isaiah 52:7–10: Other Textual Witnesses**

Having thus reviewed the occurrences of Isaiah 52:7–10 in the Book of Mormon and how it was employed in that volume of scripture, it is instructive to survey the use of this passage in other canonical and noncanonical contexts before making some concluding observations.

#### **Similarities in the Old Testament**

Two passages in the Old Testament, Isaiah 40:9 and Nahum 1:15, contain expressions similar to those in Isaiah 52:7–10. The composer Georg Handel, in his oratorio “The Messiah,” follows the lead of the apostle Matthew (see Matthew 3:1–3) in applying the first portion of Isaiah 40 to the mission of John the Baptist (a voice in the wilderness crying “prepare ye the way of the Lord” [Isaiah 40:3]). However, the *primary* focus of this passage seems to me to be the last days and the *second* coming of the Lord, when “every valley shall be exalted” (verse 4) and the “glory of the Lord shall be revealed” (verse 5).<sup>32</sup> In this last-day context, the following invitation is found:

O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord GOD will come with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him. (Isaiah 40:9–10)

The names Zion and Jerusalem, used here as synonyms, represent the inhabitants of this city who, having received glad tidings (see Isaiah 52:7), are now to be messengers of similar tidings to the rest of the cities of Judah. The phrase



“his arm shall rule for him” (verse 10) recalls Isaiah 52:10, which says, “the Lord hath made bare his holy arm.”

The book of Nahum contains a “burden” or prophecy of doom against Nineveh (see Nahum 1:1), which functioned as the capital city of the Assyrian empire from 705–612 B.C. Judah and her neighbors were vassals of the Assyrian empire for much of the seventh century, but Nahum here announces the downfall of Assyria as he prophesies the destruction of Nineveh. Thus, the book was probably composed during the latter half of the seventh century. Nahum 1 serves as a preface to the rest of the book, announcing that while “the Lord is slow to anger” he is also “great in power” (Nahum 1:3). His might will be unleashed to deliver Judah: “Thus saith the Lord . . . I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder. . . . Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off” (Nahum 1:12–15).<sup>33</sup> While the adjective *beautiful* is not employed in reference to “feet” in this passage, as in Isaiah 52:7, the messenger is represented as singular, and we would expect that the tidings of deliverance and peace were certainly welcome.

If this prophecy in Nahum 1 merely foretells the deliverance of Judah from the yoke of Assyria, then the “good tidings” were received when Assyrian domination ended, historically fulfilled when the Babylonians and Medes terminated Assyrian sovereignty in the Near East in 612 B.C. However, there are indications that this “burden” against Nineveh typologically represents the destruction of the wicked at the second coming of Christ. These clues include the description in verse 5, “the mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein,” which is

reminiscent of other prophecies of Jesus' second coming (see, for example, Psalms 97:3, 5; Malachi 4:1; 3 Nephi 26:3; and D&C 133:41, 44), as well as the statement at the end of verse 15 that "the wicked shall no more pass through thee [Judah]." This latter phrase is similar to expressions in Isaiah 52:1 and Joel 3:17 that in the final day the "unclean" and "strangers" will no longer control nor occupy Jerusalem, a condition that was not achieved with the removal of the Assyrian yoke from Judah. The fact that the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans and others followed the Assyrians in a centuries-long line of conquerors suggests that the real fulfillment of this prophecy has yet to be realized.

Thus, while Nahum the prophet may himself represent a fulfillment of the prophecy of the messenger who announces "good tidings" (Nahum 1:15) concerning the demise of historic Nineveh, it seems to me that this prophecy is meant as a type of the final deliverance of Jerusalem. In such a reading, the Lord is the messenger of good tidings, and he will declare peace for the last time. This is interesting in light of the use Abinadi makes of Isaiah 52:7, in which he indicates that while prophets function as messengers of salvation, the ultimate messenger is the Lord, who has the power to deliver physically and spiritually. This understanding of Nahum's prophecy thus correlates with Jesus' teachings in 3 Nephi 20, where Jesus indicates that he is the primary messenger of salvation at the last day.

