



BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL

<http://bookofmormoncentral.org/>

Nephi's Use of Isaiah 2-14 in 2 Nephi 12-30

Author(s): David Rolph Seely

Source: *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*

Editor(s): Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch

Published: Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998

Page(s): 151-169

Nephi's Use of Isaiah 2–14 in 2 Nephi 12–30

David Rolph Seely

*Pride stands behind the many evils plainly exposed by Isaiah,
and it also lies at the foundation of the devil's works, as
explained and prophetically identified by Nephi.*



It is no secret that Nephi loved the writings of the prophet Isaiah, nor is it surprising that the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon, particularly the long quotation found in 2 Nephi 12–24, provide great challenges to modern readers. Readers often ask why Nephi included particular passages from Isaiah in his writings and what message Nephi would have us learn from that passage. Nephi does much to help readers understand the words of Isaiah by answering these questions both directly and indirectly in his introductory statements and through his commentaries. For example, Nephi introduces his quotation of Isaiah 48 and 49 in 1 Nephi 20–21 by indicating that the prophet's words refer to the scattering and gathering of Israel: "Hear ye the words of the prophet, which were written unto all the house of Israel, and liken them unto yourselves" (1 Nephi 19:24). He then explains to his brothers Laman and Lemuel that these chapters refer to a temporal as well as a spiritual scattering of Israel, including the scattering and gathering of the Nephite and Lamanite seed (see 1 Nephi 22).

Nephi also gives us several important keys to reading and understanding the prophecies of Isaiah. For example, Nephi teaches that readers should read and interpret Isaiah's prophecies as "pertaining to things both temporal and spiritual" (1 Nephi 22:3); that readers should liken those prophecies to themselves and to "all men" (2 Nephi 11:8); and that readers will enhance their study and understanding of Isaiah

by becoming familiar with the manner of prophesying among the Jews (see 2 Nephi 25:1), by being “filled with the spirit of prophecy” (2 Nephi 25:4), and by living “in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled” (2 Nephi 25:7).¹

One other key to understanding Isaiah is to become familiar with the common themes he addresses. The poetry of Isaiah is like a musical fugue that intertwines several different themes. A reader unfamiliar with this style may feel lost with so many themes being treated at once, but one of the easiest and most effective ways to study Isaiah is to read for a specific theme and then follow that theme throughout the Isaiah passages and the accompanying commentary by the Book of Mormon prophets. John Welch has demonstrated how certain themes are found both in Nephite prophecy and throughout the Isaiah chapters quoted in the Book of Mormon. In particular he identifies the main themes of (1) Jesus Christ as the Messiah, (2) the scattering of Israel, (3) the day of the gentiles, and (4) the gathering and restoration of Israel, leading to the judgment of the world.² As we gain familiarity with each of the themes, we are better able to appreciate and understand the full score of Isaiah. This study will trace some of the prominent themes of Isaiah highlighted and emphasized by Nephi: the coming of the Messiah, the scattering and gathering of Israel, and pride.

The Coming of the Messiah in Isaiah’s and Nephi’s Writings

Nephi placed great emphasis on the coming of the Messiah, one of the central themes of Isaiah. He identifies this as one of the main reasons he included the long quotation of Isaiah 2–14 in his writings in 2 Nephi. Nephi first wove the messianic theme from Isaiah into his second book by including a sermon given by his brother Jacob (see 2 Nephi 6–10),

who quoted extensively from Isaiah on the themes of the scattering and gathering of Israel and most prominently on the theme of the coming of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. After recording Jacob's sermon, Nephi includes in his record "more of the words of Isaiah," because, he says, "my soul delighteth in his words. For I will liken his words unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him" (2 Nephi 11:2). He then includes all of Isaiah 2–14 (in 2 Nephi 12–24), chapters that contain many explicit prophecies about the Messiah as well as several allusions to his coming. For example, in these chapters we find the verses "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (2 Nephi 17:14, parallel to Isaiah 7:14) and "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (2 Nephi 19:6, parallel to Isaiah 9:6), and the prophecy of the stem of Jesse (see 2 Nephi 21, parallel to Isaiah 11). In his own prophecy, which follows the Isaiah chapters, Nephi explains the coming of the Messiah to the Jews (see 2 Nephi 25:12–13) and to the descendants of his people (see 2 Nephi 26:1–9), as well as Christ's manifestation to the gentiles (see 2 Nephi 26:12–13) and to all nations (see 2 Nephi 29:8–9).

