

## General Comments on Isaiah 11

Note: This chapter appears in the Book of Mormon as 2 Nephi 21.

This chapter continues the theme from ch. 10 where we learn the Lord's anger has dissipated with the destruction of the wicked. Israel is now to be redeemed and gathered to her ancestral lands. Where there was previously no deliverer to be found (cf. 3:6-8), the Lord now provides one (v. 1).

Of particular interest is 10:28-34, as that is the lead in to v. 1 of the present chapter. The tree cut down (cf. 10:33-34) does not die, but sends up a new shoot from the trunk (v. 1, 10).

Isaiah presents the Messiah as an idealized combination of the kings David and Solomon and the prophets Elijah and Moses. The Messiah unites and conquers like David (v. 10-14, cf. 2 Sam. 5) and is filled with wisdom and righteous judgement like Solomon (v. 3-4, cf. 1 Ki. 4:29-34, 2 Chron. 1:11-12), he slays the wicked with the word of his mouth like Elijah (v. 4, cf. 2 Ki. 1:1-17) and delivers like Moses (v. 15-16, cf. Exod. 14:15-29). Where all of these men were great kings and prophets, they all had their flaws as well. This Messiah has all of their strengths, and none of their flaws.

### KJV Isaiah 11

1 AND there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: 2 And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; 3 And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: 4 But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. 5 And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. 6 The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. 7 And the cow and the bear shall

### JPS Isaiah 11

But a shoot shall grow out of the stump of Jesse,  
A twig shall sprout from his stock.

<sup>2</sup>The spirit of the LORD shall alight upon him:

A spirit of wisdom and insight,

A spirit of counsel and valor,

A spirit of devotion and reverence for the LORD.

<sup>3</sup>He shall sense the truth by his reverence for the LORD:

He shall not judge by what his eyes behold,

Nor decide by what his ears perceive.

<sup>4</sup>Thus he shall judge the poor with equity

And decide with justice for the lowly of the land.

He shall strike down a land with the rod of his mouth

And slay the wicked with the breath of his lips.

<sup>5</sup>Justice shall be the girdle of his loins,

And faithfulness the girdle of his waist.

<sup>6</sup>The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,

The leopard lie down with the kid;

The calf, the beast of prey, and the fatling together,

With a little boy to herd them.

<sup>7</sup>The cow and the bear shall graze,

Their young shall lie down together;

And the lion, like the ox, shall eat straw.

feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. 9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. 11 And it shall come to pass in that day, [that] the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. 12 And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. 13 The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. 14 But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them. 15 And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make [men] go over dryshod. 16 And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

<sup>8</sup>A babe shall play  
Over a viper's hole,  
And an infant pass his hand  
Over an adder's den.  
<sup>9</sup>In all of My sacred mount  
Nothing evil or vile shall be done;  
For the land shall be filled with devotion to the  
LORD  
As water covers the sea.

<sup>10</sup>In that day,  
The stock of Jesse that has remained standing  
Shall become a standard to peoples—  
Nations shall seek his counsel  
And his abode shall be honored.

<sup>11</sup>In that day, My Lord will apply His hand again to redeeming the other part of His people from Assyria—as also from Egypt, Pathros, Nubia, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the coastlands.

<sup>12</sup>He will hold up a signal to the nations  
And assemble the banished of Israel,  
And gather the dispersed of Judah  
From the four corners of the earth.

<sup>13</sup>Then Ephraim's envy shall cease  
And Judah's harassment shall end;  
Ephraim shall not envy Judah,  
And Judah shall not harass Ephraim.

<sup>14</sup>They shall pounce on the back of Philistia to the west,  
And together plunder the peoples of the east;  
Edom and Moab shall be subject to them  
And the children of Ammon shall obey them.

<sup>15</sup>The LORD will dry up the tongue of the Egyptian sea.—He will raise His hand over the Euphrates with the might of His wind and break it into seven wadis, so that it can be trodden dry-shod. <sup>16</sup>Thus there shall be a highway for the other part of His people out of Assyria, such as there was for Israel when it left the land of Egypt.