### **Isaiah Quotations from the Septuagint**

The Septuagint (hereafter designated LXX) is the name given to the Greek translation of the books of the Hebrew Bible produced by Jews living in Alexandria, Egypt, in the third and second centuries B.C. It was common for Christians

in the first century A.D. to use the LXX when studying books in our “Old Testament.” The rendition of Isaiah 52 in the LXX is somewhat different from that preserved in the Masoretic Text, which is the standard, “received” text of the Hebrew Bible on which most English translations are based. We will not go into detail; it is sufficient to observe that in the version of Isaiah 52 represented in the LXX, first, the Lord is clearly depicted as the one speaking, and second, he identifies himself as the one who is “*like* beauty on the mountains” and “*like* the feet of one who proclaims peace” (emphasis added). In the LXX then, the language of Isaiah 52:7 metaphorically represents Jehovah *as if he were a messenger* proclaiming the deliverance of his people.<sup>34</sup> There is no ambiguity concerning the identity of this messenger! While I consider this passage in the LXX an interpretive rendition of Isaiah’s original prophecy, not the original version itself, I have no quarrel with the messianic sense of the interpretation.

The LXX makes explicit what is implicit in the Masoretic Text in representing the Lord speaking the contents of Isaiah 52:7. This contrasts with Jesus’ use of this material in 3 Nephi 20:40 (discussed above), in which “they,” the Israelites, are represented as speaking the contents of Isaiah 52:7. The clear depiction of Jehovah as the messenger in the LXX (although in a metaphorical sense) is reminiscent of Abinadi’s interpretation of Isaiah 52:7 in Mosiah 15:18.

### Insights from the Dead Sea Scrolls

Discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls are the remains of twenty-one copies of the book of Isaiah. Only a few of these, however, preserve any portion of Isaiah 52:7–10; the so-called Great Isaiah Scroll, *1QIsaiah<sup>a</sup>*, preserves the whole passage, while *1QIsaiah<sup>b</sup>* and *4QIsaiah<sup>b,c,d</sup>* preserve only por-

tions of it. Despite minor differences in spelling and wording, none of these manuscripts preserves text that differs in any significant way from the text of Isaiah 52:7–10 that is preserved in the Masoretic Text, which became the standard version of the Hebrew Bible.

However, there is another document among the Dead Sea Scrolls that is of greater interest for this study. A first-century-B.C. text, partially preserved on thirteen fragments and known as *11QMelchizedek* (11Q13), appears to have been composed by the Qumran community. It relates some of the future activities of a heavenly figure designated Melchizedek who “is portrayed as presiding over the final Judgment and condemnation of his demonic counterpart, Belial/Satan, the Prince of Darkness.”<sup>35</sup> The portion of the text relevant for this study is as follows:

13 But, Melchizedek will carry out the vengeance of God’s judges [on this day, and they shall be freed from the hands] of Belial and from the hands of all the sp[irits of his lot.] 14 To his aid (shall come) all «the gods of [justice]; he] is the one [who will prevail on this day over] all the sons of God, and he will pre[side over] this [assembly.] 15 This is the day of [peace about which God] spoke [of old through the words of Isaiah the prophet, who said: *Isa* 52:7 «How beautiful 16 upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, of the mess[enger of good who announces salvation,] saying to Zion: ‘your God [reigns.’»] 17 Its interpretation: The mountains are the pro[phets ...] 18 And the messenger is [the ano]inted of the spirit about whom Dan[iel] spoke [. . . and the messenger of] 19 good who announces salv[ation is the one about whom it is written that] he will send him *Isa* 61:2–3 «to comfo[rt the afflicted, to watch over the afflicted ones of Zion».] 20 «To comfo[rt the afflicted», its interpretation:] to instruct them in all the ages of the worl[d. . .] 21 in truth. [. . .] 22 [. . .] it has been

