
ISAIAH 1-2

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GOD'S CHARGE AGAINST HIS PEOPLE (1)

INTRODUCTION

The first two chapters of Isaiah lay the groundwork for the entire work, presenting the themes that will be discussed throughout the prophet's writings. Indeed, the first five chapters can be seen as playing that role, with chapters 1-2 being an intense and focused summary of the concepts and 3-5 providing a deeper look. In this first chapter, the sins of a rebellious nation are delineated, while chapter 2 focuses more on the potential of a future righteous city and nation. This concept of a rebellious present and a potentially exalted future is what the rest of Isaiah works to explain and expand on. Isaiah is a book of dramatic reversals, of divine paradoxes, and of stark contrasts. God's covenant people have a divine calling and potential, and Jehovah just wants them to live up to their covenant relationship. The first 27 verses of chapter 1 are read each year by Jews on the Sabbath preceding *Tish'ah be'av*, the commemoration of the destruction of the temple, because Isaiah 1 offers the theological justification for that destruction (JSB, 784).

Isaiah is not presented in chronological order like other books, such as Ezekiel. Rather, it is thematically arranged. Chronologically, the book begins at chapter 6. The information in these first chapters were likely given to the prophet at various times through his ministry and

only collected later into these chapters to serve as an introduction.

THE VISION OF ISAIAH (1:1)

1 The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah—kings of Judah.

The first verse declares the name of the author of the book and a few things about his vision and writings. Imagine having a box full of scrolls and trying to determine which one is Isaiah—having the first verse clearly identify the book is immensely helpful.

1:1 **The vision.** Hebrew *hāzôn*, translated “vision,” always refers to a divine communication; it could also mean ‘prophesy.’ Other prophets (Ezekiel 7:13; Daniel 1:17; Obadiah 1:1; Nahum 1:1; Habakkuk 2:2) spoke of their experiences using the same word.

1:1 **Isaiah.** The prophet's name in Hebrew is *yēša'yahû*, meaning ‘Yahweh is salvation.’ Other men in the Bible have the same name but the KJV translators rendered it

differently, such as Jeshaiiah (1 Chronicles 25:3). In the New Testament, the Greek version of his name is rendered Esaias in English (e.g., Matthew 3:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23; Acts 8:28).

1:1 *concerning Judah and Jerusalem.* The main character in Isaiah is not the prophet, not the king, not even the servant or the conqueror—it's a city, Jerusalem. The name is mentioned 49 times in the book, as well as other equivalent names (e.g., "Zion" 47 times, "Ariel" 5 times, and "city," referring to Jerusalem, at least 30 times). Isaiah was a prophet of Jerusalem and Judah so it makes sense that he could focus on that part of the world. But in his writings, Jerusalem is not just a literal place but a symbol for how the Lord will treat all of his creation; Jerusalem is representative of the sins and of the destiny of the entire world.

1:1 *Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.* The four kings of Judah during Isaiah's ministry were Uzziah (784-740 B.C., also called Azariah in Kings and Chronicles, e.g., 2 Kings 14:21), Jotham (740-735 B.C.), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (715-687 B.C.). If Jewish tradition is true that Isaiah was killed by Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, then we could add that king to the list, which may extend his ministry later in the 680s or even 670s. Isaiah's ministry likely started the year that Uzziah died (see 6:1), which puts the beginning of his ministry at 740 B.C.

GOD CHARGES ISRAEL FOR HER SINS (1:2-5A)

Israel has made a covenant with the Lord but now that covenant has been broken. Invoking the witnesses of the first covenant, Yahweh calls on the people to turn from their rebellious state but they instead turn their backs on him and so brings the punishment upon themselves.

2 Hear, O heavens,
and listen, O earth;

For the Lord has spoken:
I have reared and raised children,
but they rebelled against me.

3 The ox knows its purchaser
and the ass its owner's feeding-trough

Israel does not know,
my people do not understand.

4 Woe, nation that sins,
people burdened with iniquity,
seed of evildoers,

children who are corrupt.

They have abandoned the Lord;
they have spurned the Holy One of Israel;

they have turned their backs.
5a Why will you be smitten again?
You continuously revolt.

1:2 *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth.* Isaiah 1 is a trial-like setting, with Yahweh acting as prosecutor and judge and the heavens and the earth as witness who acknowledge the truth of the Lord's words. This evokes in the readers' minds Deuteronomy 32:1 (and 30:19 as a secondary comparison) where the Lord called upon the heavens and the earth to witness the covenant that he made with Israel as he brought them out of Egypt. Now calling upon those same witnesses, Israel's disobedience to that covenant is called out, with their own acts testifying against them.

1:2 *for the Lord hath spoken.* This frames the beginning of the condemnation that continues to verse 20, where a similar phrase closes the Lord's charge against his wayward covenant partner.

1:2 *nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled.* The Lord portrays wayward Israel as rebellious children—his children that he has cared for all of their lives. In Deuteronomy 21:18-21, a "stubborn and rebellious son" could receive death by stoning if parents and elders have worked with him to no avail. This penalty was likely top of mind with this language.

1:3 *ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib.* Israel the child, cared for by the Lord, is not showing even as much intelligence as an ox or donkey who know who cares for them and trusts that hand. Portraying beasts of burden here starts a theme or burden-bearing that continues in verses 4, 14, and 24.

1:3 *Israel doth not know.* "Know" is *yādaʿ*, the same word used at the beginning of the verse with the ox and ass. It means to know things or gain knowledge of them but also has the meaning of intimate knowledge, such as when Adam knew Eve and she had a son (Genesis 4:1). Jesus taught that eternal life was to "know" God and his Son (John 17:3). The Lord here declares that Israel lacks that close, personal knowledge of their God, which even an animal has in regards to its owner.

1:3 *my people doth not consider.* The Hebrew word translated "consider" in the KJV has the meaning of discern or understand or perceive.

