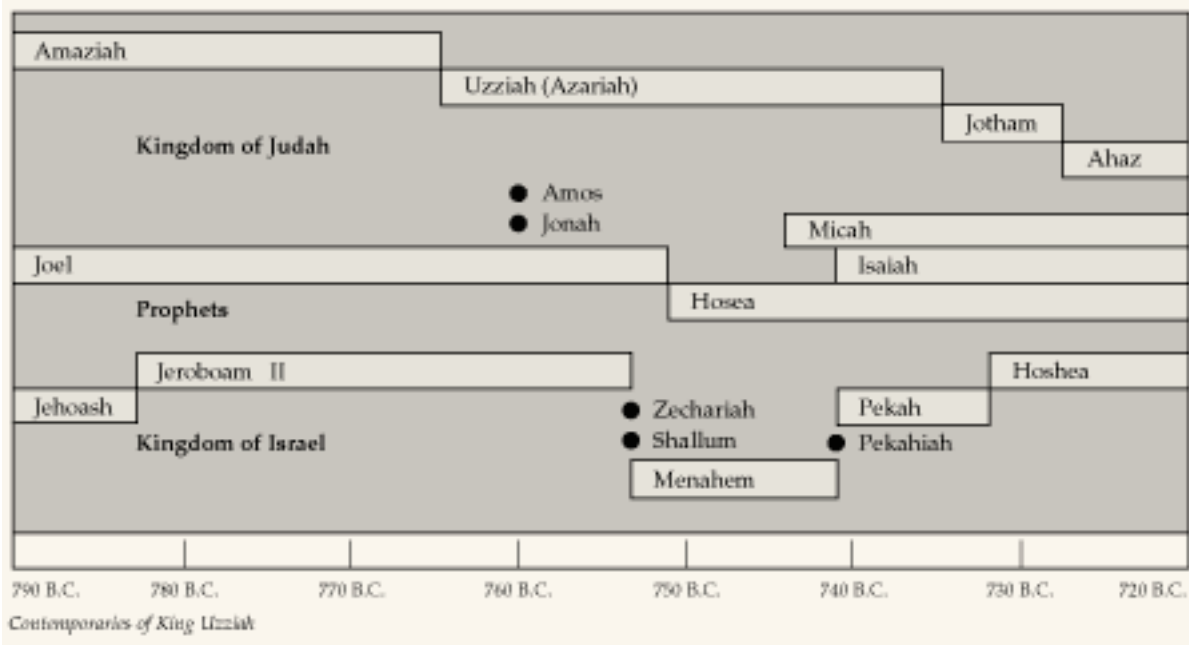


Isaiah 6

“Behold, I and the Children Whom the Lord hath Given Me are for Signs and Wonders in Israel” (Isa. 8:18)



What do we know about the man, Isaiah? His name means “The Lord is salvation.” It is believed that he lived from 770 BC -692. He served under four Judean kings; only one of whom truly honored and regarded his gifts: his son-in-law, Hezekiah (Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer and Poet*, p. 2). Hezekiah followed Isaiah’s counsel, and relied upon the Lord when Jerusalem was surrounded by the fierce and formidable Assyrian army. As a result of their faith, the Lord fought for Jerusalem, and slew the Assyrian force in the night (Isa. 36-39). Sadly, Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh, was not as fond of Isaiah and his warnings of doom and destruction: it is believed that he had Isaiah encased within a tree trunk and sawn asunder with a wooden saw (*Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews* 10:3; *Legends of the Jews* 4:279; see also Bible Dictionary, Isaiah).

Isaiah wrote: “Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel” (Isa. 8:18). Indeed, the Lord did use Isaiah and his family as signs to the people of Judah. At one point, the Lord directed Isaiah to walk naked through the streets of Jerusalem, symbolizing the coming conquest and humiliation of her people (Isa. 20:2-3). His “nakedness” probably meant that he was only wearing the loincloth that men wore under their tunics, having set aside the tunic, cloak and girdle common amongst men of Biblical times (Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*). Nevertheless, his efforts were mostly unappreciated, and he was scorned for his actions.

Isaiah and his wife named their sons at the Lord's direction: Shear-jashub meant "the remnant shall return" and Maher-shalal-hash-baz meant "to speed to the spoil, he hasteneth the prey." The very birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz was to be a sign to the people, a foreshadowing of the prophecy of the birth of Christ, as well as a foreshadowing of the coming destruction and gathering of Israel (see Isaiah 7-8).