turned away from Belial and it [. . .] 23 [. . .] in the judgments of God, as is written about him: *Isa* 52:7 «Saying to Zion: ‘your God rules’». [«Zi]on» is 24 [the congregation of all the sons of justice, those] who establish the covenant, those who avoid walking [on the pa]th of the people. «Your God» is 25 [. . . Melchizedek, who will fr]ee [them] from the hand of Belial. (11*QMelchizedek* [11*Q13*], col. 2)<sup>36</sup>

While this is not the place to evaluate the manner of interpretation at Qumran, nor for a detailed evaluation of this passage, it is noteworthy that, first, the fulfillment of the prophecy of a messenger announcing peace in Isaiah 52:7–10 is envisioned as occurring at the last day, when Belial, or Satan, and his followers will be vanquished, and second, that the messenger is described as one who “is [the ano]inted of the spirit about whom Dan[iel] spoke [, . . and the messenger of] good who announces salv[ation] is the one about whom it is written that] he will send him *Isa* 61:2–3 «to comfo[rt the afflicted, to watch over the afflicted ones of Zion»].” The Hebrew word rendered “anointed” is *meššiah*, “messiah.” Daniel 9:25 contains a difficult prophecy about a “messiah and prince” who the people at Qumran identified as the messenger who would bring glad tidings and comfort to the afflicted of Israel. The contents of 11*QMelchizedek* suggests that an *angelic* Melchizedek would deliver true Israel and would judge the world by destroying the sons of darkness with the power of God. The sense of deliverance in this passage is similar to that in Jesus’ use of Isaiah 52:7–10 in 3 Nephi 20:33–40 and Abinadi’s use of Isaiah 52:8–10 in Mosiah 15:26–31.

Latter-day Saints should recall that “Melchizedek” is a name-title meaning “King of Righteousness” that is used as an alternate designation of the Holy Priesthood of the Son of God (see D&C 107:1–4), because Melchizedek the person was such a faithful follower and powerful “type” of Christ.



Thus, the name itself is an appropriate title for Jesus. I consider this passage in *11QMelchizedek* to be a corrupted tradition of an earlier, authentic teaching that the Lord, the true “King of Righteousness,” would be the messenger of deliverance and peace in Isaiah 52:7.<sup>37</sup>

Significantly, the two noncanonical texts of significance for this study, the LXX rendition of Isaiah 52 and *11QMelchizedek*, both preserve interpretations of key elements of Isaiah 52:7–10 that are similar to those found in the Book of Mormon: *11QMelchizedek* envisions a last-day fulfillment (and in its own way preserves an interpretation of the messenger as a heavenly being with power over the world and Satan), and the LXX specifically associates the image of the messenger with the Lord himself. Of course, these texts do not prove that a last-day, messianic interpretation of Isaiah’s prophecy should be preferred over others, but they do support the view that we have already seen in the Book of Mormon.

### **Letter of Paul**

The apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans in the New Testament preserves an interesting form and use of Isaiah 52:7. It is likely that Paul has paraphrased this passage since the text of Romans 10:15 does not exactly match either the traditional Hebrew text or the LXX of Isaiah 52:7. Paul taught that “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (verse 13).

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (Romans 10:14–15)



Paul employs some of Isaiah's imagery, but not all. For example, he mentions neither mountains nor Jerusalem. By excluding the phrase *thy God reigneth* at the end of Isaiah 52:7 and 52:8–10 and the message of judgment contained therein, Paul is able to apply Isaiah's prophecy to his own circumstances. Paul refers to the beautiful feet of "them," not a singular herald as in Isaiah's text. These messengers preach the "gospel" of peace, which, in the context of Paul's remarks, clearly refers to the message of salvation through Christ. Furthermore, the destination of these messengers is not restricted to Jerusalem, for in the process of "likening" Isaiah's passage to the first century A.D., Paul depicts Christian missionaries of his day delivering the gospel message to the Mediterranean world. This is conceptually analogous to Nephi's use of Isaiah 52:7 in the context of the latter-day spread of the gospel (see 1 Nephi 13:37), to Abinadi's use of Isaiah 52:7 in reference to prophets and saints who publish peace and salvation in all ages (see Mosiah 15:14–17), and to the use of Isaiah 52:7 in relation to the missionary efforts of the sons of Mosiah (see Mosiah 27:37).