## Specific Comments on Isaiah 11

The text of this chapter is neatly divided into two halves. The first half discusses the spiritual aspects of Messiah (v. 1-9) and the second half discusses the physical aspects (v. 10-16). The spiritual aspect of the Messiah brings righteous judgement, heavenly knowledge, and transcendent peace. The physical aspect of the Messiah gathers and restores Israel while subjugating all her enemies.

Note how the rhetoric and imagery of these two sections differs. Verses 1-9 are highly poetic and figurative while v. 10-16 are very literal and concrete.

**1 AND there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: 2 And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; 3 And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: 4 But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. 5 And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.**

v1-5 A branch grows up out of the chopped off stump of the father of David (v. 1). The Holy Spirit endows this branch with heavenly knowledge (v. 2) such that he judges righteously (v. 3) over the poor and the humble. His voice carries the power of heaven to the dismay of the wicked (v. 4). He is bound up and filled with with justice and faithfulness (v. 5).

The lineage of Jesse is to produce the promised Messiah, and this Messiah is not only to be anointed by oil as the king of Judah, but is to be anointed by the Holy Spirit. The Messiah judges with great power and righteousness because of the anointing of the Spirit.

v1 This verse is commented on in D&C 113, as follows:

Q: "Who is the Stem of Jesse?"

A: "Verily thus saith the Lord: It is Christ"

Note: that this is commenting specifically upon Jesus Christ and not a more general "anointed servant" is implied by the usage of the term "Christ" in D&C 113:4 where another anointed servant, adressed in the next question, is "in the hands of Christ".

Q: "What is the rod spoken of...that should come from the Stem of Jesse?"

A: "Behold, thus saith the Lord: It is a servant in the hands of Christ, who is partly a descendant of Jesse as well as of Ephraim, or of the house of Joseph, on whom there is laid much power."

Q: "What is the root of Jesse?"

A: "Behold, thus saith the Lord, it is a descendant of Jesse, as well as of Joseph, unto whom rightly belongs the priesthood, and the keys of the kingdom, for an ensign, and for the gathering of my people in the last days."

Note: by the above statement concerning this individual having a right to the priesthood, it may be the case that this person is a literal descendant of Aaron, cf. D&C 68:15-21, D&C 107:16.

The comments in D&C 113 provide an interpretation significantly different from the typical reading. The typical reading is the rod/branch is the Messiah and the stem/roots are the ancient David, by means of synonymous parallelism. However, the D&C 113 reading forwards the view that it is to be read as an inverted parallelism, that the stem/branch is the Messiah and the rod/roots are a servant in the hands of Christ.

The D&C 133 comments suggest there are two or perhaps three persons being referenced here. The descriptions given for the rod and root are quite similar, but do not explicitly reference one another. If they were the same person, it seems likely the answer to the "root" question would say "This is the rod" or something to that effect. Instead, it reiterates the description from the "rod" answer but changes it somewhat, suggesting the rod is more of Judah than the root.

If we assume the rod and the root are two different persons, then who are they? Contrasting the two descriptions, the root appears to be more of the lineage of Judah than of Joseph where the rod appears to be more of Joseph than Jesse. Given this we can equate the rod with Joseph Smith, given his connections to Israel via Joseph (cf. 2 Ne. 3). Then the root could be the eschatological David (or the High Priest under this yet to arise David, cf. Zech. 3:8-9, Zech. 4:14, Rev. 11:3-4). This root is also spoken of in v. 10. The acts described in v. 10-16 are similar to those of Ezek. 37:21-25, and there in Ezekiel the eschatological David is explicitly referenced.

Compare the symbolism of this verse with that employed by

Jesus in John 15:1-5. There he identifies himself as the true vine and all those who abide in him are leaves connected with the vine much in the same way as Isaiah uses the symbol of Christ as the trunk of a tree.

v2-5 These verses describes some of the qualities of anointed servant of the Lord. While some interpret this description as referring solely to Jesus Christ, it can be read as a reference to all the Lord's anointed servants.