The Succession of Nations in Nephi's Quotation of Isaiah

In addition to the theme of the Messiah, the themes of the scattering and gathering of Israel, destruction, and restoration are likewise intertwined and developed throughout these passages in 2 Nephi 12–30. Both Isaiah and Nephi are

interested in the coming events that will affect the rise and fall and destinies of a series of national groups.

The Isaiah texts in 2 Nephi 12–24 deal with the succession of the Old World peoples and kingdoms of Judah, Ephraim, Syria, Assyria, and Babylon; likewise, Nephi’s subsequent chapters, 2 Nephi 25–30, also deal with various groups of people, namely, the Jews, the Lehites, and the gentiles. Table 1 outlines the contents of 2 Nephi 12–30.

| Table 1 | |
|--|---|
| Isaiah’s Prophecies in 2 Nephi 12–24, Parallel to Isaiah 2–14 | |
| <u>2 Nephi/Isaiah</u> ³ | <u>People Addressed or Discussed</u> |
| 12/2 | Judah and Jerusalem, destruction |
| 13/3 | Judah, Jerusalem, daughters of Zion |
| 14/4 | Zion’s daughters |
| 15/5 | Judah as a vineyard, destruction |
| 16/6 | Isaiah’s call, iniquity of Judah |
| 17/7 | Syria and Ephraim, destruction |
| 18/8 | Syria and Ephraim, destruction |
| 19/9 | Syria and Ephraim, destruction |
| 20/10 | Assyria, destruction |
| 21/11 | Israel, gathering |
| 22/12 | Israel, gathering |
| 23/13 | Babylon, type of the world, destruction |
| 24/14 | Babylon, type of the world, destruction |
| Nephi’s Prophecies in 2 Nephi | |
| <u>2 Nephi</u> | <u>People Addressed or Discussed</u> |
| 25 | Jews, history |
| 26 | Nephites/Lehites, history |
| 26–29 | Gentiles, history |
| 30:1–2 | Gentiles to enter the covenant |
| 30:3–6 | Lamanites to enter the covenant |
| 30:7 | Jews to believe in Christ |
| 30:8–18 | all nations to hear the Gospel |

Table 1 shows that Isaiah 2–14 and 2 Nephi 12–24 pertain to a succession of ancient nations and peoples known from the world of Isaiah. A closer examination of these passages helps us better understand how these chapters fit together.

Chapters 12–16 of 2 Nephi present the iniquities of covenant Israel and Judah, including the vivid image of the mincing daughters of Zion (see chapters 13–14) and the allegory of the vineyard (see chapter 15). Because of its iniquities, Israel was destroyed and exiled by Assyria in 722 B.C., and Judah met the same fate in 587 B.C. Chapter 16 gives an account of the call of Isaiah to be a prophet.⁴

Chapters 17–19 discuss the apostasy of Ephraim and its collusion with Syria in an alliance that threatens Judah. In chapter 17, Isaiah warns Ahaz, king of Judah, not to join the Syro-Ephraimite alliance against Assyria, because the alliance would soon be destroyed. In fulfillment of this prophecy, Assyria destroyed the Syro-Ephraimite alliance in 732 B.C. Chapter 20 discusses Assyria, the nation that inflicted the divine punishment upon Syria and Ephraim in 732 B.C. but was itself destroyed in 612 B.C.