### Modern Witnesses

In more recent times, Joseph Smith, in a doctrinal letter to the church dated 6 September 1842, declared:

Now what do we hear in the gospel which we have received? A voice of gladness! A voice of mercy from heaven; and a voice of truth out of the earth; glad tidings for the dead; a voice of gladness for the living and the dead; glad tidings of great joy. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that bring glad tidings of good things, and that say unto Zion: Behold thy God reigneth! As the dews of Carmel, so shall the knowledge of God descend upon them! (D&C 128:19)

The important imagery of feet, mountains, and Zion are all included in the prophet Joseph's paraphrase of Isaiah 52:7. However, significant differences include the phrase "the feet of those," indicating more than one messenger, and the context in which this passage is employed. Joseph is speaking about baptism for the dead. In the following two verses he mentions a number of divine messengers who had restored authority, keys, and knowledge that made possible vicarious ordinances for the dead, as well as such ordinances for the living ("a voice of gladness for the living and the dead"). It thus seems likely that the phrase "those that bring glad tidings" was used in reference to such messengers. The concluding phrase in verse 19, "so shall the knowledge of God descend upon them," likely refers to the living and the dead. According to this interpretation, the term *Zion* refers to the church and the phrase "thy God reigneth" refers to the Lord's power and desire to reveal the teachings and authority necessary for the salvation of his children so that those who are faithful may reign with him. There is no passage in the Book of Mormon that exactly parallels the use made of Isaiah 52:7 here.

Elsewhere, in Doctrine and Covenants 19:29, 31:3, and 79:1, the Lord commissioned and encouraged Joseph Smith, Thomas B. Marsh, and Jared Carter, respectively, to declare "glad tidings" as part of their missionary efforts. The Lord instructed Jared Carter to go forth "proclaiming glad tidings of great joy, *even the everlasting gospel*" (D&C 79:1, emphasis added). Although most of the imagery of Isaiah 52:7 is absent from these passages, the content of the "glad tidings" is specifically explained in this context as the gospel. Nephi employed the phrase "tidings of great joy" from Isaiah 52:7 in reference to the preaching of latter-day missionaries (see 1 Nephi 13:35–37). In like manner, but without

specific reference to the last days, we have seen how Paul (see Romans 10:14–15) and Abinadi (see Mosiah 15:14–17) utilized Isaiah 52:7 in reference to those who have preached the gospel at various times. Thus, passages from the Book of Mormon, Bible, and the Doctrine and Covenants illustrate how prophets in different dispensations have drawn upon the words of Isaiah 52:7 to express the preaching of “glad tidings” or “good news,” the gospel, by faithful missionaries.

In addition to these passages from the Doctrine and Covenants, Latter-day Saint General Authorities have employed Isaiah 52:7–10 in their teachings, typically in the context of missionary work. Consider this modern example:

As we live righteous and unselfish lives, the Spirit of the Lord enters our souls and then radiates from us. We become beautiful, even as a holy temple is beautiful. And as missionaries we can help others to become beautiful. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings.”<sup>38</sup>

## Summary and Conclusion

The preceding review demonstrates that the Book of Mormon is a valuable resource for understanding Isaiah 52:7–10. It assists us in appreciating what I consider to be the primary sense of this passage, as well as the broader or secondary sense in which this passage is often employed.

