

“MY SOUL DELIGHTETH IN THE WORDS OF ISAIAH”

2 NEPHI 11-25

**written by
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QUOTE OF THE WEEK: “It just may be that my salvation (and yours also) does in fact depend upon our ability to understand the writings of Isaiah as fully and truly as Nephi understood them.” (Elder Bruce R. McConkie, *The Ensign*, Oct 1973, p. 78)

INTRODUCTION: Someday I hope to read the Book of Lehi—the source for the 116 manuscript pages that disappeared while in the custody of Martin Harris (see heading to D&C 10). I am anxious to know more about the record of Lehi’s father, and the genealogy of Lehi, and the activities of his group in the wilderness (see 1 Nephi 19:1). I believe that many of our questions about Book of Mormon geography might be clarified if we had that record, and I am a fanatic for anything Nephi wrote.

But I am not ready to trade!

If someone offered me the Book of Lehi in exchange for the contents of the small plates which replaced it, I would require about 1 nano-second to make up my mind and say “No!” I do not believe that Martin’s mistake caused us to give up something *magnificent* for something *pretty good*, or that the content of the small plates was a second choice for inclusion in the Book of Mormon. God, knowing long in advance what would happen during the translation, commanded Nephi to make the *small plates* and to write on them his “ministry and the prophecies, the more plain and precious parts of them . . .” (1 Nephi 19:3). So Nephi made them and he and others wrote on them and Mormon included them with the plates prepared for Joseph Smith for what they called “a wise purpose” in the Lord (1 Nephi 9:5; Words of Mormon, 1:7).

One of the reasons why these *small plates* are so valuable is their wonderful witness of the divinity of Christ.

In the introductory material to the Book of Mormon, we have access to the

testimony of the three witnesses to the divinity of the book: Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer bear solemn testimony of the miraculous experience that demonstrated to them the reality of God's involvement with this work. We call them the *Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon*. But there are three *other* witnesses, standing, as it were, *in the book*, just inside the threshold of this book; three witnesses to the divinity of Christ. They are Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah. They stand together, *close together*, at the portal, bearing a powerful and unified witness of the mission and ministry of the Messiah.

In the February 2004 *Ensign*, Elder Henry B. Eyring suggested an approach to reading the words of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon. Read the entire article. It is entitled, "The Book of Mormon Will Change Your Life," and it is superb!

Many are more skilled than I am at putting scriptures in their historic context. There are wonderful techniques of understanding metaphor, simile, and allegory in the scriptures, and I hope you will learn as much about that as you can. But I hope you will learn one more thing. As you read Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, try to believe that Nephi knew Isaiah and he knew imagery. Nephi said to liken Isaiah directly unto you. So I tried it. I read Isaiah's words again, assuming Nephi picked the parts of Isaiah that I, without worrying about the imagery, could take directly to my heart as if the Lord were speaking to me.

Now I will share with you my own experiment. It is not one you would teach, because for each person the Lord will speak directly to the heart with a different message. This is personal; it lets you look into my heart.

I began to read in 2 Nephi 12 [2 Ne. 12] and thought: "The Lord is speaking to me. What is it He wants to tell me directly?"

Jesus told the Sadducees that it was impossible to believe the scriptures and not believe in the resurrection (see Matthew 22:31-33). In like manner, it is impossible to believe the Book of Mormon, especially the words of Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah, and not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. It is in large measure for this testimony that Nephi delights in the words of Isaiah.

And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for 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. And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word. Nevertheless, God sendeth more witnesses, and he proveth all his words (2 Nephi 11:2,3)

1. NEPHI TESTIFIES OF ISAIAH'S WRITINGS AND GIVES KEYS FOR UNDERSTANDING THEM (2 NEPHI 11; 25:1-8)

Nephi gives us at least 7 reasons for quoting Isaiah. Since engraving these records on metal sheets cannot have been an easy task (see Jacob 4:1), his desire to record these things in *his* record must have been exceptional.