1:4 **Ah**. “Ah” is *hōy*, more often translated “woe” (of 21 uses in Isaiah, it is “Ah” twice, “O” once, and “Ho” once; the rest are “Woe”). It begins a judgment statement or lament, “a cry of grief and doom, of sorrow and death” (Oswalt, 1:87). Verses 4-9 here are that lament.

1:4 **sinful nation**. Where verse 3 was a metaphor, verse 4 uses strong language to express it directly. Employing four expressions (two parallel phrases), the people are called sinful, perverse or depraved, and the offspring of wicked destroyers.

1:4 **they have forsaken the Lord**. “Forsaken” has the meaning of abandonment or even divorce; Israel has deserted its God. This is the first of three charges leveled against Israel in this verse.

1:4 **they have provoked**. “Provoked” here can also mean to spurn, condemn, despise, or abhor. The people have despised God.

1:4 **Holy One of Israel**. This is the first use of an important name for the Lord in Isaiah. It occurs twenty-five times in Isaiah and only six times in the rest of the entire Old Testament. (Isaiah also uses Holy One of Jacob [29:23] and Holy One [40:25; 43:15; 49:7], adding three more related instances.) The phrase, *qēdôš yisēra’ēl*, emphasizes the sacred and holy nature of Israel’s God, and perhaps reflects on Isaiah’s experience when he was first called as a prophet (Isaiah 6).

1:4 **they are gone away backward**. Literally, ‘they have turned their backs.’ The third charge is that even as the Lord was speaking to them, Israel turned away from him and ignored him, no longer listening to or even looking at him. This insult shows a complete lack of interest and an abandonment.

1:5 **stricken any more**. “Stricken” can have the meaning of being hit or beaten, resulting in severe wounds (“Why do you seek further beatings?”, JPS). The meaning is that rebellious Israel has already suffered for sins and rebellion against the Lord, so the Lord puzzles why they would want to the beatings to continue? Yet that seems to be exactly what they want because they keep revolting against him.

DESCRIPTION OF ISRAEL’S CONDITION (1:5B-9)

The wickedness described in the preceding verses has brought about natural consequences. Verses 5-6 show them toward the people with verses 7-9 toward the land itself, showing that Israel’s sins even impact the environment (making them “cosmic” in scope). Here as

in other places in Isaiah and the scriptures, Israel is portrayed as a woman who has made a marriage covenant with Yahweh but who has not honored the covenant. See, for example, Jeremiah 3:1; Hosea 1:2-9; Revelation 12:7 (especially JST); 21:2, 9; 3 Nephi 22:6.

5b Your entire head is sick;
your entire heart is diseased.

6 From the sole of the foot to the head, there is no healthy spot.
Wounds, and bruises, and open sores—

they have not been closed up nor wrapped,
neither softened with ointment.

7 Your land is desolate,
your cities are burned with fire,

your soil, strangers, devour in your presence,
it is desolate, overthrown by strangers.

8 And the daughter of Zion is left as a hut in a vineyard,
as a shelter in a cucumber field,
as a besieged city.

9 If the Lord of Hosts had not left us a few survivors,
we would be like Sodom,
we would be as Gomorrah.

1:5 **the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint**. The rebellion has afflicted the entire body, represented by the head and the heart. In ancient Israel, the head represented the totality of the person, the top or chief part (which is why the head was anointed and hands were laid upon the head). The heart represented the thoughts and feelings, the will and understanding of the person. Today we might say, ‘you’re sick on the outside and on the inside.’ One commentary suggests that “head” may represent the leaders and “heart” the people (Parry, *Understanding*, 12).

1:6 **sole of the foot...the head**. In a parallel phrase, Isaiah teaches that the entire body from bottom to top has “no soundness,” meaning nothing is healthy.

1:6 **wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores**. Instead of health, the woman Israel has “bruises, welts, and raw wounds” (NASB). None of these wounds have been treated in any way, nor anointed with oil, which was a healing activity.

1:7 **desolate...burned with fire.** Isaiah's view shifts to the land itself, showing that Israel's sin impacts the environment around them. The images and language in verses 7-9 point to a date of the Assyrian destruction inflicted upon Judah in 701 B.C. (see chapter 36-37).

1:7 **strangers devour it in your presence.** When armies laid siege to an area, they would strip all the farmlands and fields of their food and animals, with the people in the walled-up city watching it all helplessly ("your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you," NIV).

1:8 **the daughter of Zion.** Isaiah uses this phrase six times (1:8; 10:32; 16:1; 37:22; 52:2; 62:11), which is clearly a metaphorical reference to Jerusalem. Jeremiah (e.g., 4:31 and 6:2) and other prophets (e.g., Micah 1:13; Zephaniah 3:14; and especially Zechariah 9:9) also use it in the same way.

1:8 **cottage in a vineyard...lodge in a garden.** At first this image might sound very pleasant, but the "cottage" and "lodge" are temporary shelters in fields, used during harvest periods. After the harvest, these shelters would be abandoned or dismantled. The metaphor indicates the abandonment or destruction of Jerusalem—that it will be valued no more than a lean-to in a field.

1:8 **a besieged city.** Siege warfare at this time was to surround a walled city with an army large enough to either cut off supplies and starve the inhabitants into submission, or attack the city and force surrender violently. Either way, the city was likely to be taken unless another army from the outside could come to its aid and attack the besiegers.

1:9 **The Lord of Hosts.** Hebrew *yēhōwah šēba'ôt*, meaning Yahweh of warfare or army. This translation is found more than 300 times in scripture and speaks to the power of the Lord to command legions to do his bidding. A transliterated form, Lord of Sabaoth, appears a four times in the D&C (87:7; 88:2; 95:7; 98:2) and twice in the New Testament (Romans 9:29; James 5:4), and should not be confused with Sabbath, which is a very different word. Using this title here signifies God's power to save the little cottage or shack, just as he has promised.