If the “messenger” and “Jerusalem” referred to by Isaiah in 52:7 were meant as figures or types representing any number of people and places, then the passages cited above represent various prophetic uses of what Isaiah intended as a general theme: faithful messengers, prophets, and missionary saints in all ages would be welcomed by at least

some watchmen and watchwomen who would rejoice when the glad tidings of the gospel were preached to them. This is the way in which several prophets who lived after Isaiah (such as Nephi, Paul, Joseph Smith, and even the Lord) employed Isaiah 52:7–10 in their teachings. This perspective represents one major interpretive possibility.

If, on the other hand, Isaiah ultimately had a single latter-day herald in mind who would bring glad tidings specifically to *Old* Jerusalem, then we can see how some of the teachings of Abinadi (in Mosiah 15) and Jesus (in 3 Nephi 20) that Isaiah 52:7–10 is or will be fulfilled by the Messiah are of considerable significance in understanding the original intent of Isaiah's words. This fulfillment—that of a single latter-day, messianic herald—represents a second major interpretive possibility.

A conceptual middle ground that many Latter-day Saints are inclined to occupy results from combining the specific and the more general perspectives just presented by accepting the multiple fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Thus, Jesus, as *the* messenger of salvation who can deliver both temporally and spiritually, represents the primary fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. However, Jesus' mission as deliverer serves as a type of all his followers who, in an expanded application of Isaiah's passage, carry the gospel message of peace and hope to the world in all dispensations. According to this view, prophets in the passages cited above broadened the focus of Isaiah's original prophecy. This took place either as an appropriate process of likening the scriptures to their own or previous circumstances (as in the case of Paul, Alma or Mormon in relation to the sons of Mosiah, Abinadi, and Joseph Smith) or to circumstances that they understood would prevail in the future (as in the case of Nephi, Abinadi, and Jesus).

Wherever *you* are on this interpretive spectrum, I conclude with what *I* consider to be the primary fulfillment of this prophecy in the mortal phase of this earth's history: Jesus' second coming to Jerusalem, in power and glory, to people who will recognize him and be grateful for his message. Prophesying through Joseph Smith as he had earlier through Zechariah (chapters 13, 14), the Lord declared, concerning his own second coming:

Then shall the arm of the Lord fall upon the nations. And then shall the Lord set his foot upon this mount [of Olives], and it shall cleave in twain, and the earth shall tremble, and reel to and fro, and the heavens also shall shake. And the Lord shall utter his voice, and all the ends of the earth shall hear it. . . . Then shall they know that I am the Lord; I am he who was lifted up. I am Jesus that was crucified. I am the Son of God. And then shall they weep because of their iniquities; then shall they lament because they persecuted their king. (D&C 45:47–53)

Jesus, the "messenger of salvation" (D&C 93:8), the "messenger of the covenant" (Malachi 3:1), will "bare his holy arm" and bring "good tidings" of deliverance and peace to a war-ravaged Jerusalem that is in ruins by comforting and redeeming a portion of his people both physically *and* spiritually. How beautiful will be his feet, or in other words, how welcome will be his appearance and message, as he descends upon the Mount of Olives. Then and only then will Jerusalem know, as Isaiah prophesied (see Isaiah 40:1–2), that "her warfare is accomplished" and "that her iniquity is pardoned." Then shall the watchmen of that portion of the Lord's people shout for joy, and his "people shall [finally] know his [true] name" (Isaiah 52:6)—Jesus the Messiah. While I consider this the primary focus of Isaiah's prophecy, in a very real way this interpretation of Isaiah 52:7 is merely a type of what Jesus can and does do in delivering us from



the yoke of mortality as we continue in our eternal progress. The extension of such power and compassion to us represents “glad tidings” indeed.

### **Addendum**

Several months after this paper was delivered at the FARMS symposium on Isaiah and the Book of Mormon, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland made the following comments in the October 1996 semi-annual General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

A general conference of this Church is a remarkable occasion indeed—it is an institutional declaration that the heavens are open, that divine guidance is as real today as it was for the ancient house of Israel, that God our Heavenly Father loves us and speaks His will through a living prophet.