Victor Ludlow explains that in Isaiah's day, "prophets usually delivered their messages orally at the city gates or in a public assembly place, such as the temple courtyards in Jerusalem" (*IPSP*, 4). While scribes would write down the words of the prophets, most people did not have these writings, and had to remember the prophets' words as they had heard them and as they were repeated. Despite the poor reception to his prophecies during his lifetime, Isaiah is the most quoted of all the prophets, and the Savior, Himself, directed us to read and ponder his words (3 Ne. 23:1).

"Mine Eyes Have Seen the King, the Lord of Hosts" (Isa. 6:5)

Isaiah received his call as a prophet in the Temple – but not in any earthly Temple. From the tribe of Judah, he would not have been allowed to enter the Jerusalem temple. Instead, he saw the Lord in His heavenly Temple, "sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Isa. 6:1). There are two important principles inherent in this: 1) Isaiah held the Melchizedek Priesthood, and 2) he received it through special dispensation, as explained below.

Although the offices of the temple were under the stewardship of the Aaronic Priesthood during Isaiah's lifetime, and the Melchizedek Priesthood was ostensibly "taken from the earth," Isaiah received it under some special dispensation because of his worthiness and the role he was to play as a prophet. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that:

"The withdrawal of the higher priesthood was from the people as a body, but the Lord still left among them men holding the Melchizedek Priesthood, with power to officiate in all its ordinances, so far as he determined that these ordinances *should be granted unto the people. Therefore Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Elijah, and others of the prophets held the Melchizedek Priesthood*, and their prophesying and their instructions to the people were directed by the Spirit of the Lord and made potent by virtue of that priesthood which was not made manifest generally among the people of Israel during all these years." President Smith adds this detail: "We may presume, with good reason, that never was there a time when there was not at least one man in Israel who held this higher priesthood (receiving it by special dispensation) and who was authorized to officiate in the ordinances" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:85, emphasis added). Or, as he wrote on another occasion, "The Lord, of necessity, has kept authorized servants on the earth bearing the priesthood from the days of Adam to the present time; in fact, there has never been a moment from the beginning that there were not men on the earth holding the Holy Priesthood. Even in the days of apostasy . . . our Father in heaven held control and had duly authorized servants on the earth to direct his work and to check, to some extent at least, the ravages and corruption of the evil powers. These servants were not permitted to organize the Church nor to officiate in the ordinances of the gospel, but they did check the advances of evil as far as the Lord deemed it necessary" (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 2:45).

Isaiah explains his experience in his own first-hand account, found in chapter 6:

In the year that king Uzziah died
I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne,
high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

Above it stood the seraphim¹: each one had six wings;
With twain he covered his face,
and with twain he covered his feet,
and with twain he did fly.

And one cried unto another, and said,
Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts:
the whole earth is full of his glory.

And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried,
and the house was filled with smoke.

Then said I, Woe is me!
for I am undone;
because I am a man of unclean lips,
and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips:
for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.

Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand,
which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar.

And he laid it upon my mouth,
and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips;
and thine iniquity is taken away,
and thy sin purged.

Also, I heard the voice of the Lord, saying,
Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?
Then said I, Here am I; send me.

And he said, Go, and tell this people,
Hear ye indeed, but [they]² understand not;
and see ye indeed, but [they perceived]³ not.

¹ 2 Ne. 16:2 eliminates the s. Seraphim is plural.

² see 2 Ne. 16:9

³ see 2 Ne. 16:9

Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

Then said I, Lord, how long?
and he [said]⁴
Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant,
and the houses without man,
and the land be utterly desolate.

And the Lord have removed men far away,
[for]⁵ there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

But yet [there]⁶ shall be a tenth, and [they]⁷ shall return,
and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak,
whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves:
so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.

The Prophet Joseph Smith provided a perspective on experiences such as Isaiah's when he said:

“Could we read and comprehend all that has been written from the days of Adam, on the relation of man to God and angels in a future state, we should know very little about it. Reading the experience of others, or the revelation given to them, can never give us a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God. Knowledge of these things can only be obtained by experience through the ordinances of God set forth for that purpose. Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject” (*Teachings*, p. 324).