1:9 **a very small remnant.** By 701 B.C., Assyria had completely destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and most of the southern kingdom of Judah. There was little left except Jerusalem. We see remnant theology in light of a latter-day remnant of Israel, which is the right perspective in likening Isaiah to our day. But Isaiah's prophecy of a remnant being preserved was very real at that time since the inhabitants of Jerusalem were nearly the only survivors of the Assyrian attacks.

1:9 **as Sodom...like unto Gomorrah.** Sodom and Gomorrah were completely destroyed in the days of Abraham because of wickedness (Genesis 18-19). Isaiah's point is that except for God's mercy in preserving a remnant, Jerusalem would be completely destroyed like these two cities.

CONDEMNATION AGAINST ISRAEL'S APOSTATE TEMPLE PRACTICES (1:10-15)

Isaiah next turned his attention to the leaders of the society in Jerusalem, especially those involved in religious leadership. The thrust of the message is not condemn the practices of the day but the hypocrisy of it. This section continues the condemnation started at the beginning of the chapter with an eye toward the temple and shattered covenants. In a sense, this is how the people were trying to fix the problems in earlier verses.

10 Hear the word of the Lord, rulers of Sodom;
listen to the law of our God, people of Gomorrah.

11 What is the multitude of your sacrifices to me?
says the Lord.

I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams,
and the fat of fattened beasts and the blood of bulls.
I do not delight in lambs or he goats.

12 When ye come to see my face,
who requires this from your hand to trample my
courts?

13 Bring no more meaningless offerings;
incense is an abomination unto me;

the new moons and sabbaths,
the calling of assemblies—

I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly;

14 My soul hates your new moons and your
appointed feasts;

they have become a burden to me;
I am weary of bearing them.

15 And when you spread forth your palms, I will hide
mine eyes from you;
even when ye pray much, I will not hear.

Your hands are full of blood,
your fingers with iniquity.

1:10 **Hear the word...give ear unto the law.** These parallel phrases align the word of the Lord, given by prophets and the Spirit, with the Law (Torah), given to Moses. The violations listed next refer to concepts and practices in the Law of Moses.

1:10 **Sodom...Gomorrah.** Returning to the references in the previous verse, Isaiah now calls the city by these names, implying that the wickedness of Jerusalem equals that of the destroyed cities of Genesis.

1:11 **the multitude of your sacrifices.** Or, "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" (NASB). There were the regular sacrifices required by the Law, and this is no condemnation of those practices required by the Mosaic Law. But here in this time of crisis (the city is besieged), they are offering even more sacrifices to appeal to God to save them. Many pagans gave food and drink offerings to the gods in the hopes of winning their blessing (compare Psalm 50:12-13). However, the hypocrisy of Judah (which Isaiah attacks in detail later in the chapter) makes the death of these animals pointless.

1:11 **I am full of the burnt offerings of rams.** A burnt offering is where the animal is fully consumed by the fire, and thus given wholly to the Lord. But he declares that these animals are not helping their case because he has had enough hypocritical burnt offerings.

1:12 **appear before me.** In the temple.

1:12 **tread my courts.** Or, "this trampling of My courts" (NASB and NIV). The multitude of people coming to the temple to offer extra sacrifices were trampling around, kicking up dust and making noise for no good reason.

1:13 **no more vain oblations.** Or, "Stop bringing meaningless offerings!" (NIV). This verse starts a series of short, direct statements that decry the many practices of worship that have become hypocritical in that time and culture. "The reader (or listener) gets the impression of an endless round of activities all repeated continuously to no effect. The weariness of God becomes palpable" (Grogan, 475).

1:13 **new moons and sabbaths.** The lunar calendar determined the timing of the various feasts and sacrifices among the Jews and their Near Eastern neighbors. The Jews added in the Sabbath, which was a weekly day of worship as well as being tied to feasts, jubilee days, and more.

1:13 **I cannot away with.** Or, I cannot endure (footnote 13e).

1:15 **when ye spread forth your hands.** A common prayer position was standing with uplifted hands; this matches the parallel phrase in the second half of the verse, "when ye make many prayers."

1:15 **your hands are full of blood.** Or, "Your hands are stained with crime" (JPS). The blood from the useless sacrifices covers and stains their hands. This image will return in v. 18.

INVITATION FOR ISRAEL TO REPENT AND CLEANSE THEMSELVES (1:16-20)

With the charges fully laid out against them, the Lord now shows his great mercies by offering them a way to become clean of their sins and wickedness. This is the Lord's way of fixing the problems in the beginning of the chapter. Nine verbs in verses 16-17 reveal what it takes to receive forgiveness: wash; make clean (be pure); put away (turn aside); cease; learn; seek; relieve; judge (do justice; defend); and plead. In short: repent, be baptized, and learn and live the commandments of God, especially caring for those in need (see Mosiah 4:16).

16 Wash yourselves.
Be pure.

Remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes.
Stop the evil.

17 Learn to do well;
seek justice,

relieve the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.

18 Come and let us reason together, says the Lord:

Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white
as snow;
though they are red like crimson, they will be as
wool.

19 If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the
good of the land;

20 but if you refuse and rebel, you will be consumed
by the sword,

for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

1:16 **Wash you, make you clean.** The verb "wash" can refer to ceremonial washing, such as hands and feet, but

also bathing and being fully immersed. Either way, there are covenantal implications with the commands to wash and be pure.

1:16 **put away the evil of your doings.** To “put away” is to turn aside or depart from the way the person was going into a new way.

1:17 **Learn to do well.** Or, “Learn to do right!” (NIV).