The great Isaiah foresaw such moments and foretold this very setting in which we find ourselves:

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that 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.

“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.” [Isaiah 2:2–3]

Of such comforting latter-day direction, including its divine source, Isaiah would go on to say: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace.” [Isaiah 52:7]

Peace and good tidings; good tidings and peace. These are among the ultimate blessings that the gospel of Jesus Christ brings a troubled world and the troubled people who live in it, solutions to personal struggles and



human sinfulness, a source of strength for days of weariness and hours of genuine despair. This entire general conference and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints which convenes it declare that it is the Only Begotten Son of God Himself who gives us this help and this hope. . . . As the Book of Mormon prophet Abinadi made clear in a slight variation of Isaiah's exclamation:

"O how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that *is the founder of peace*, yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people; yea, him who has granted salvation unto his people." [Mosiah 15:18]

*Ultimately it is Christ who is beautiful upon the mountain.* And it is His merciful promise of "peace in this world," His good tidings of "eternal life in the world to come" [see D&C 59:23] that make us fall at His feet and call His name blessed and give thanks for the restoration of His true and living Church. (*Ensign* [November 1996]: 82; second italics added)

## Notes

The author expresses his appreciation to John W. Welch and Larry E. Dahl who helped so much in refining his ideas as they are presented here.

1. All Bible quotations are from the King James Version (hereafter KJV) unless otherwise indicated.

2. This language is part of a literary pattern that begins in the preceding chapter; see Isaiah 51:9, 17. Also, compare Lehi's adaptation and use of this language and imagery as he addresses his rebellious sons in 2 Nephi 1:13, 14, 21, 23.

3. Joseph Smith, of course, also taught that "the whole of America is Zion itself from north to south" (Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970], 362 [hereafter *TPJS*]).

4. See, for example, 2 Kings 19:21, 29–32; Psalms 102:21; 147:12; Isaiah 2:3; 4:3; 31:9; and so on.

5. *TPJS*, 79–80.

6. I take a different position than Monte S. Nyman in his *“Great Are the Words of Isaiah”* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 199, when he states that “Joseph Smith designated Jackson County, Missouri, as the Zion spoken of in verse 8.” Applying a prophecy of Isaiah to a particular situation is not the same as saying that the prophecy is exclusively fulfilled by that situation. The prophetic use and application of earlier prophecies is a concept that is demonstrated by this paper.

7. Note also that Isaiah 52:10 is quoted in Doctrine and Covenants 133:3, and portions of Isaiah 52:8–9 are paraphrased in a millennial song recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 84:98–9, again suggesting the time when this prophecy will actually be fulfilled.

8. For a review of these interpretive options, see Victor L. Ludlow’s *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 438–41. Ludlow favors identifying the servant in this passage as Joseph Smith. See also, Nyman, *Words of Isaiah*, 204–6. See also the brief discussion of Isaiah 52 by David R. Seely, “The Lord Will Bring Salvation,” in *1 Kings to Malachi*, vol. 4 of *Studies in Scripture*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 148–51.

9. Consider, for example, such well-known prophecies as those recorded in Isaiah 2:1–5; 7:14; and 40:1–5.

10. There are no indications of which I am aware that women functioned in such positions in the ancient Near East, thus I use masculine pronouns throughout this discussion. For examples of passages mentioning watchmen but not messengers, see 2 Samuel 13:34 and 2 Kings 9:17–20. See also the LDS Topical Guide, s.v. “Watchman, Watchmen.” For biblical citations mentioning messengers, both secular and religious (i.e., prophetic), see the LDS Topical Guide, s.v. “Message, Messenger.”

11. For a convenient review of the available evidence, see Samuel A. Meier, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World*, Harvard Semitic Monographs no. 45 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). Biblical texts relating to the form of the message are dealt with on pages 37–42 and 191.