Chapters 21 and 22 juxtapose the theme of destruction in the preceding chapters with the glorious coming of the Messiah and his servants, who together will usher in the day of the Lord, delivering and gathering covenant Israel and thus leading to a reunification of Ephraim and Judah. Chapters 23 and 24 prophesy of the rise of Babylon, the nation that destroyed Assyria and inflicted the divinely ordained destruction of Judah and Jerusalem in 587 B.C. but was destroyed by the Medes in 539 B.C. Babylon represents the world, which must eventually be overcome by covenant Israel.⁵

In chapter 25, Nephi explains that Isaiah's words were difficult for his own people to understand. In contrast to the

difficulty of understanding Isaiah's prophecies, Nephi says, "But behold, I proceed with mine own prophecy, according to my plainness; in the which I know that no man can err" (2 Nephi 25:7).

In 2 Nephi 25–30, then, Nephi prophesies "in plainness" (2 Nephi 25:4), looking into the future of three important groups of covenant Israel: the Jews (see 2 Nephi 25:9–30); the Lehites—that is, Nephites and Lamanites (see 2 Nephi 26:1–12); and the gentiles (see 2 Nephi 26:12–29:14). Nephi examines the relationship of the Messiah to each group, the problems each group has or will have with pride, the process by which Israel will be scattered for breaking the covenant, Israel's eventual gathering through the restoration of the gospel, and Israel's final acceptance of the Messiah. Nephi concludes his prophecy with a chiastic review of the status of each of these groups in relation to the Holy One of Israel, Jesus Christ. He prophesies that the last group, the gentiles, will repent, accept the Messiah, and enter into the covenant first (see 2 Nephi 30:1–2); then that the remnant of the Lehites, the Lamanites (see 2 Nephi 30:3–6), will do the same; and finally, the first group, the Jews, will embrace the Lord Jesus Christ (see 2 Nephi 30:7). The gospel will be taken to all nations (see 2 Nephi 30:8–18), leading to the millennium, which Nephi describes with citations from Isaiah 11.

Isaiah and Nephi Address the Theme of Pride

In a discussion about how to teach this particular sequence of Isaiah chapters in the Book of Mormon effectively to undergraduate students, one of my colleagues, Fred Woods, told me, "The key to these chapters is the theme of pride." Sure enough, as I began to read these passages looking for this theme, I discovered he was right. Pride is a central theme of the prophecies of Isaiah that Nephi quotes and

also of Nephi's own prophecies. Recognizing this theme can help us better understand and appreciate these passages and to identify the metaphors used by Isaiah and Nephi to warn us against pride.

The sin of pride is identified by both Isaiah and Nephi as the common denominator in the fall, destruction, and scattering of all the nations and peoples discussed in Isaiah's prophecies. Table 2 names each of these groups and gives at least one passage representative of each group's acceptance or rejection of the Messiah and his gospel and containing Isaiah's condemnation of each group's pride.

Table 2

**The Theme of Pride in 2 Nephi 12–24
(Parallel to Isaiah 2–14)**

Speaking of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem:

And it shall come to pass that the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. The day of the Lord shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty. (2 Nephi 12:11–12, parallel to Isaiah 2:11–12)

Moreover, the Lord saith: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes . . . the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head. (2 Nephi 13:16–17, parallel to Isaiah 3:16–17)

And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled. (2 Nephi 15:15, parallel to Isaiah 5:15)

[Isaiah's message will] make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes . . . until the cities be wasted without inhabitant. (2 Nephi 16:10–11, parallel to Isaiah 6:10–11)

Speaking of the destruction of Syria and Ephraim:

And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of heart: The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars. (2 Nephi 19:9–10)

Speaking of the destruction of Assyria:

[Assyria] saith: By the strength of my hand and by my wisdom I have done these things; . . . And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people. . . . Shall the ax boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? (2 Nephi 20:13–15, parallel to Isaiah 10:13–15)

Behold, the Lord, the Lord of Hosts shall lop the bough with terror; and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down; and the haughty shall be humbled. (2 Nephi 20:33, parallel to Isaiah 10:33)

Speaking of the destruction of Babylon:

And I will punish the world for evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay down the haughtiness of the terrible. (2 Nephi 23:11, parallel to Isaiah 13:11)

[The King of Babylon, typified as Lucifer, has said in his heart:] I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. (2 Nephi 24:14–15, parallel to Isaiah 14:14–15)