- ' "God sendeth more witnesses, and he proveth all his words" (32 Nephi 11:3).
- ' "My soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ . . ." (2 Nephi 11:4).
- ' "My soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers . . ." (2 Nephi 11:5).
- ' "My soul delighteth in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death" (2 Nephi 11:5).
- ' "And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish" (2 Nephi 11:6).
- ' "I write some of the words of Isaiah, that whoso of my people shall see these words may lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men (2 Nephi 11:8).
- ' "Now these are the words, and ye may liken them unto you and unto all men" (2 Nephi 11:8).

In 2 Nephi 25, Nephi gives us some keys to help us with Isaiah. 2 Nephi 25 begins Nephi's commentary on the writings of Isaiah, a commentary that includes 2 Nephi 25-30. And Nephi knew we would probably need some help understanding the writings of Isaiah:

NOW I, Nephi, do speak somewhat concerning the words which I have written, which have been spoken by the mouth of Isaiah. For behold, *Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of my people to understand. . .* (2 Nephi 25:1, emphasis added)

Here are the keys Nephi provides to us.

- ' *"They know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews"* (2 Nephi 25:1) We will have a better ability to understand the messages of Isaiah if we have a better understanding of the way in which the Jews prophesied. In part that understanding comes with exposure. Reading and pondering and re-reading will increase our ability to comprehend. It is of enhancing this ability that Elder Eyring spoke in the beginning of his quote above.
- ' *"For because the words of Isaiah are not plain unto you, nevertheless they are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy"* (2 Nephi 25:4) Revelation 19:10 tells us that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." An abiding witness of the divinity of Christ and the purposes of his ministry will assist greatly in clarifying the passages of Isaiah. Also, the spirit of prophecy is closely linked to the spirit of revelation. They are referred to together 9 times in the Book of Mormon. That spirit of revelation will also be of great usefulness in understanding Isaiah.
- ' *"There is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them, save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews"* (2 Nephi 25:5) A knowledge of the culture and history of the time periods in which Isaiah wrote will assist in understanding.
- ' *"in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled men shall know of a surety, at the times when they shall come to pass"* (2 Nephi 25:7) Sometimes, we will understand only after we see the fulfillment: then we will say as we strike our palms to our foreheads, "Oh! So that's what it meant!" The prophecy in 2 Nephi 12:2,3 is such a prophecy. To those of us who have seen the Salt Lake temple and the know of the gatherings to Utah, in the 1800's for settlement and now for General Conference, the meaning seems perfectly clear. In

retrospect, the prophecies of Isaiah 29 about the Book of Mormon and about Martin Harris and Charles Anthon, seem remarkably clear.

- ' *"Wherefore, they are of worth unto the children of men, and he that supposeth that they are not, unto them will I speak particularly . . . I know that they shall be of great worth unto them in the last days; for in that day shall they understand them"* (2 Nephi 25:8) Those who think the words of Isaiah (and Nephi's transcription of those words) of little value, will have a great difficulty in understanding the meaning of those words.

2. ISAIAH SEES THE LATTER-DAY TEMPLE AND THE GATHERING OF ISRAEL (2 Nephi 12:1-12)

Viewing the future of his people across the ages, Isaiah saw the temples of the last days and the gathering of Israel. Elder McConkie suggested that it would be a mistake to think that this prophecy had reference only to the Salt Lake Temple:

This great prophecy, as is often the case, is subject to the law of multiple fulfilment. 1. In Salt Lake City and other mountain locations temples, in the full and true sense of the word, have been erected, and representatives of all nations are flowing unto them to learn of God and his ways. In this connection and as part of the general fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, is the fact that one of the world's greatest genealogical societies has been established in Salt Lake City -- a society to which people of all nations come to do the ancestral research which must precede the performance of vicarious temple ordinances. 2. But the day is yet future when the Lord's house is to be built on that "Mount Zion" which is "the city of New Jerusalem" in Jackson County, Missouri. (D. & C. 84:2-4.) Mount Zion, itself, will be the mountain of the Lord's house in the day when that glorious temple is erected. 3. When the Jews flee unto Jerusalem, it will be "unto the mountains of the Lord's house" (D. & C. 133:13), for a holy temple to be built there also as part of the work of the great era of restoration. (Ezek. 37:24-28.) (Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, p.518)