12. Meier, *Messenger*, 13–30, 163–79. Note the *written* comment of Amenophis III, king of Egypt, to King Kadašman-Enlil of Babylonia that “your messengers don’t speak truly to you. . . . Don’t listen to

your messengers whose mouths are false. . . . I swear . . . they told lies" (el-Amarna letter 1:81–88, as quoted in Meier, *Messenger*, 169).

13. Ibid., 2 n. 6.

14. See *ibid.*, 168–9, 188–9, for a convenient discussion of this passage.

15. See also Isaiah 62:6; Jeremiah 6:17; and Ezekiel 3:17.

16. Israelite prophets seem to have also been messengers, in some way, to surrounding nations, judging from prophecies to and about foreign nations preserved in the Old Testament. Some examples are found in Isaiah 13–17; Jeremiah 46–51; Amos 1–2; Jonah 3; Nahum; and Zephaniah 2.

17. For examples of heavenly messengers, see Judges 2:1–4; 1 Kings 19:5–7; and the LDS Topical Guide, s.v. "Messenger."

18. Note, however, how the New International Version renders it as plural, without any notation: "the feet of those who bring good news."

19. Note that in Isaiah 41:27, *mēbaśśēr* is rendered in the KJV as "one that bringeth good tidings." This translation is presumably based on the translators' understanding of the context. In comparison, *mēbaśśēr* is rendered simply as "herald" in the same verse in *Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988), hereafter cited as NJPS.

20. *TPJS*, 182.

21. See Genesis 18:4; Luke 7:44; and John 12:3.

22. I note here the suggestion of Larry Dahl (private communication) that perhaps the feet are described as beautiful because they *are* clean. Larry rightly observes that some of the scriptural passages that mention feet refer to the washing or cleansing of feet, symbolizing forgiveness of sins and acceptance by the Lord that can only come through the true gospel (see, for example, Exodus 30:17–21; D&C 88:74–75). Thus, in his view, the gospel is the message and the feet of the messenger(s) are clean because he/they represent the Lord. Those who accept the message share in the hope of becoming clean through Christ.

23. In addition to the work of LDS authors (Ludlow and Nyman) mentioned above, see John A. Tvedtnes, Study Aid to "The Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon," (Provo, Utah:

FARMS, 1981), 89–91, for notes on the occurrence of Isaiah 52 in the Book of Mormon; see also Monte S. Nyman, “Abinadi’s Commentary on Isaiah,” in *Mosiah: Salvation Only Through Christ*. ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center and Bookcraft, 1991), 176–9.

24. Isaiah 53:8 is the only passage in the Hebrew Bible in which the expression *dôrô*, rendered “his generation” in the KJV, occurs (although see Genesis 6:9: *dôrôtāyw*, literally “his generations,” in reference to Noah). It may mean “his lifetime,” since the Hebrew term *dôr* refers to the period of a life, a generation. It often occurs in the expression *dôr wēdôr*, “generation to generation,” indicating a long time, even forever. Thus, to “declare his generation” seems to mean to announce what he accomplished during his life, or the value of his lifetime. Others have explained this phrase with more specific reference to the Lord’s genealogy and origin as the son of God through Mary. See, for example, Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978), 471–3.

25. In Mosiah 5:7, Benjamin refers to the “children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters,” whom “he hath spiritually begotten.”

26. This view is developed by John W. Welch, “Judicial Process in the Trial of Abinadi” (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1981). See also Paul Y. Hoskisson, “A Singular Explanation of the Atonement: Abinadi Speaks of Those Beautiful Feet upon the Mountain” (October 1996; presently unpublished). I appreciate both of these colleagues sharing their work with me.

