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**The Isaiah Quotation:
2 Nephi 12-24**

Sidney B. Sperry

SP-ISQ

Reprint

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**LECTURE ON ISAIAH QUOTATION
2 NEPHI 12-24**

In this lecture I shall consider the longest single quotation of scripture in the Book of Mormon. It is found in 2 Nephi 12-24, paralleling chapters 2-14 in the Book of Isaiah. The Book of 2 Nephi is probably the most difficult book of the Book of Mormon and chapters 12-24, dealing with Isaiah, are in turn the most difficult to understand in that book. Few people in our day understand the words of Isaiah, and the prophet Nephi himself testified that his people also found them difficult.

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; for they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews. (2 Nephi 25:1.)

In our discussion of Nephi's long quotation from the prophecies of Isaiah, let us first try to understand his reasons for quoting the great Hebrew prophet of the eighth century B. C. After quoting a sermon of his brother Jacob's in which prophecies of Isaiah are discussed, Nephi says:

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. (2 Nephi 11:2.)

What does Nephi mean by the words "I will liken his words unto my people" as translated by Joseph Smith? As far as I can determine, the word "liken" means to "apply." (cf. 1 Nephi 19:23,24; 2 Nephi 11:8.) In other words, Nephi means to apply the lessons of Isaiah's prophecies to his own people "and unto all men" (2 Nephi 11:8) even though they were originally directed to the Jews. We must constantly bear this fact in mind. Apparently Nephi was interested in emphasizing the following points, among others, in the great Hebrew prophet's teachings: (1) The coming of Christ and the power of His atonement.

Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ;. . . my soul delighteth in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death. And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish. (2 Nephi 11:4,5,6.)

(2) Predictions of special interest to Nephi's people and the house of Israel concerning the latter days. (2 Nephi 25:8, 15-18.) The Lord to do "a marvelous work and a wonder." (3) The Lord in the last days will redeem his people Israel and be in their midst. (2 Nephi 22.) (4) The judgments of God upon the nations.

Now, let us glance at significant and interesting passages in these chapters from Isaiah. Let us notice first 2 Nephi 12:2-4. Latter-day Saints

believe that this passage of scripture refers to our day and is even now in the process of complete fulfillment.

Discuss

Then Isaiah appeals to his people, "the house of Jacob" (vs. 5), to mend their ways and walk in the "light of the Lord." In the remainder of the chapter (e.g. vs. 12, 19, 21) Isaiah suggests that in the latter days the judgments of God will shake all nations and that a wicked man will even "go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for the fear of the Lord shall come upon them and the majesty of his glory shall smite them." Here we have an impressive picture of God's retribution upon the wicked, not only of Israel, but of all nations of the earth.

In 2 Nephi 13 Isaiah explains that God will take responsible government away from Judah and Jerusalem. Competent leaders in society and state will be replaced by incompetent weaklings. Why?

For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen, because their tongues and their doings have been against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory. (2 Nephi 13:8.)

And the Lord accuses Judah's leaders of eating up the vineyards and keeping the spoil of the poor in their houses. They "beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor, saith the Lord God of Hosts." (2 Nephi 13:14-15.)

Then in verses 16-24, the Lord delivers a scathing rebuke upon the women of Judah, "the daughters of Zion." Not only are the men of Judah guilty of wrongdoing, but the women are also. This will, through the centuries, cause the Lord to punish Judah for her backsliding:

Thy men shall fall by the sword and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she shall be desolate, and shall sit upon the ground. (2 Nephi 13:25-26.)

And, indeed, Isaiah's prophecy has been fulfilled as history attests.

Chapter 14 is a picture of some of the things that are to happen in the latter days, the age in which we live. As a result of the judgments of God, Isaiah sees a day when the escaped of Israel, the remnant that have survived the destruction of the wicked, shall experience glorious times. So great will be the destruction of men that the prophet predicts many women will request one man to be their husband:

Quote verse 1.