1:17 **seek judgment.** In nearly every instance in the Old Testament when the word “judgment” is used, it is for the Hebrew *mišēpāṭ*, meaning “justice.” It is one of the most important words in Isaiah (used 42 times) and he frequently calls on the people to repent and administer justice, especially to those in need such as orphans and widows. Isaiah’s message is a very practical, personal one, calling for social justice and not just adherence to the rituals of the Law.

1:17 **judge the fatherless.** As with judgment, “judge” here means to defend, vindicate, or plead for.

1:18 **let us reason together.** Or, “let us reach an understanding” (JPS). The Lord is being merciful and patient in helping Israel see the need to change and repent of their many sins.

1:18 **scarlet...crimson.** This echoes back to v. 15 where their hands were covered in blood. Scarlet is bright red, crimson a darker shade, representing both fresh and stained blood. Their sins are red and easily visible to anyone who looks, but those stained hands can be cleansed through repentance, baptism, and covenants to “white as snow” or “as wool.”

1:19 **willing and obedient.** “Willing” means consenting and desiring to do something. “Obedient” is *šēmaʿ*, which is typically to hear and then obey. We have to consent to hear the word of the Lord and then do what it requires of us to be forgiven.

1:19 **eat the good of the land.** Besides repentance, the Lord’s promise is prosperity and abundance; “you will have plenty to eat” (NLT). This is very similar to the common Book of Mormon promise to the obedient: “they shall prosper in the land” (1 Nephi 4:14).

1:20 **be devoured with the sword.** The alternative for those who “refuse and rebel” is to be consumed by the sword, meaning overpowered and destroyed by their enemies.

LAMENT FOR THE INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM (1:21-23)

As the Lord and Isaiah look upon the wickedness of the city, a lament for their sins is naturally and emotionally expressed. How could the covenant people have become this sinful?

21 How the faithful city has become a harlot!

It was full of justice;
righteousness lodged in her,
but now murderers.

22 Your silver has become dross,
your wine mixed with water.

23 Your rulers are rebels
and companions of thieves.

They all love bribes
and chase after gifts.

They do not defend the cause of the orphan,
neither does the cause of the widow come to them.

1:21 **the faithful city become an harlot!** Jerusalem (representing Israel) was the faithful city, but now, using a common prophetic metaphor, she has left her husband to go out into the streets and prostitute herself with other men (gods). This is another theme that shall reappear in many sections of Isaiah.

1:21 **judgment; righteousness.** Two of Isaiah’s favorite words appear side-by-side for the first time. We already mentioned judgment (1:17 above); “righteousness” is *šedēq*, the same word that forms the last part of the name of the great high priest Melchizedek.

1:22 **Thy silver is become dross.** This and the wine mixed with water are probably both references to the rebellious rulers, which are at best diluted but more likely polluted.

1:23 **Thy princes are rebellious.** “Prince” is *šār* and “rebellious” is *sārar*, making an excellent play on words.

1:23 **loveth gifts...rewards.** The leaders were all looking for gifts from those they were supposed to caring for; there was no justice available to orphans and widows who could not afford to pay the bribes.

ZION TO BE REDEEMED, THE WICKED
DESTROYED (1:24-31)

Turning from condemnation to promise and mercy, the Lord graciously describes in these verses how he will redeem Israel and bring them to a state of righteousness and faithfulness, while the wicked receive punishment. Chapter breaks are added later and don't always reflect a good break in the content flow. In this case, 1:24 would be a great place to have started chapter 2, because the vision at the beginning of chapter 2 is the result of what the Lord does in 1:24-31.

24 Therefore the Lord,
the Lord of Hosts,
the Mighty One of Israel, speaks:

Ah, I will get relief from my adversaries,
and avenge myself of my enemies.

25 And I will turn my hand against you
and smelt away your dross
and take away all your slag.

26 And I will restore your judges as at the first,
and your counselors as at the beginning.

Afterward you will be called
the City of Righteousness,
the Faithful City.

27 Zion will be redeemed with justice
and her repentant ones with righteousness.

28 But transgressors and sinners together will be
crushed
and those that forsake the Lord will be consumed.

29 For you will be ashamed of the oaks which you have
desired,
and you will be confounded because of the gardens
that you have chosen.

30 For you will be as an oak whose leaf withers,
and as a garden without water.

31 And the strong one will be as tinder,
and his work as a spark,

and both will burn together,
and none will quench them.

1:24 **Lord of hosts, the mighty One of Israel.** These names represent the power of God, setting up for the claims of what he will do in the next verses.

1:24 **Ah.** See 1:4 above.

1:24 **I will ease me of mine adversaries.** Or, "I will take vengeance on my foes" (NAB). The concept is that tables will be turned and Yahweh will no longer suffer his adversaries (those who defy him) to appear to be in charge. This does not refer to external enemies but to those within the covenant who refuse to follow the Lord.

1:25 **purge away thy dross.** Echoing back to verse 22 where the leaders are the dross (the leftovers from smelting metal), the Lord proclaims himself the smelter who will make a pure metal by removing the impurities.

1:26 **restore thy judges.** Israel was governed by judges after the initial conquest under Joshua until the people asked for a king, and got Saul, David, and Solomon. During the period of the judges, there was a king—but it was Yahweh. This phrase means that Yahweh will be restored as king at this time of purging as well.

1:26 **The city of righteousness.** Jerusalem was once known by this name under a leader who bore the title "King of Righteousness"—Melchizedek. In the day of restoration, it will be known by that name again, as well as "The Faithful City."

1:27 **redeemed with judgment...with righteousness.** Isaiah's twin words of redemption appear again in this verse—*mišēpāt* (justice) and *šēdāqāh* (righteousness or justification). This is what Israel lacks but will have with the Lord's blessings.

1:28 **destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together.** Or, "Rebels and sinners alike shall be crushed" (NAB).