The descriptions in these verses has fewer divine qualities associated with them than does 9:5-6. In this passage, the anointed one is portrayed as being full of reverence for the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord. And, given the more pluralistic reading on v. 1 given by D&C 113, it is safe to assume all of the characters references are to be anointed by the Spirit in the described manner.

**6 The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. 7 And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. 9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.**

v6-9 A series of symbols portraying the peaceful conditions under which people at the time of the Messiah will be living. With such a righteous ruler, society is transformed.

Isaiah arranges v. 6-8 to be as a result of v. 9. All enmity, evil, contention, strife, and the power of the adversary ceases because all of mankind devotedly worships the Lord.

Throughout the Old Testament people are compared with animals because of various attributes they possess in common. Isaiah employs this kind of symbolism as well (cf. 1:3, 5:17). Assuming a non-literal reading, the symbolism is formerly adversarial nations (e.g., bears, lions) will come together and live in peace because all will "be filled with devotion to the Lord".

There have been various attempts to interpret this passage literally and say all animals will become grazers and humans will become vegetarians as a symbol of all enmity between man and beast ending under the Lord's Millennial reign. This reading is problematic as it requires a selectively literal interpretation on v. 6-7 and a selectively figurative interpretation on v. 8-9 (v. 8 might be lumped in with v. 6-7, but v. 8 is usually interpreted as a reference to the adversary being bound for the

Millennium). Knowing what we know of Biology, it also seems unlikely predatory carnivores will become herbivores as that would require a drastic change in animal physiology.

**10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. 11 And it shall come to pass in that day, [that] the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. 12 And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.**

v10-12 The root of Jesse becomes a rallying point for all nations (v. 10), including the remnants of Israel (11-12).

v10 The root of Jesse, apparently the eschatological David from v. 1, serves as an ensign, a standard and rallying point, for all nations. Compare D&C 113:5-6 where similar phraseology is used.

v11-12 Compare 66:19 for a similar statement of gathering and list of nations.

v11 The surviving remnants of natural Israel will be gathered out of all nations that they have been scattered to. Note in this verse it says "the Lord will set his hand again the second time". When was the first time and when is the second time? See 2 Nephi 6:14, Jacob 6:2.

v12 Compare D&C 64:41-42 where Zion is called an ensign. Contrast this with 5:26 where Isaiah calls the king of Assyria an ensign to gather all nations to go and fight against Jerusalem. Isaiah theme follows that of Joel's wherein there is a great gathering to either of the two camps: Zion, or Assyria.

**13 The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. 14 But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them. 15 And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make [men] go over dryshod. 16 And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.**

v13-16 Israel will once again be united (v. 13) and conquer all her enemies (v. 14). All of the scattered remnants of Israel will be gathered out of Assyria even as ancient Israel underwent the Exodus from Egypt (v. 15-16). The promises to Abraham are fulfilled in that all his children are returned to the promised land.

v13-14 During OT times Ephraim was the foremost among the northern kingdom (e.g., the northern 10 tribes) and Judah was foremost among the southern kingdom (e.g., the southern 2 tribes, Judah and Benjamin). As a result there was envy and even war between them as is documented in ch. 7, and 2 Chron. 28:16-18, also cp. 1 Ki. 12.

This verse also uses symbolism from the ancient David's rulership as a type since David's rule united Israel. Under David Israel also enjoyed considerable military success against her hostile neighbors.

v15-16 The deliverance of Israel from Assyria is equated with the deliverance of ancient Israel from Egypt where the Lord brought about miraculous means to bring His people to the promised land, cp. 19:23.

Also note Abraham is promised all of the lands from the river of Egypt, the Nile, to the Euphrates, located in Assyria (cf. Gen. 15:18). Isaiah presents all of the nations bordering Abraham's lands as being turned into a way of deliverance for the remnants of Israel. Also compare D&C 133:26-33.

Copyright © 2002 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurtn@cybcon.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.