Concerning that day, which is even yet mostly future the prophet exclaims:

Quote verses 2, 3, 5 and 6.

Chapter 15 begins with the famous parable of the vineyard (vss 1-6) in which by effective imagery Isaiah drives home to his people that they have repaid God's loving kindness with base ingratitude and wickedness. For this God threatens dire retribution. In a series of six woes (vss 8-23), Isaiah indicts the rulers of his people for land-grabbing, for drunkenness, for challenging God to hasten His work, for calling evil good and good evil, for their arrogance, and for taking away the righteousness of the righteous. Those upon whom the six woes are pronounced shall be punished; nevertheless, the Lord's hand is still stretched out to his people in the hope that they will return to Him:

Quote verses 24 and 25.

In verses 25-30, the prophet continues his description of the future glorious age of Israel's final restoration. The gospel ensign will be lifted up to the world, and the Lord will "hiss" His word to the ends of the earth. When Israel responds, she shall come with power, and her enemies shall not be able to deliver themselves.

We need not spend much time in considering chapter 16. It concerns Isaiah's call to the ministry by the Lord, whom the prophet sees upon a throne in the temple, high and lifted up. This event took place in the year that King Uzziah died, about 740 B. C. The Lord charges Isaiah to preach to a people who are spiritually defective -- whose hearts are fat, their ears heavy, and their eyes shut.

Chapter 17 is one in which the Lord charges Isaiah, together with his son Shearjashub (a remnant shall return), to go meet King Ahaz of Judah and deliver to him a message of assurance and a sharp warning for his unbelief and godlessness. One verse arrests our attention. This is verse 14 in which the Lord through Isaiah gives Ahaz a sign, the significance and interpretation of which have been much disputed.

Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign -- Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

The Gospel of Matthew sees in this verse a prediction of the birth of Jesus Christ and we shall follow it.

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel," which being interpreted is, God with us. (Matthew 1:22-23.)

Doubtless Nephi also interpreted this scripture as a prediction of Christ's coming in the flesh.

In chapter 18:1-8 Isaiah tells in symbolical language the forthcoming invasions by Assyria. The prophet's new-born son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz (the

spoil speedeth, the prey hasteth), was to symbolize the fall of Damascus and Samaria (18:1-4), and verses 5-8 refer to the Assyrian invasion of Judah.

Verses 9-15 of this chapter seem designed to show that the evil and conspiring designs of nations against Israel will be frustrated. "For God is with us," says the prophet. With God on Israel's side there can be no good reason to fear. (See 18:11-13.)

Many in Israel and Judah--doubtless the wicked--the prophet goes on to point out, will find the Lord a "stone of stumbling," and a "gin and a snare." They will ". . .fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken." (18:14-15.)

Because of the fact that the prophet's message is not received, he indicates that his testimony is to be bound up and sealed for his disciples' future use. (18:16-18.) The people are advised in the future not to seek advice from God through improper spiritual sources. "To the law and to the testimony; and if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (18:19-20.)

In spite of coming gloom, Isaiah indicates that glorious tidings shall eventually flash forth. In chapter 19:1-2, Isaiah is speaking about the Christ as attested by Matthew 4:12-16.

Quote and explain.

Isaiah again predicts the coming of Christ in this wonderful passage:

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. (19:6.)

That Isaiah was looking forward to Christ's coming there is no doubt in the minds of Latter-day Saints.

Through verses 19:8 to 20:4, Isaiah expresses the Lord's pent-up wrath against Northern Israel. This takes the form of a fine poem composed of four strophes. The prophet tells of calamities sent by the Lord in time past by way of warning against Israel because of her wickedness. Moreover, he predicts others yet to come. Each strophe of the poem ends with the solemn and impressive refrain, "for all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still." (19:12, 17, 21, 20:4; cf. Isaiah 5:25.) Isaiah recalls in succession foreign invasions and lost territory, losses and suffering in battle, men not sparing each other during internal strife, and, finally, wicked decrees and social unrighteousness. With captivity and judgment facing them the people still persist in their wicked course. God's warnings have failed; only divine judgment remains.