1:29 **oaks...gardens.** These have reference to the worship of foreign gods who were made of wood (oaks) and their worship, often in garden-like settings.

1:31 **strong shall be as tow.** "Tow" here is a strand of flax. When flax is beaten, tow is the part that falls away, of little value for making fabric, so used to start fires instead.

JERUSALEM AND THE LAST DAYS (2)

INTRODUCTION

Chapters 1 and 2 have been called “A Tale of Two Cities”¹ after the Charles Dickens classic. I think a better title is “A Tale of One City in Two Different States.” Sure, mine’s not as catchy as Dickens’, but it’s perhaps more precise. Isaiah is a book largely about Jerusalem (see 1:1 above), but it’s about Jerusalem in Isaiah’s day contrasted with Jerusalem *as it can be* when transformed, redeemed, and saved by the grace of a loving God. Chapter 2 begins with that vision of the great future Jerusalem, exalted among the nations, with God present and leading the earth from his capital city, and nations honoring and respecting the city’s position. In a sense, the message of the book of Isaiah is how we move from a fallen state to an exalted one, like Jerusalem in chapters 1 and 2.

That vision is followed by a prayer and a reminder of the judgment to come for the wicked—in and out of Jerusalem. Of course, the city Jerusalem is a type for all covenant people and most of the time when we read “Jerusalem” or “Zion” in Isaiah, we should read “me.”

Chapter 2 is also the first chapter quoted in the Book of Mormon (not chronologically in that text but in order of the chapters in Isaiah). It starts the long quotation of Isaiah’s words in 2 Nephi 12-24. There are significant and interesting differences in the text of Isaiah 2-14 and 2 Nephi 12-24 (in fact, for most of the Isaiah quotations in the Book of Mormon) and most are very similar to the later Joseph Smith Translation of Isaiah (though the JST has some differences). Why would Nephi quote so much Isaiah to his people and record them on the plates? He gave four reasons:

1. “That [his people] might know the **judgments** of God, that they come upon **all nations**” (2 Nephi 25:3). Not only does Isaiah write compellingly about the judgments, but Nephi noted that many of these judgments “hath come to pass among the Jews...according to all that which Isaiah hath spoken” (2 Nephi 25:6). In other words, Nephi was a witness to some of Isaiah’s pronouncements coming true and that gave him greater confidence that others yet in the future would come to pass.
2. That even though these judgments have come upon them, “they shall **return again**, and possess

the land of Jerusalem; wherefore, they shall be restored again” (2 Nephi 25:11). The message of the remnant was very important to the Book of Mormon people, because they saw themselves as that remnant, or at least part of it.

3. Because Isaiah’s words “are of worth unto the children of men” and especially “of great worth unto [his own people] in the last days; for in that day **shall they understand them**; wherefore, for their good have I written them” (2 Nephi 25:8). No one in history is in a better position to understand Isaiah than we are.
4. And finally, because he said his “soul delighteth to **prophecy concerning [Christ]**, for I have seen his day, and my heart doth magnify his holy name” (2 Nephi 25:13). Isaiah’s message throughout is about Christ—the King, the Servant, the Anointed Conquerer.

In short, Nephi quoted Isaiah because his writings speak of God’s judgments but also God’s promises to Israel, and especially concerning the coming Messiah, making them of great worth to all.

For a list of Isaiah quotations and paraphrases in the Book of Mormon, see the Appendix below.

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD (2:1-5)

These verses are often quoted in the Church as pertaining to Salt Lake City, the building of the temple there, and other latter-day temples now dotting the world. That’s entirely appropriate and a great example of likening Isaiah to our day. But what did Isaiah’s audience in 700 B.C. hear in these words? Understanding that message will help us apply to our day even more clearly.

Chapters 2-4 appear to form a unit, with the opening and closing sections (2:1-5 and 4:2-6) telling the story of the future of Jerusalem and its people and the section between forming a kind of lament for the present condition in comparison. (As mentioned above, I would start the message with 1:24-31.)

¹ See Bo Lim’s excellent video/podcast series on Isaiah, <http://blog.spu.edu/lectio/readings/isaiah/>.

Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3 are nearly identical, with Micah adding that every man shall sit in peace under his fruit trees. Joel 3:10 also contains similar wording. It's impossible to know who came first or if all are quoting a lost original source. Perhaps it was a psalm commonly known in Isaiah's day (Micah was a contemporary)? If one is the author, then Isaiah is most likely as the phrasing matches his style better than Micah's (though Oswalt, 115-116, makes a case for Micah).

1 The word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

2 And it will come to pass in the last days, **when** the mountain of the Lord's house

will be established at the top of the mountains,
and it will be exalted above the hills,

and all nations will flow unto it.

3 And many people will come and say,

Come,
and let us go up

to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;

that he may teach us of his ways,
and that we may walk in his paths;

because the law will go forth from Zion,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4 Thus he will judge among the nations,
and he will settle the case for many people.

And they will hammer their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks.

And nation will not lift up a sword against nation,
nor will they learn war again.

5 Come, O house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the Lord;
yea, come, for you have all gone astray, every one to his wicked ways.

2:1 *The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.* How do you "see" a word? Well, if you are a seer, you can "see" the word of the Lord as the message is revealed through the Spirit. (The Hebrew *ḥāzāh* is the verb form of the noun used in 1:1 and means to see with the eye but also to perceive or to see in vision; compare D&C 7 [Intro]

and 76:11-13; also Amos 1:1) That it's a word from the Lord brings hope and comfort after the difficult message of chapter 1.

2:1 *concerning Judah and Jerusalem.* The opening to chapter 2 is the same as 1:1 except that the kings are not listed. This is often cited as an argument for Isaiah 1 being added later but it does not preclude that the author of chapter 1 is the prophet himself.