Table 2 shows that the theme of pride is an important and recurring theme throughout the Isaiah passages that Nephi quotes. The theme of pride is also central to Nephi's own prophecy in 2 Nephi 25–30, which prophesies the futures of the Jews, the Lehites, and the gentiles. Nephi describes how the Messiah will present himself to each of these peoples

and how in each case the main reason for their rejection of the Messiah and his gospel is pride. Ultimately, however, through the revelation of the Book of Mormon to the gentiles, each group will repent of its pride, be brought back to a knowledge of the Messiah, and enter into a covenant with the Lord. Table 3 outlines Nephi's progression through the groups' reactions to the Messiah and the gospel, giving representative passages of their attitudes and actions.

Table 3

Nephi's Prophecy: Pride in 2 Nephi 25–30

A The Jews' rejection of the Messiah, who will come first to them (see 2 Nephi 25:9–30):

"Behold, they will reject him, because of their iniquities, and the hardness of their hearts, and the stiffness of their necks" (2 Nephi 25:12).

B The Nephites' initial acceptance of the Messiah, who appeared to them after his death, and their subsequent rejection of him (see 2 Nephi 26:1–11):

After "the Son of righteousness shall appear unto them . . . For the reward of their pride and their foolishness they shall reap destruction; for because they yield unto the devil and choose works of darkness rather than light" (verses 9–10).

C The gentiles' reaction to the Messiah and to the restoration of the gospel in the latter days (see 2 Nephi 26:12–29:14):

"It must needs be that the Gentiles be convinced also that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God" (2 Nephi 26:12), but "the Gentiles are lifted up in the pride of their eyes, . . . and preach up unto themselves their own

wisdom and their own learning, that they may get gain and grind upon the face of the poor" (2 Nephi 26:20).

"Because of pride, and because of false teachers, and false doctrine, their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride they are puffed up" (2 Nephi 28:12).

"O the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up in the pride of their hearts, and all those who preach false doctrines . . . revile against that which is good" (2 Nephi 28:15–16).

C' The gentiles' acceptance of the gospel (see 2 Nephi 28–30:3):

"As many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people . . . for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel. . . . There shall be many [gentiles] who shall believe the words which are written; and they shall carry them forth unto the remnant of [the Jews]" (2 Nephi 30:2–3).

B' The Lamanites' acceptance of the gospel (see 2 Nephi 30:3–6):

"They shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers" (verse 5).

A' The Jews' acceptance of the gospel (see 2 Nephi 30:1–7):

"And it shall come to pass that the Jews which are scattered also shall begin to believe in Christ; and they shall begin to gather . . . [and] become a delightsome people" (verse 7).

The Isaiah passages in 2 Nephi 12–24 express pride using many different terms and images: "lofty looks," "haughtiness," "stretched forth necks and wanton eyes," "mighty

man," "eyes of the lofty," "fat heart," "heavy ears," "shut . . . eyes," "pride and stoutness of heart," "strength of my hand," "high ones of stature," and "arrogancy of the proud." A close inspection of Nephi's prophecy (in 2 Nephi 26:12–29:14) shows that Nephi incorporated many of these Isaianic concepts and phrases. Consider the following five examples where Nephi apparently borrowed Isaiah's concepts (the italicized words and phrases indicate specific places where Nephi appears to have used Isaianic phraseology).

Example 1

Commentary by Nephi

And the gentiles are lifted up in the pride of *their eyes*, and have stumbled, because of the greatness of their stumbling block, that they have built up many churches; nevertheless, they put down the power and miracles of God, and *preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning*. (2 Nephi 26:20)

They may get gain and *grind upon the face of the poor*. (2 Nephi 26:20)

Source from Isaiah

Wo unto the *wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight!* (2 Nephi 15:21, parallel to Isaiah 5:21)

What mean ye? Ye beat my people to pieces, and *grind the faces of the poor*. (2 Nephi 13:15, parallel to Isaiah 3:15)

Nephi describes the gentiles in terms Isaiah used, in Isaiah's parable of the vineyard (found in Isaiah 5), to describe Israel. The irony of the gentiles' pattern is that they build up many churches but deny the power of God and preach their own learning as doctrine; the irony in Isaiah 5 is that Israel was "planted" and cared for by the Lord (Isaiah 5:2), and yet the

Israelites “regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands” (Isaiah 5:12). Both Israel and the Gentiles glorified and relied on human instead of divine wisdom, and both took advantage of the poor to get gain.