The remainder of chapter 20 (vss 5-34) is devoted mainly by Isaiah to a consideration of Assyria as an instrument or "rod" in the chastisement of the Lord's people. The prophet seems to indicate that it is not in reality the

military power of Assyria that conquers Israel, but rather the indignation of God. The Assyrians are simply the whip used by Him to accomplish the purpose desired. Unfortunately, Assyria does not recognize the true nature of the divine commission which she has been given, and proceeds to act in sheer self-interest and lust of conquest.

In verses 20-23, however, it seems to me that Isaiah has reference again to the final escape of the remnant of Israel in the latter days from all her enemies, and of her eventual dependence upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel:

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the House of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them, but shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

The remnant shall return, yea, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God.

For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return; the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness.

For the Lord God of Hosts shall make a consumption, even determined in all the land.

We come now to a consideration of the glorious 11th chapter of Isaiah (2 Nephi 21, in the Book of Mormon). This chapter is famous in the annals of the Church, as well it might be. The reader of Isaiah cannot help but observe how often the prophet returns to the theme of Israel's gathering and the glory of the redeemed latter-day Zion. We believe that the Lord revealed to Isaiah the great events associated with the rise and development of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Isaiah saw these events with such clarity and understanding that when the Angel Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith on the evening of September 21, 1823, he quoted chapter eleven in its entirety to the young prophet. In the Documentary History of the Church, Joseph Smith tells us that Moroni quoted many passages of scripture and offered many explanations. Among other things Joseph Smith says, "In addition to these (Mal. 3 & 4), he quoted the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, saying that it was about to be fulfilled." Few Old Testament scholars could believe this, but as Latter-day Saints we say it is true. We believe that Isaiah was a greater prophet than Bible scholars will admit, and even they pay great tribute to him. What is the message of Isaiah 11? What is in this chapter which is of such great moment to mankind?

The chapter divides into three logical parts: (1) Vss 1-5, (2) Vss 6-9, and (3) Vss 10-16. Now let us examine each of these parts in sufficient detail to realize its importance.

The first verse of chapter 11 is intriguing. It reads:

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse,
And a branch shall grow out of his roots.

What does this verse mean? Commentators give various explanations, but one gets the feeling that they are groping in the dark. Many non-Jewish writers,

however, do believe that it has Messianic connotations. The Prophet Joseph Smith gives a straight-from-the-shoulder answer to most of it. In the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 113, we find answers to certain questions on scripture. Here are the parts that concern us most at this point:

Who is the Stem of Jesse spoken of in the 1st, 2d, 3d, 4th, and 5th verses of the 11th chapter of Isaiah?

Verily thus saith the Lord: It is Christ.

What is the rod spoken of in the first verse of the 11th chapter of Isaiah, that should come of the Stem of Jesse?

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. (D & C 113:1-4.)

The "Stem of Jesse" is Christ. That is not hard to believe in view of the language of verses 2-5:

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,

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.

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.

And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins,
And faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

The Book of Mormon gives an interesting sidelight on the interpretation of verses 4 and 5 that we should not miss. Nephi refers to them as follows:

For the time speedily cometh that the Lord God shall cause a great division among the people, and the wicked will he destroy; and he will spare his people, yea, even if it so be that he must destroy the wicked by fire. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. (2 Nephi 30:10-11.)

The next verse of Nephi's indicates that the "great division" spoken of shall precede the great millennial era of peace and righteousness spoken of in Isaiah 11:6-9.