2:2 *in the last days.* This is "a prophetic phrase denoting the final period of the history so far as the speaker's perspective reaches; the sense thus varies with the context, but it often = the ideal or Messianic future" (BDB, 31). We would likely translate this 'the latter days,' but the literal translation could be 'And it shall be in the end of time' (or, as one author put it, "in the afterward of these days," Oswalt, 116).

2:2 *the mountain of the Lord's house.* Temples were often equated with mountains in the ancient near east. The temple at Jerusalem specifically was built on a high hill overlooking the city and the surrounding area, so everyone had to come up to go to the temple. Indeed, it was referred to as "*har ha-bayit*, 'mountain of the house'" (Ogden & Skinner, 2:182). Latter-day prophets have stated that this verse is also fulfilled in our modern temples, including the Salt Lake temple, the future New Jerusalem, and even all of North and South America. Symbolically, all temples are the mountain of the Lord, where his foot can come down and touch the earth, the place that bridges the gap between heaven and mortality.

2:2 *all nations shall flow unto it.* Water does not flow uphill—in this case, up a mountain. So the symbolic action of nations flowing up to the temple signifies God's hand in it; only by a miracle can this thing happen. ("The nations will not merely come; they will pour out in a river toward Zion," Oswalt, 112.) The image is powerful in a culture where the great civilizations were typically associated with large rivers—the Nile, the Euphrates, or the Tigris. Here those very people become the river that Jerusalem geographically lacks.

2:3 *teach us of his ways.* We go to the temple to gain knowledge directly from the Lord, willing to be taught and open to his revelations. The nations will recognize the power of covenants with Yahweh and will ask in droves to be taught. Though desirable, this was a radical thought in Isaiah's time; Gentiles did not come to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh or seek knowledge of him, but to attack and plunder the city and lay waste its crops (see 1:7-8).

2:3 ***we will walk in his paths***. After we are taught, we make covenants to obey the things we have received. The pattern of being taught and acting on those teachings is consistent in the gospel and especially temple worship.

2:3 ***out of Zion . . . from Jerusalem***. The poetry in Isaiah makes these parallel phrases—Jerusalem/Zion is the place from which the Lord issues his laws and his word. But latter-day revelation helps us understand that this parallelism also refers to two separate capital cities in the millennial day—Jerusalem rebuilt (Ether 13:2-11) and Zion or the New Jerusalem in Missouri (D&C 57:3; 84:2-4).

2:4 ***beat their swords into plowshares***. Under Christ's reign, the people will abandon war and turn to peaceful pursuits, represented by making plows and pruning hooks out of weapons. The word "beat" here doesn't just mean reshape but to break into pieces. Broken swords become the sharp points on plows to break the ground, and the metal of spears becomes hand tools to prune vineyards.

2:4 ***neither shall they learn war any more***. Not only will war end, but even learning about war will cease.

2:5 ***walk in the light of the Lord***. This phrase is unique here in Isaiah, though the concept of the 'light of the Lord' is found in other scriptures, especially Psalms. The Lord's light shows the way, blesses our lives, and brings joy and peace. It means we have his Spirit with us, which brings knowledge, intelligence, and understanding. And it reflects our status with him, for we cannot enjoy his light unless we are living up to our covenants.

2:5 ***yea, come, for ye have all gone astray, every one to his wicked ways***. The Book of Mormon and the JST add this phrase to the end of this verse, drawing on language from Isaiah 53:6 and perhaps Ezekiel 3:18-19 and 13:22. The addition not only completes the poetry but provides a transition from the description of latter-day peace and success to the judgment verses following, explaining why the Lord has forsaken the people.

ISAIAH'S PRAYER TO JEHOVAH (2:6-9)

These verses are given in contrast to the first five in this chapter, showing the dramatic difference between the ideal and the reality; it is the nations that come up to Jerusalem to find blessings from the Lord, but Israel, who is already there, is looking to those same nations instead of Yahweh to find what they think they need.

6 Therefore, **O Lord**, you have rejected your people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled from the east,

and **hearken unto** soothsayers as do the Philistines, and they clasp hands with foreigners.

7 Their land is full of silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures.

Their land is full of horses and there is no end to their chariots.

8 Their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, that which their fingers have made.

9 And mankind has **not** been humbled and man has **not** been brought down;

do not forgive them.

2:6 ***thou hast forsaken***. The JST and Book of Mormon change "thou" to "O Lord." Without that change, it is not certain who has forsaken Israel; with it, the charges clearly originate with God—and Isaiah's words are turned into a prayer.

2:6 ***replenished from the east***. Or, "full of superstitions from the East" (NIV). Instead of turning to God, they receive their renewal from eastern religions and governments, such as Assyria, Babylon, or other "children of strangers."

2:6 ***and are soothsayers***. A potential textual emendation (small correction) here would change the meaning the verse from one of superstition to commerce, aligning it more closely with v. 6. That would make it read: "for they are crowded with traders and barbarians like the Philistines" (New English Bible; see Grogan, 486).

2:6 ***they please themselves in the children of strangers***. Or, "clasp hands with pagans" (NIV); or, "they covenant with strangers" (NAB). Clasp hands in a token of covenant is an ancient practice. The charge here is that Israel has made covenants with foreign nations that causes them to turn their backs on the Lord, a common and significant accusation in Isaiah.

2:7 ***full of silver and gold***. The worldly wealth of these other countries is part of the attraction. They have precious metals and large, expensive armies (horses and chariots), showing their power and control from a

mortal perspective. Note the repetition of the word “full” in verses 7-8; this shows that Israel has filled the land with foreign influences rather than the worship of Yahweh (Parry, *Understanding*, 28).

2:8 *Their land also is full of idols.* Though the nations around Judah might be powerful, they also believed in false gods, as represented by their idols. Yahweh was not to be portrayed as an idol (Exodus 20 4-5), so his followers were unique in the ancient Near East. Idols could be small and worn around the neck, or large to fill a temple. They were often covered in gold flakes or fine clothing and given offerings of food and drink to appease them or request their favor. When an idol was created, it went through a ritual to tie it to the god (Walton, 4:18).