Example 2

Commentary by Nephi

And all the nations that fight against Zion, . . . yea, it shall be unto them, even as unto a hungry man which dreameth, and behold he eateth but he awaketh and his soul is empty; or like unto a thirsty man which dreameth, and behold he drinketh but he awaketh and behold he is faint, and his soul hath appetite. (2 Nephi 27:3)

Source from Isaiah

And he shall snatch on the right hand and be hungry; and he shall not be satisfied; they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm.⁶ (2 Nephi 19:20, parallel to Isaiah 9:20)

Nephi used the vivid imagery of hunger and thirst that cannot be satisfied to describe those who seek to destroy Zion in the latter days. The imagery in Isaiah 9 refers to the quarreling between Ephraim, Manasseh, and Judah, who are unable to stand against Assyria. These three tribes of Israel were united only in one thing—to take advantage of the poor, widows, and orphans (see 2 Nephi 20:2, parallel to Isaiah 10:2), showing a greed that is manifest by the enemies of God in the latter days as well.

Example 3

Commentary by Nephi

They *rob the poor* because of their fine sanctuaries; they *rob*

Source from Isaiah

[They] turn away the needy from judgment, and to take away the

the poor because of their fine clothing; and they persecute the meek and the poor in heart, because in their pride they are puffed up. (2 Nephi 28:13) right from *the poor* of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may *rob* the fatherless! (2 Nephi 20:2, parallel to Isaiah 10:2)

One of the first tenets of the eternal gospel is to care for the poor and the oppressed. Under the law of Moses, failing to care for the widows and orphans was a serious offense. The Lord said on Mount Sinai, “If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless” (Exodus 22:23–24). The prophets in Israel all echoed the same theme. Not only did the covenant people of Israel neglect the poor, but they deliberately oppressed the poor and needy for their own gain. Worse, they did it in the name of religion. Ancient Israel was destroyed and scattered for breaking the covenant, and Nephi prophesies that the Nephites would eventually be destroyed for the same reason. The gentiles have the same problem, but they can still repent: “Nevertheless, I will be merciful unto them, saith the Lord God, if they will repent” (2 Nephi 28:32).

Example 4

Commentary by Nephi

O the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up in the pride of their hearts, and all those who preach false doctrines, . . . for they shall be thrust down to hell! (2 Nephi 28:15)

Source from Isaiah

And it shall come to pass that the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. (2 Nephi 12:11, parallel to Isaiah 2:11)

The Book of Mormon and the book of Isaiah both teach the lesson that those who are proud will ultimately be humbled by being cast down. Isaiah and Nephi teach this lesson with the stories of Israel, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. The Book of Mormon also illustrates it, with the stories of the fall of the Jaredites and the destruction of the Nephites. Both books warn all people, especially the latter-day covenant people, of the dangers of pride.

Example 5

Commentary by Nephi

Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or *maketh flesh his arm*, or shall hearken unto the precepts of men, save their precepts shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost. (2 Nephi 28:31)

Source from Isaiah

Their land is also full of idols; they *worship the work of their own hands*, that which their own fingers have made. (2 Nephi 12:8, parallel to Isaiah 2:8)

One aspect of pride that Isaiah points out is the folly of putting trust in the things of men instead of in the things of God. In Isaiah, the lesson is dramatized in a parable about an idolatrous woodcutter who cuts down a tree with his own hands and makes an idol, which he then worships (see Isaiah 44:9–20). But the idol does not have the power to save. In 2 Nephi 28:4, Nephi prophesies the fate of those who “err because they are taught by the precepts of men.” For the gentiles, just as for ancient Israel, to trust in the arm of flesh is a form of idolatry.