We have clearly seen that the "Stem of Jesse" is Christ, but we are still not clear as to the identity of the "rod," despite the explanation in the Doctrine and Covenants. To be sure, the scripture tells us that "it is a servant in the hands of Christ," etc., but an express name is not given. May I

suggest that the "servant" or "rod" referred to is none other than the Prophet Joseph Smith himself. For this suggestion I am solely and alone responsible. But let the Latter-day Saint reader glance a little beyond verse 4 of section 113 in the Doctrine and Covenants:

What is the root of Jesse spoken of in the 10th verse of the 11th chapter (i.e., of Isaiah)?

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. (D & C 113:5 & 6.)

I identify the individual of verse 4 with the one in verse 6. Who holds the keys of the priesthood in this dispensation? Joseph Smith. Who holds the keys of the gathering in this dispensation? Joseph Smith. Therefore the "rod" of Isaiah 11:1 is Joseph Smith. That is one of the reasons why Moroni quoted the chapter to the modern prophet, and doubtless explained to him that Isaiah saw his coming as a choice seer to this dispensation.

Verses 6-9 of Isaiah 11 constitute the ancient prophet's view of the eventual reality of that glorious day looked forward to by poets and prophets for ages -- the day when man and beast shall live together in peace and rest. Latter-day Saints believe that Isaiah was speaking of the great Millennial Era referred to in the Doctrine and Covenants, where the Lord reveals that He will come and ". . . dwell with men on earth a thousand years, and the wicked shall not stand." (D & C 29:11.) Moreover, He reveals the following:

And in that day the enmity of man, and the enmity of beasts, yea, the enmity of all flesh, shall cease from before my face. And in that day whatsoever any man shall ask, it shall be given unto him. And in that day Satan shall not have power to tempt any man. And there shall be no sorrow because there is no death. In that day an infant shall not die until he is old; and his life shall be as the age of a tree; and when he dies he shall not sleep, that is to say in the earth, but shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and shall be caught up, and his rest shall be glorious. Yea, verily I say unto you, in that day when the Lord shall come, he shall reveal all things -- things which have passed, and hidden things which no man knew, things of the earth, by which it was made, and the purpose and the end thereof -- things most precious, things that are above, and things that are beneath, things that are in the earth, and upon the earth, and in heaven. (D & C 101:26-34; cf. Isa. 65:22.)

It is clear that Joseph Smith, our modern prophet, elaborates on and explains the event in greater detail than does Isaiah. Now let us quote the ancient prophet's beautiful description of that day of peace, yet future:

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.

And the cow and the bear shall feed;
Their young ones shall lie down together:
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp,
And the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk's den.

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. (Isaiah 11:6-9.)

Is it to be wondered at that Isaiah has been loved and admired for centuries? But even more should Latter-day Saints love his prophecies, because we have been given greater opportunities to understand his message than the world at large.

Verse 10 of chapter 11 fittingly opens the division dealing with the recovery of the remnant of Israel. We have already indicated our belief that the "root of Jesse" in this verse refers to Joseph Smith, the great prophet of this dispensation, and the one to whom the Lord entrusted the keys of the gathering of Israel. Here is the verse:

And it shall come to pass in that day,
That the root of Jesse, that standeth for an ensign of the peoples,
Unto him shall the nations seek;
And his resting-place shall be glorious.

The above translation is a little clearer for our purposes than that of the Authorized Version. Joseph Smith stands for an ensign of the peoples because he holds aloft the gospel principles to the world. The restored gospel in this age is indeed the "ensign" or standard held forth by the modern prophet. The nations have sought and will continue to seek him. The Mormon people have no hesitation in proclaiming Joseph Smith's greatness and the importance of his message.

Isaiah perceived that when the gospel was restored the Lord would proceed to gather scattered Israel from the four corners of the earth:

And it shall come to pass in that day
That the Lord will set His hand again the second time
to recover the remnant of His people,
That shall remain 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.

And He will set up an ensign for the nations,
And will assemble the dispersed of Israel,
And gather together the scattered of Judah
From the four corners of the earth. (11:11-12.)