This is a daunting invitation and charge from the Prophet, who did, indeed, “gaze into heaven” and brought an enlightenment perhaps never before known to man. While Joseph's words may startle us, they also encourage us to do the same, although this promise may seem incomprehensible. Joseph taught:

“Every man lives for himself. Adam was made to open the way of the world, and for dressing the garden. Noah was born to save seed of everything, when the earth was washed of its wickedness by the flood; and the Son of God came into the world to redeem it from the fall. But except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. This eternal truth settles the question of all men's religion. A man may be saved, after the judgment, in the terrestrial kingdom, or in the telestial kingdom, but he can never see the celestial kingdom of God, without being born of water and the Spirit. He may receive a glory like unto the moon, [i.e., of which the light of the moon is typical], or a star, [i.e., of which the light of the stars is typical], but he can never come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly

⁴ see 2 Ne. 16:11

⁵ see 2 Ne. 16:12

⁶ see 2 Ne. 16:13

⁷ see 2 Ne. 16:13

Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the Firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, unless he becomes as a little child, and is taught by the Spirit of God. Wherefore, we again say, search the revelations of God; study the prophecies, and rejoice that God grants unto the world Seers and Prophets. They are they who saw the mysteries of godliness; they saw the flood before it came; they saw angels ascending and descending upon a ladder that reached from earth to heaven; they saw the stone cut out of the mountain, which filled the whole earth; they saw the Son of God come from the regions of bliss and dwell with men on earth; they saw the deliverer come out of Zion, and turn away ungodliness from Jacob; they saw the glory of the Lord when he showed the transfiguration of the earth on the mount; they saw every mountain laid low and every valley exalted when the Lord was taking vengeance upon the wicked; they saw truth spring out of the earth, and righteousness look down from heaven in the last days, before the Lord came the second time to gather his elect; they saw the end of wickedness on earth, and the Sabbath of creation crowned with peace; they saw the end of the glorious thousand years, when Satan was loosed for a little season; they saw the day of judgment when all men received according to their works, and they saw the heaven and the earth flee away to make room for the city of God, when the righteous receive an inheritance in eternity. *And, fellow sojourners upon earth, it is your privilege to purify yourselves and come up to the same glory, and see for yourselves, and know for yourselves. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you*” (August, 1832. DHC 1:282-284. *Teachings*, 12; emphasis added).

Joseph went on to further explain that it was necessary for Isaiah to have a visitation by the Second Comforter in order to achieve such a far-reaching vision:

“Now what is this other Comforter? It is no more nor less than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and this is the sum and substance of the whole matter; that when any man obtains this last Comforter, he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him, or appear unto him from time to time, and even He will manifest the Father unto him, and they will take up their abode with him, and the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him, and the Lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God; and this is the state and place the ancient Saints arrived at when they had such glorious visions - Isaiah, Ezekiel, John upon the Isle of Patmos, St. Paul in the three heavens, and all the Saints who held communion with the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn” (*Teachings*, 150).

In the Throne Room of God

In Isaiah’s vision, the Lord’s throne is “high and lifted up.” He is the King of Kings, the Father of our Spirits, and the Creator of the Universe. He is above all others, and all creatures and creations within the throne room give obeisance and honor to Him.

The Lord's "train fills the temple." Many commentators suggest that the Lord's train represents His robe, or the "hems of his robe" (Parry & Parry, *Understanding Isaiah*, 64, Ludlow, *IPSP*, 128). Victor Ludlow writes:

Many similarities exist between the images of Isaiah's vision and the symbols of the temple service. The Lord's robe or train compares to the temple veil which separates us from God's direct glory. The seraphim are like temple attendants, calling to one another in a threefold petition (v 2). The moving door posts (v 4) suggest a stirring at the veil (*IPSP*, 128-29).

Sister Ann Madsen, BYU professor, and Isaiah scholar, suggests that the term "train" may also be indicative of the royal "train" of courtiers and followers that accompanied the king in ancient days, in which case, those who follow after righteousness, and whom God has saved in the celestial kingdom "fill [His] temple"; it is the Lord's stated mission to save numberless concourses of His children. Sister Madsen teaches further that the "moving of the posts" in Isaiah's vision may be suggestive of the moving of the "stakes" to enlarge the space for those who are saved and enter into the celestial kingdom.

Anciently, the presence of smoke was symbolic of the presence and glory of God (see Ex.19:18; Rev. 15:8). Fire and smoke are frequently used to depict the glory of celestial realms. In the language of Joseph Smith: "God Almighty Himself dwells in eternal fire; flesh and blood cannot go there, for all corruption is devoured by the fire. 'Our God is a consuming fire (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29). When our flesh is quickened by the Spirit, there will be no blood in this tabernacle. Some dwell in higher glory than others ... Immortality dwells in everlasting burnings.'" (*Teachings*, p. 367.)

What are *seraphim*? The Bible Dictionary states: "Probably fiery beings. Angelic beings mentioned in the account of Isaiah's vision (Isa. 6:2). They are represented as winged and partly human in form. They are attendants in Jehovah's court, the ministers of the heavenly sanctuary, joining in adoration before the throne."