2:9 *the mean man boweth down.* In the KJV, both the “mean” (or, average) man and the great man in this verse bow down to the idols they created in verse 8. Because all men thus bow down to idols, Isaiah prays that they should not be forgiven. Interestingly, the translation of mean and great are probably not accurate. In Hebrew, the two words are *ʿādām* and *ʾiš*, both of which mean man or mankind (in the early chapters of Genesis, the man God creates is alternately called those two words; we get the name Adam as a transliteration of the first). The meaning, however, is the same: everyone bows down before idols.

2:9 *forgive them not.* In the JST and Book of Mormon, the word “not” is added twice to this verse, after “boweth” and “humbleth himself,” changing it so men do *not* bow down to the Lord (not to the idols as the MT implies). The textual history of these changes are complicated but interesting. At first, the Prophet applied the “not” only to the great man in both the original Book of Mormon text and the JST. But in the 1837 Book of Mormon, he added “not” for the mean man as well. Based on that change, the RLDS Church put both in the verse when they printed the *Inspired Version* in 1867, even though the JST manuscripts matched the 1830 Book of Mormon with only one “not.” Joseph Smith apparently first interpreted this that only the great man didn’t humble himself, but later read it that no one humbled themselves before the Lord among the house of Jacob, and so none should be forgiven.

THE DAY OF JEHOVAH (2:10-22)

With clear statements about Israel’s potential and her current state entered into the record (as in a courtroom setting; see 1:2), the judge is now ready to pronounce his decision. The rest of chapter 2 is that pronouncement.

Several themes emerge in these verses. Proudful men who think of themselves as powerful without God (or by the power of their idols) will end up being humbled and brought low. When the day of the Lord comes, they will see their error and fear the Lord and the glory of his majesty while they will throw away their idols into holes in the ground and hide themselves in the same holes (making themselves even lower). Man is nothing and only God is exalted.

10 O you wicked ones, enter into the rock, and hide in the dust;
for the fear of the Lord and the glory of his majesty **will smite you.**

11 And it will come to pass that the eyes of the haughty man will be brought low,
and the loftiness of men will be humbled,

and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.

12 For the day of the Lord of Hosts soon comes upon all nations;
yea, upon every one;

yea, upon the proud and lofty
and upon every one who is lifted up;
and he will be brought low.

13 Yeah, and the day of the Lord will come
upon all the cedars of Lebanon,
for they are lofty and lifted up,
and upon all the oaks of Bashan,

14 and upon all the lofty mountains,
and upon all the hills,

and upon all the nations which are lifted up,
and upon every people.

15 And upon every high tower,
and upon every fortified wall,

16 And upon all the ships of the sea,
and upon all the ships of Tarshish,
and upon all luxury ships.

17 And the loftiness of man will be humbled,
and the haughtiness of men will be made low,

and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.

18 And the idols will completely disappear.

19 And they will go into the caves of the rocks,
and into the caverns of the ground,

for the fear of the Lord **will come upon them**,
and the glory of his majesty **will smite them**
when he arises to shake terribly the earth.

20 In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver
and his idols of gold, which he hath made for himself to
worship,

to the moles
and to the bats,

21 and go into the caverns of the rocks,
and into the crevices of the cliffs,

for the fear of the Lord **will come upon them**,
and the **majesty** of his **glory will smite them**
when he arises to shake terribly the earth.

22 Cease from man, in whose nostrils is only breath;
for does he merit esteem?

2:10 **Enter into the rock.** The JST/BoM add “O ye wicked ones” to the beginning of this verse, referring back to the ordinary and great men who are not humble in verse 9. The language of this verse is picked up in Revelation 6:15 where all wicked men hide themselves “in the dens and in the rocks.” The wicked are bowing down in fear of judgment, not worship.

2:10 **the glory of his majesty.** Or, ‘the splendor of his exaltation.’ The perfection of the Lord is so overwhelming to mortal, sinful man, that his presence is enough to overwhelm (cf. Moses 1:2, 5, 11). This phrase is repeated in vv. 19 and 21.

2:12 **the day of the Lord of hosts.** This is the Second Coming of Christ, the day of judgment, which “soon cometh upon all nations” (2 Nephi 12:12). It comes upon different groups of people who are represented metaphorically in the next four verses (see 2:13 below). Nephi explained that one of the reasons he quoted Isaiah was so “. . . that they may know the judgments of God, that they come upon all nations” (2 Nephi 25:3). God exalts his purified city (2:2-4) but humbles the unrepentant nations. This phrase and related ones are found fifty-five times in Isaiah, demonstrating his focus on the last days and the Second Coming (Parry, *Understanding*, 33).

2:12 **proud and lofty.** Pride is the antithesis of humility and is the foundation of all sin. Isaiah tied pride and

being proud to judgment for both Israel (3:5; 9:9; 25:11; 28:1) and other nations (e.g., 13:11; 16:6; 23:9). Proud and lofty both have to do with height; to be proud is to make yourself higher than you really are (Motyer, 58). Only Yahweh is high (vv. 11, 17).

2:13 **upon all the cedars of Lebanon.** The cedars of Lebanon (modern Syria) and oaks of Bashan (modern Jordan and Golan Heights) in this verse are representative of the proud people mentioned in the previous verses. Other symbols include “high mountains” and “hills” (2:14) representing apostate systems of worship trying to imitate the true temple of the lord; “high tower” and “fenced wall” (2:15) symbolizing man’s reliance on the arm of flesh through his own efforts; and various ships that sail in the waters (2:16), signifying wealth and affluence.

2:15 **every high tower.** Reminiscent of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9.