This gathering will precede millennial judgement and peace on the earth. Nephi reminded us (in the words of Isaiah) that, following this gathering, the Lord would

. . . judge among the nations, and . . . rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (2 Nephi 12:4)

What a longing we ought to have for a day in which the implements of war become implements of peace—when the financial drain of military expenditure becomes the financial blessing of feeding the multitudes of hungry in this world. I do not mean to belabor this observation, but you might consider what it will mean to this world when the *trillions* of dollars spent on military activities are redirected to the solving of social problems such as hunger. That one event alone might be able to finance a millennium! Consider the following:

About 24,000 people die every day from hunger or hunger-related causes. This is down from 35,000 ten years ago, and 41,000 twenty years ago. Three-fourths of the deaths are children under the age of five.

Today 10% of children in developing countries die before the age of five. This is down from 28% fifty years ago.

Famine and wars cause just 10% of hunger deaths, although these tend to be the ones you hear about most often. The majority of hunger deaths are caused by chronic malnutrition. Families simply cannot get enough to eat. This in turn is caused by extreme poverty.

Besides death, chronic malnutrition also causes impaired vision, listlessness, stunted growth, and greatly increased susceptibility to disease. Severely malnourished people are unable to function at even a basic level.

It is estimated that some 800 million people in the world suffer from hunger and malnutrition, about 100 times as many as those who actually die from it each year.

Sources (by paragraph):

1. The Hunger Project, United Nations
2. CARE
3. The Institute for Food and Development Policy
4. United Nations World Food Program (WFP)
5. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

The information in the paragraphs above come from <http://www.thehungersite.com/hungerfacts.html> on the internet. (If you have the inclination, visit this site, which offers a simple, free way to help feed the hungry.)

President Hinckley quoted Charles Sumner about this matter. He wrote:

Give me the money that has been spent on war, and I will clothe every man, woman, and child in an attire of which kings and queens would be proud. I will build a schoolhouse in every valley over the whole earth. I will crown every hillside with a place of worship, consecrated to the gospel of peace (*The Ensign*, March 1971, p. 20).

From page 160 of the *Improvement Era*, March 1938, comes this interesting insight:

Nicholas Murray Butler has figured that money spent for the World War could have built a \$2,500.00 house, placed in it \$1000.00 worth of furniture, put it on five acres of land worth \$1000.00 an acre, and have given this to every family in the United States, Canada, Australia, England, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, France, Belgium, Germany, and Russia; could have given to each city of 20,000 or over in each of these countries a five-million dollar library and a ten-million dollar university; and could still with what was left set aside a sum at 5 per cent that would provide a \$1,000.00 yearly salary for over 125,000 teachers and a like number of nurses (Reprinted from *Treasures I Would Share*, Heber J. Grant, Dec. 1`937)

It may take divine intervention for this to happen. General Omar O. Bradley, who spent his life commanding and directing military operations, wrote,

We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount . . . Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living (cited in *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, Louis Fischer, p. 349).

Dwight D. Eisenhower, who also knew something of the vicissitudes of war, offered this observation:

Every gun made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in a final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.

This world in arms is not spending money alone: it is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children . . . this is not a way of life at all, in any true sense.

Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron. (*Peace with Justice: Selected Addresses of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, pp. 37-38)

We may not have much ability to influence the interactions of nations, but we are commanded to do a couple of things, that if done faithfully by enough people, will make a difference: 1) “Renounce war and proclaim peace,” (D&C 98:16); and 2) “walk in the light of the Lord; yea, come, for ye have all gone astray, every one to his wicked ways” (2 Nephi 12:5).