Bruce R. McConkie explained that

"Seraphs are angels who reside in the presence of God, giving continual glory, honor, and adoration to him. 'Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts' (Ps. 148:2). It is clear that seraphs include the unembodied spirits of pre-existence, for our Lord 'looked upon the wide expanse of eternity, and all the seraphic hosts of heaven, before the world was made' (D&C 38:1). Whether the name seraphs also applies to perfected and resurrected angels is not clear. While petitioning on behalf of the saints, the Prophet prayed that 'we may mingle our voices with those bright, shining seraphs around thy throne, with acclamations of praise, singing Hosanna to God and the Lamb!' (D&C 109:79).

"In Hebrew the plural of seraph is seraphim or, as incorrectly recorded in the King James Version of the Bible, seraphims. Isaiah saw seraphim in vision and heard them cry one to another 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory' (JST Isa. 6:1-8) The fact that these holy beings were shown to him as having wings was simply to symbolize their 'power, to move, to act, etc.' as was the case also in visions others had received" (D&C 77:4) (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, pp. 702-3.)

Victor Ludlow believes that “the wings could be symbols of the ability of God’s spirit children to move freely throughout his kingdom (see D&C 77:4), though they are probably literal wings upon real animal-like entities that reside in God’s presence. Many animals and plants live in God’s kingdom, and some creatures communicate with God and man” (ISPS, 129). He bases this point upon Joseph Smith’s teachings:

John saw curious looking beasts in heaven; he saw every creature that was in heaven - all the beasts fowls and fish in heaven - actually there, giving glory to God. How do you prove it? (See Rev. 5:13) “And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

I suppose John saw beings there of a thousand forms, that had been saved from ten thousand times ten thousand earths like this, - strange beasts of which we have no conception: all might be seen in heaven. The grand secret was to show John what there was in heaven. John learned that God glorified Himself by saving all that His hands had made, whether beasts, fowls, fishes or men; and He will glorify Himself with them.

Says one, “I cannot believe in the salvation of beasts.” Any man who would tell you that this could not be, would tell you that the revelations are not true. John heard the words of the beasts giving glory to God, and understood them. God who made the beasts could understand every language spoken by them. The four beasts were four of the most noble animals that had filled the measure of their creation, and had been saved from other worlds, because they were perfect: they were like angels in their sphere. We are not told where they came from, and I do not know; but they were seen and heard by John praising and glorifying God (*Teachings*, 291).

Finally, the Targum suggests that the seraphim covered their faces with their wings because they were not worthy to look upon God, and that they covered their feet in embarrassment for the imperfection of their conduct, walk and conversations. Like the exalted elders who throw their crowns at Jesus’ feet in John’s Revelation, those who dwell in the presence of God are constantly aware that it is through His mercy and grace that they have achieved salvation (see Rev. 4). The beasts (also with six wings) of John’s vision, together with the seraphim of Isaiah’s, sing together: “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God almighty!”

“Woe Is Me! For I Am Undone!”

If, as the Targum suggests, the seraphim were embarrassed by their shortcomings, likewise, Isaiah’s first response to seeing God was to exclaim: “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts” (Isa. 6:5).

Lehi taught:

Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may

bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise. Wherefore, he is the first fruits unto God, inasmuch as he shall make intercession for all the children of men; and they that believe in him shall be saved (2 Ne. 2:6-9).

No wonder Elder Neal A. Maxwell reminded us:

He rejoices in our genuine goodness and achievement, but any assessment of where we stand in relation to Him tells us that we do not stand at all! We kneel! (October 1981 Conf.)

Isaiah knew of his weaknesses and imperfections, and felt unworthy to stand before the Lord. In a sacred and symbolic ritual, one of the seraphim placed a coal from the altar upon Isaiah's mouth to clean and purge him (Isa. 6:6). Victor Ludlow explains:

The live coal that touches Isaiah's lips symbolizes the purging of his sins, just as our ordinances of baptism and the sacrament physically represent acts of spiritual power. The coal could have come from the altar of burnt offerings outside the temple, but it could also have been the stone on the altar of incense inside the temple. The latter is more likely, since the Hebrew word for "live coal" is *ritzpah*, which is often translated as "stone," particularly as "glowing (incandescent) stone." In the ancient temple service, the incense was placed on a stone to be burned. Regardless of whether the coal (or stone) came from an altar outside or inside the temple, or whether the temple was in Jerusalem or in God's presence, the important fact is that the coal represents divine fire and the cleansing power of the Atonement. By touching Isaiah's lips, the cleansing object not only purges him from being "a man of unclean lips," but it also consecrates him to speak in righteousness as a mouthpiece of the Lord (see Jer. 1:9) (*IPSP*, 131).