Isaiah looks into the future and sees the destruction of a series of nations and peoples, and in each case he cites pride as the cause of their rejection of the Lord and of their eventual scattering and destruction. In his own prophecy about the history of the Jews, Lehites, and gentiles, Nephi also identifies, often in the language of Isaiah, the main challenge that each of these groups faces as pride.

The Theme of Pride throughout the Writings of Nephi

Pride is a central theme in the writings of Nephi, and it is also one of the most important themes of the whole Book of Mormon. Nephi sees in vision the history and future of the world, including his own people's history, and he understands that the handling of pride is a determining factor in the welfare and future of all peoples. In Nephi's vision of the tree of life, the large and spacious building is identified as the "pride of the world" (1 Nephi 11:36), or the "pride of the children of men" (1 Nephi 12:18). The Messiah is opposed by the people "that were in [the] large and spacious building," which the angel identifies as "the world and the wisdom thereof," who are gathered up to fight against the Lamb (see 1 Nephi 11:35–36). For Nephi, the large and spacious building is the embodiment of the great and abominable church. The pride of the world is further defined in relation to the churches that will be founded in the day of the gentiles: "All churches which are built up to get gain, . . . to get power over the flesh, and those who are built up to become popular in the eyes of the world" (1 Nephi 22:23). Nephi affirms that the "church of the devil" has "dominion over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people" (1 Nephi 14:10–11).

On a more personal level, Nephi identifies pride as one of the main reasons that his brothers Laman and Lemuel reject the teachings of their father and of Nephi. Nephi describes his brothers as stiff-necked (see 1 Nephi 2:11) and hard-hearted (see 1 Nephi 2:18; 7:8; 15:3). They refuse to listen to the words of Lehi and Nephi, rebel against the Lord, and ultimately seek to kill Nephi and his people.

To Nephi, Laman and Lemuel represent all Israel throughout history: just as Laman and Lemuel are hard of heart, so

are the ancient Israelites (see 1 Nephi 17:30, 42), the future Lamanites (see 2 Nephi 5:21), the Jews (see 1 Nephi 19:7; 2 Nephi 25:12), and the Nephites, his own descendants, who would in the end be destroyed “for the reward of their pride” (2 Nephi 26:10).⁷ Nephi, in his panoramic view of history, also sees pride as a central issue for the gentiles: if they “harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, they shall be numbered . . . among the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 14:2). Nephi fervently teaches in his writings that just as the “proud and lofty” of the past were destroyed, so will “every one who is lifted up . . . be brought low” (2 Nephi 12:12, parallel to Isaiah 2:12).

The sermon by Nephi’s brother Jacob, in 2 Nephi 6–10, also contains many references to pride. In that speech Jacob warns of the imminent destruction of those who “when they are learned . . . think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves” (2 Nephi 9:28) and of those worldly rich, who, “because they are rich . . . despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore their treasure is their god” (2 Nephi 9:30). Jacob defines true humility by juxtaposing it with learning and wealth: “And the wise, and the learned, and they that are rich, who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches—yea, they are they whom he [God] despiseth; and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them” (2 Nephi 9:42).

Nephi teaches that the solution to pride is humility. The opposite of a prideful heart is a humble, softened heart, an image occasionally expressed in the Book of Mormon.⁸ When Lehi receives his call to be a prophet, his family members are faced with great challenges. Perhaps the greatest is their

decision whether to follow and obey Lehi. Because of the hardness of their hearts, Laman and Lemuel refuse to listen to their father, but Nephi turns to the Lord. He records, “Wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers” (1 Nephi 2:16). One of the keys to overcoming pride is sincere and humble prayer—trusting in the Lord rather than ourselves. Through prayer we petition the Lord to extend his power and soften our hearts. Nephi learns this concept early in his life, and throughout his life he constantly turns to the Lord, while his brothers do not. Nephi alludes to his own struggles in the psalm of Nephi and concludes, “O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh” (2 Nephi 4:34). In the end, Nephi is able to endure trials and challenges, while his brothers become hardened and bitter, ultimately refusing to come to the tree of life.