111. ISAIAH PROPHECIES THAT THE LORD WILL RAISE AN ENSIGN AND GATHER ISRAEL (2 Nephi 15:26-29; 21:12)

The restored church is an ensign to the nations (see 2 Nephi 15:26; 21:12)

Established by the power of the priesthood and according to the will of God, it becomes the most powerful force in the world for good. Its emissaries will call to people from throughout the world to come and partake of the goodness of the kingdom. The message of those emissaries is here described as a *hiss*. The Lord will "hiss unto them from the end of the earth." The *hissers* are the missionary force of the church. We know from the scriptures and from revelation that they must discharge their duty to be *hissers* before they worry about becoming *kissers*.

These verses indicate that these hissers will go forth in power!

Whose arrows [are] sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind: Their roaring [shall be] like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry [it] away safe, and none shall deliver [it]. (2 Nephi 15:28,29)

The power with which they serve as they declare the reality of the restoration is the message behind this familiar statement from the prophet Joseph Smith:

Our missionaries are going forth to different nations.... The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done [History of the Church, Vol. 4:p. 540].

A statement with a similar feeling came from Brigham Young.

When the wicked have power to blow out the sun, that it shines no more; when they have power to bring to a conclusion the

operations of the elements, suspend the whole system of nature, and make a footstool of the throne of the Almighty, they may then think to check "Mormonism" in its course, and thwart the unalterable purposes of heaven. Men may persecute the people who believe its doctrines, report and publish lies to bring tribulation upon their heads, earth and hell may unite in one grand league against it, and exert their malicious powers to the utmost, but it will stand as firm and immovable in the midst of it all as the pillars of eternity. Men may persecute the Prophet, and those who believe and uphold him, they may drive the Saints and kill them but this does not affect the truths of "Mormonism" one iota, for they will stand when the elements melt with fervent heat, and the heavens are wrapt up like a scroll and the solid earth is dissolved. (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, p.442, 443)

IV. ISAIAH AND NEPHI TESTIFY OF JESUS CHRIST' S REDEEMING POWER (selected verses)

Sing unto the Lord; for he hath done excellent things; this is known in all the earth. (2 Nephi 22:5)

He hath done excellent things. What a joy it was to read these Isaiah chapters looking for examples of the wonderful things the Savior has done or is willing to do for us. I found several descriptions worth considering in the context of a testimony of the Savior's redeeming power.

1. The Lord will wash "away the filth of the daughters of Zion." (2 Nephi 14:4)
2. He will "lift up an ensign to the nations." (2 Nephi 15:26)
3. He gives us light—the light of the life and mission of Christ: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light" (2 Nephi 19:2)
4. He gives us joy. "Thou hast multiplied the nation, and increased the joy--they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil." (2 Nephi 19:3)
5. He will lift our burdens, and give us relief from the rod and the staff: "For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his

- shoulder, the rod of his oppressor.” (2 Nephi 19:4)
6. He will judge us righteously. “he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears. But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek . . .” (2 Nephi 21:3,4)
 7. He will gather his people. “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 . . .” (2 Nephi 21:11)
 8. He will be our strength, our salvation, a shadow, a refuge, a “covert from storm and from rain.” (2 Nephi 22:2; 14:6)
 9. He will give us living water. “. . . with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.” (2 Nephi 22:3)
 10. He will put an end to the influence of the wicked. “The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, the scepters of the rulers.” (2 Nephi 24:5)
 11. He will give the earth a time to rest and heal. “The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet; they break forth into singing.” (2 Nephi 24:7)

CONCLUSION:

Doesn't the review of these descriptions of the Savior make you desire to *break forth into singing* and to cry out with Ammon?

Therefore, let us glory, yea, we will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever. Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord? Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy, and of his long-suffering towards the children of men? Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel. (Alma 26:16)

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