Although it is ancillary to the present discussion, it is also interesting to ask why this is the only question from the priests to Abinadi that is preserved for us. We are told that the priests of Noah “began to question him, that they might cross him, . . . but he answered them boldly, and withstood all their questions” (Mosiah 12:19), and this took place *before* they asked Abinadi the question regarding Isaiah 52:7–10. While it is not possible to discern the extent to which the *present* form of the account of Abinadi reflects Alma’s initial efforts to record this incident (Alma was “concealed for many days [and] did write all the words which Abinadi had spoken” [Mosiah 16:4]) in relation to

Mormon's later editorial work on and use of Alma's record, it seems to me that the singular reason for the decision to include this episode in our Book of Mormon is Abinadi's powerful teaching of the Savior, which the Nephite prophet delivered and then sealed his testimony with his life. All other questions and considerations regarding this pericope on Abinadi must be considered with this perspective in mind.

27. Interestingly, the original pronoun "thy" in the phrase "thy watchmen" is retained. This may suggest that he is speaking about watchmen in the Americas. Contrast the situation in 3 Nephi 30:32, discussed below.

28. A third possibility is that Jesus is speaking specifically of the gentiles, as opposed to the house of Israel, although this does not seem likely to me given that he has said that if the gentiles repent and convert they "shall be numbered among my people" (3 Nephi 16:13), and if they do not repent they will be "trodden under the foot of my people" (3 Nephi 16:15).

29. This interpretation is given, for example, in Nyman, *Words of Isaiah*, 199.

30. Third Nephi 20:32, 34–35, parallel to Isaiah 52:8–10; 3 Nephi 20:36–38, parallel to Isaiah 52:1–3; 3 Nephi 20:39–40, parallel to Isaiah 52:6–7; 3 Nephi 20:41–54, parallel to Isaiah 52:11–15. Isaiah 52:4–5 is not included in 3 Nephi 20.

31. Angela M. Crowell, "The Hebrew Literary Structure of the Book of Mormon," *Restoration Studies V* (Independence, Mo.: Herald House, 1993): 166, has classified Moroni's use of Isaiah in this passage as "narrative midrash." I thank John W. Welch for this reference.

32. See, for example, Doctrine and Covenants 33:10. This is not meant to suggest that the passage should not be applied to John the Baptist, as in Matthew 3, but only that such usage appears to be a secondary application of Isaiah 40.

33. There are a number of challenges to interpreting this chapter, such as the identity of the "wicked counselor" (verse 11) and the nature of the poetic description of the Lord's power and its effects (see verses 3–6, 8), that cannot be dealt with in this paper.



34. I thank my colleague Michael Rhodes for discussing this passage with me.

35. Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 4th ed. (New York: Penguin, 1995), 360.

36. This translation is from F. García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, trans. W. G. E. Watson. (New York: Brill, 1994), 140. Note that the text within brackets has been restored; it is not on the fragments that have survived. The italicized numerals indicate the line numbers in this column of text. See also Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 361, and the comments of James VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 52–4. A critical study of 11QMelchizedek is available in Paul J. Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchireša'* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981), 4–23.

37. While it is not likely in my opinion, it may be that the Qumran view of Melchizedek is a variant of the teaching that Michael will not only assist but actively lead out in the last great battle against Satan at the *end* of the millennium, as recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 88:100–15 (see also Revelation 20:7–10, although Michael is not specifically mentioned there). Note that Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 360, considers Melchizedek in 11QMelchizedek as “identical with the archangel Michael.”

38. Elder Keith W. Wilcox, “Look for the Beautiful,” *Ensign* (May 1985): 28. It is interesting to note how Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses* 13:355–6, evoked the sense of going out from Zion with glad tidings in a manner similar to that found in Isaiah 40:9–10, quoted above: “We came here [to the mountains of Utah] to fulfil these ancient prophecies. God has lifted up this Church. . . . Beautiful indeed are the feet of those who are sent forth from the mountains of Zion to publish glad tidings of great joy among the various nations and kingdoms of the earth.” Again, the “beautiful feet” are those of multiple missionaries preaching the gospel.