Now worthy to be with God, Isaiah hears God's own voice addressing an unmentioned audience, probably a celestial council: 'I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me' (Isa. 6:8). Isaiah volunteers for the calling even before it is directly offered to him; his acceptance echoes Jehovah's own response to a similar invitation in the heavenly councils of the premortal existence (see Abr. 3:27). Isaiah's answer to God's call is as simple as the call itself ... Although some great prophets, like Enoch, Moses, and Jeremiah, were initially reluctant to accept their prophetic calling, Isaiah responds without hesitation. His willing attitude testifies to his greatness" (*IPSP*, 131).

"Go, and Tell This People"

The instructions Isaiah received from the Lord seem confusing at first:

And he said: Go and tell this people – Hear ye indeed, but they understood not: and see ye indeed, but they perceived not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes – lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and be converted, and be healed (2 Ne. 16:9-10).

The instructions are difficult enough if you have used the cleaner translation of Isaiah's vision, as recorded in 2 Nephi (as I did). Using the Savior's own words as they relate to this verse can shed further light:

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Matt. 13:13-15).

Victor Ludlow explains:

The complex charge given to Isaiah in verse 10 is more difficult to understand. In casual reading, it appears that Isaiah is told to deliberately confuse the people because the Lord does not want them to repent and be healed. Actually, Isaiah's words were to be incomprehensible not because the Lord desired the people to be ignorant, but because they, themselves, did not want to know the truth or to be converted and healed.

Isaiah, when facing a difficult teaching situation, did not use the parable as a tool; instead, he veiled his message in clouds of symbolism, poetry, and complex terminology. In other words, instead of speaking at a simple level and letting his listeners build upon the foundation, Isaiah spoke at a high intellectual and spiritual level, thus challenging or even forcing his listeners to attain that level before they could begin to understand his words. Isaiah was not only difficult, he was deliberately difficult. We must study his words, wrestle with them, and ponder them at great length before his powerful, sublime teachings begin to emerge and inspire us. Because of this, it is easy to become discouraged and give up before we begin to understand his message. However, through serious and prayerful study, when we finally grasp the language and ideas of a particular chapter until they not only make sense, but enlighten and inspire as well, we realize that we have arrived at a profound level of understanding (*IPSP*, 133-35).

"How Long?"

Isaiah's words continue to inspire or confuse today. His calling was not to last for his lifetime only.

When Isaiah asked the Lord how long he was to fulfill his assignment, the Lord answered:

Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land" (Isa. 6:12).

Isaiah was the last major prophet to teach all the Israelite tribes. He prophesied of, and witnessed, the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria, and warned Jerusalem that while they would be overrun, but not conquered by the Assyrians, they would yet be conquered by the [then] seemingly

harmless country of Babylon. Further, he prophesied that Babylon, in turn, would be conquered by the Medes, and that the Medo-Persian king, Cyrus, would release the “Jews” and allow them to return to the Holy Land and rebuild their Temple (this prophecy is made more than 160 years before Cyrus’ birth, yet he is called by name). In minute detail and clarity, he prophesied that although they would be allowed this opportunity, few would return (Isa. 7:4-7; 8:6-8; 13:17; 21:2,9; 44:28-45:5).

Most of Israel remained dispersed throughout the known world, but Isaiah’s words went with them to the four corners of the earth to instruct, inspire, and comfort them throughout the following generations. We see this clearly when both Nephi and his brother Jacob used Isaiah’s writings to comfort their families and assure them that they were not “cast off forever,” and remind them that covenant blessings were still in effect and would be fulfilled (1 Ne. 22; 2 Ne. 6:1-10:23; especially 2 Ne. 7:1).

The ending verses of chapter 6 particularly pertain to these concerns of Nephi, Jacob, and others in the Lord’s “vineyard,” who were broken-off branches of the House of Israel. Although Isaiah prophesied that “a tenth” should return [to Jerusalem], he also promised that the seeds of the covenant family would remain within the roots, the stumps and the branches that had been scattered, and that in the end, all would be gathered together to flourish again under the Lord’s direct stewardship. This is one of the great themes of Isaiah’s prophecies: that covenant Israel would be scattered, yes, but also that the Lord would remember His covenant with them, and gather them together again.