2:16 **upon all the ships.** As the footnote in the LDS edition of the Bible explains, “upon all the ships of the sea” is found in the Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament), while the “ships of Tarshish” phrase is in the Hebrew Bible. Only in the Book of Mormon and the JST are both phrases found. It is not known if Tarshish was a location or a description of a type of ship, or both (e.g., ships that came from Tarshish). Either way, the ships appear to have been known for their great size and wealthy cargo. Isaiah’s purpose, therefore, is supported either way—he is showing how the great things of the world will be humbled by the Lord. In the change here, he goes from the general (“all the ships of the sea”) to the specific merchant class (“ships of Tarshish”). The phrase “pleasant pictures” continues the thought because it is better translated “beautiful craft” (NASB) or “stately vessel” (NIV), bringing luxury ships into the picture as well.

2:17 **the Lord alone.** Verse 17 is a near repeat of verse 11, emphasizing that man will be humbled and only the Lord exalted.

2:18 **the idols.** The Hebrew word translated “idols” here means “weak, feeble, poor” and related to “insufficiency, worthless” (BDB, 47). False gods are utterly unable to do anything. This harks back to v. 8. Isaiah uses wordplay: *ʾēlōhîm* is God and the word here, *ʾēlîlîm*, is thus ‘no-god.’

2:18 **idols he shall utterly abolish.** Or, “idols will totally vanish.” God’s appearance and glory alone is enough to make the ‘competition’ completely disappear.

2:19 **holes of the rocks.** In verse 10, the proud were commanded to go into the caves and the ground, now they go there with their idols (v. 20-21), hiding from the majesty of the Lord at his coming and ashamed of their worship of false gods.

2:19 **the fear of the Lord.** The BoM and JST add phrases (see translation above) that marvelously complete the poetic structure of the verse; fear comes upon the people and his glory smites them in parallel phrases, completed with a summation line referring to the shaking of the earth at his coming.

2:19 **when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.** Earthquakes are often tied to God's judgment in the scriptures. Here, the quaking of the earth occurs when Yahweh arises or "comes forth" (JPS) in view of all the world. The phrase reoccurs in v. 21.

2:22 **Cease ye from man.** Or, "Stop regarding man" (NASB) or, "Stop trusting in man" (NIV). The sense is to quit thinking of these wicked humans as important, as the world might believe, and see them as the Lord does, "whose breath is in his [man's] nostrils" (cf. Genesis 2:7). Like Moses, Israel first had to learn that "man is nothing" (Moses 1:10) before they could realize that man's salvation and exaltation is God's work and glory (Moses 1:39 and Isaiah 4).

2:22 **for wherein is he to be accounted of?** Or, "For why should he be esteemed?" (NASB), which transitions nicely to chapter 3, graphically and specifically showing the consequences of sin.

APPENDIX

Isaiah quotations in the Book of Mormon:

Key:

1 Isaiah Quoted by Other Prophets

2 Isaiah Quoted by Jesus Christ

3 Expansions or Paraphrases of Isaiah

Key	KJV Isaiah	Book of Mormon
1	2 – 14	2 Nephi 12 – 24
3	5:26	2 Nephi 29:2
3	9:12-13	2 Nephi 28:32
3	11:4	2 Nephi 30:9
3	11:11a	2 Nephi 25:17a
3	11:11a	2 Nephi 29:1b
1	11:4-9	2 Nephi 30:9-15
3	22:13	2 Nephi 28:7-8
3	25:12	2 Nephi 26:15
1	28:10, 13	2 Nephi 28:30a
1	29:3-5	2 Nephi 26:15b-16, 18
1	29:6	2 Nephi 6:15
3	29:6-24	2 Nephi 27:1-35
1	29:13	2 Nephi 28:9, 14b
1	29:14	1 Nephi 14:7
1	29:14	1 Nephi 22:8a
1	29:14	2 Nephi 25:17b
1	29:14	2 Nephi 29:1a
1	29:15	2 Nephi 28:9b
1	29:21	2 Nephi 28:16a
1	40:3	2 Nephi 10:8
1	45:18	1 Nephi 17:36
1	48 – 49	1 Nephi 20 – 21
1	49:22-23	1 Nephi 22:6, 8b
1	49:22-23	2 Nephi 6:6-7
3	49:23a	2 Nephi 10:9a

Key	KJV Isaiah	Book of Mormon
1	49:24-26	2 Nephi 6:16-18
1	50 – 51	2 Nephi 7 – 8
3	52:1	Moroni 10:31a
1	52:1-2	2 Nephi 8:24-25
1	52:1-2	Moroni 10:31
2	52:1-3, 6-7, 11-15	3 Nephi 20:36-45
1	52:7	1 Nephi 13:37b
1	52:7	Mosiah 15:14-18
1	52:7-10	Mosiah 12:21-24
1	52:8-10	Mosiah 15:29-31
2	52:8-10	3 Nephi 16:18-20
2	52:8-10	3 Nephi 20:32-35
1	52:10	1 Nephi 22:10-11
2	52:11-12	3 Nephi 21:29
2	52:13-15	3 Nephi 21:8-10
2	52:15b	3 Nephi 21:8b
1	53	Mosiah 14
1	53:7	Mosiah 15:6b
1	53:8, 10	Mosiah 15:8
1	54:8, 10	Mosiah 15:10-11
2	54	3 Nephi 22
3	54:2b	Moroni 10:31a
1	55:1	2 Nephi 26:25b
1	55:1-2	2 Nephi 9:50-51

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JPS – Jewish Publication Society (also called Tanakh)	NASB – New American Standard Bible
JST – Joseph Smith Translation	NIV – New International Version
KJV – King James Version	NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)	NLT – New Living Translation
MT – Masoretic Text (Hebrew)	RSV – Revised Standard Version
NAB – New American Bible	

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