Isaiah refers to nations well known in his day, because his people would not recognize the names of modern nations from whence parts of scattered Israel have been gathered to the West. Nor can it be doubted that scattered Judah is being gathered to her predicted home. The people of the world seem not to recognize the gradual fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, though it is taking place under their very eyes.

In verse 14, Isaiah states that the Gentiles (under the appellation "Philistines") will help his people in the gathering, and Israel's enemies (represented by their ancient names of Edom, Moab and Ammon) shall no longer have any power over them. Rather the shoe will be on the other foot: Israel shall have power over her enemies if any remain. Finally, the Lord will perform as great a miracle as He did anciently when Israel came up out of Egypt, by providing a highway for the remnant of His people. (11:15-16; cf. Isa. 35:8-10; 51:9-11; D & C 113:27.) Not much has been revealed to us concerning the nature of this great manifestation still to come.

Having seen a glorious consummation to the predicted gathering of Israel's remnant, Isaiah records a beautiful hymn by the redeemed Zion, personified as a single person. (2 Nephi 22; cf. Isa. 12.) Actually the hymn seems to be composed of two short hymns (verses 1-3 and 4-6), but for our purposes it may be considered as a single poem of two strophes, each of three verses. The Lord's wrath has been appeased, and He now comforts Zion. The restored friendship gives confidence in future trials and will prove a source of abundant blessings. Zion called upon the redeemed to give thanks to the Lord and proclaim His deeds among the nations. The Lord has delivered His people and now once more dwells in the midst of them. The reader's attention is especially called to the lovely expression, "therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." (12:3.) Here is the hymn in full:

And in that day thou shalt say:
'I will give thanks unto Thee, O Lord;
For though Thou wast angry with me,
Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me.
Behold, God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid;
For God the Lord is my strength and song;
And He is become my salvation.'
Therefore with joy shall ye draw water
Out of the wells of salvation.

And in that day shall ye say:
'Give thanks unto the Lord, proclaim His name,
Declare His doings among the peoples,
Make mention that His name is exalted.
Sing unto the Lord; for He hath done gloriously;
This is made known in all the earth.
Cry aloud and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion;
For great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.'
(12:1-6.)

Now let us notice briefly 2 Nephi 23 (Isaiah 13). Though most authorities hold that all of Isaiah 13 is directed against ancient Babylon, I cannot escape the belief that in verses 1-13 (division point uncertain) Isaiah is still dealing with the events of the latter days. As I view it, these verses are directed against the spiritual Babylon prevalent in the world of the day when Israel is being gathered and redeemed. It is the Babylon referred to in the Lord's preface to the Doctrine and Covenants. (See D & C 1:16.) In the remainder of chapter 13 Isaiah deals with an event nearer his own times, the end of the wicked Babylonian Empire. The terrible destruction of Babylon is vividly described.

In verses 1-3 of 2 Nephi 24 (Isa. 14), Isaiah now looks again to the day when Israel will be chosen by the Lord, and when she will rest from her travail and hard service.

Isaiah's famous taunt-song over fallen Babylon, personified as a king, follows in verses 4-21. In verses 12-15 the king of Babylon is personified as Lucifer, the son of the morning. The figure will be recognized by Latter-day Saints as an allusion to Lucifer's fall in the great war in heaven during our pre-existent state. An epilogue follows in verses 22 and 23.

The remainder of the chapter (vss 24-32) is mostly devoted to a discussion of the destruction of the Assyrians who shall enter Judah, with a similar fate promised for other nations whose designs are evil (vss 24-27), and to a message of doom against Palestine, meaning Philistia (vss 29-31). In the last verse (32) Isaiah implies that God, who destroys the enemies of His people, will take care of His own:

What shall then answer the messengers of the nations?
That the Lord hath founded Zion,
And the poor of His people shall trust in it.

And, indeed, in our day the Lord has been building up Zion and preparing her for her great role in dealing with the remnants of Israel.