The Lord is able to soften the hearts of the children of men in dramatic ways. After Laman and Lemuel tie Nephi up on the ship during their trip to the promised land, Nephi records, “And there was nothing save it were the power of God, which threatened them with destruction, could soften their hearts” (1 Nephi 18:20). King Lamoni describes the process by which the Lord softened the hearts of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies: “And behold, I thank my great God that he has given us a portion of his Spirit to soften our hearts” (Alma 24:8). And Jacob prophesies that in the latter days the Lord “will soften the hearts of the Gentiles, that they shall be like unto a father to [the Lamanites]; wherefore, the Gentiles shall be blessed and numbered among the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 10:18).

Conclusion

In 2 Nephi 11:2–7, Nephi explains that he desired to include the words of Isaiah in his record because his soul delighted in proving to his people the truth of the coming of Christ and of the covenant the Lord had made with their fathers. In verse 8, Nephi further announces that he would liken the words of Isaiah unto his own people. Throughout his own prophecy, which he delivers in “plainness” (2 Nephi 25:7), Nephi makes several specific allusions, often using Isaianic language, and many broad references to the Isaianic themes of the coming of the Messiah, the scattering and gathering of Israel, and destruction and restoration of covenant Israel and the nations around her. Crucial to the salvation of the covenant people and of all nations is the conquering of pride. Pride influences our relationships with ourselves, our fellow mortals, and our God. When we rely on the arm of flesh rather than on the Holy Ghost, when we ignore the poor and the oppressed, and when we worship idols—the works of our own hands—we separate ourselves from the Messiah. Isaiah and Nephi point to cases spanning thousands of years of history and prophecy in which pride plays a part in the downfall of the nations of Assyria and Babylon and the covenant peoples of Ephraim, Judah, and the Nephites and Lamanites.

Although pride is one of the greatest challenges we face in the latter days, the Book of Mormon’s teachings can help us attain and maintain humility. As we read the warning against pride pronounced with eloquence by Isaiah and in plainness by Nephi, and as we study their other prophecies, may we remember the words Nephi wrote at the beginning of these prophecies and liken these words to ourselves (see 2 Nephi 11:8).

Notes

1. See Donald W. Parry, “Nephi’s Keys to Understanding Isaiah (2 Nephi 25:1–8),” in this volume, which discusses these and other keys at length.

2. See John W. Welch, “Getting through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View,” in this volume.

3. The chapter numbers of the quotation of Isaiah 2–14 are 2 Nephi 12–24—numerically exactly ten more. An easy mnemonic device for identifying the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi 12–24 is simply to subtract ten from the 2 Nephi chapter numbers. To identify the 2 Nephi passage from the Isaiah 2–14 chapters, simply add ten.

4. See Stephen D. Ricks, “Heavenly Visions and Prophetic Calls in Isaiah, the Book of Mormon, and the Revelation of John,” in this volume.

5. See also Sidney B. Sperry, “The Isaiah Quotation: 2 Nephi 12–24,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/1 (1995): 192–208.

6. In the Old Testament, the closest parallel to the image of “trusting in the arm of flesh” is found in Jeremiah 17:5: “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.” Since some of the writings of Jeremiah were on the brass plates (see 1 Nephi 5:1–13), Nephi may have borrowed this image from Jeremiah.

7. Nephi does not use the word *hard-hearted* in reference to the future Nephites, but it is a common phrase used by the other authors in the Book of Mormon to describe the Nephites in general. In particular, 4 Nephi 1:31 and 34 describe the beginning of the end for the Nephites, who “did harden their hearts” and attempted to kill the disciples of Jesus. Mormon used the image of the hard heart throughout his book to document the final destruction of the Nephites (see Mormon 1:17; 3:3, 12; 4:11).

8. For examples of the “hard heart” image, see 1 Nephi 3:28; 15:3; 16:2; for examples of images of a “softened heart” see 1 Nephi 2:16; 18:20.