

The Great Jerusalem Temple Prophecy: Latter-day Context and Likening unto Us

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The great Jerusalem temple prophecy, found in Isaiah 2:1–3, is one of the most remarkable passages in the Hebrew Bible, or indeed, in all of ancient scripture. It is reliably translated into English in the King James Version of the Bible as follows:

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

And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.¹

This triumphant passage heralding the Jerusalem temple of the last days serves as the lead prophecy for the entire collection of Isaiah's writings and

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as the actual beginning of his ancient book. In this paper, I shall first explain why this is so and then clarify the latter-day context of the passage, which is set in Judah and in Jerusalem—subjects which are largely unrecognized and rarely discussed in Latter-day Saint circles. Why this passage actually refers, in its latter-day context, to the great temple yet to be built in Jerusalem will be made clear. Finally, I will comment on how it is both legitimate and instructive for Latter-day Saints to liken the Isaiah 2 passage to themselves and their own temples, the Jerusalem context of the prophecy notwithstanding.

Isaiah's Lead Prophecy

The great Jerusalem temple prophecy of Isaiah 2 stands as the lead passage for the entire book of Isaiah; it is first in the chronological order of Isaiah's oracles.² It must be remembered that the content of Isaiah chapter 1 was not the earliest of Isaiah's writings. Chapter 1 is actually a series of admonitions which would chronologically come right after the narrative of Isaiah 36–39.³ That narrative reports the destruction of Judah by the Assyrian forces of Sennacherib in 701 BC and describes the miraculous salvation of Jerusalem at that time. The content of Isaiah 1 reflects the situation in 700 BC, in the aftermath of Judah's destruction, when all that was left of the Israelite nation was the single city of Jerusalem.⁴ If placed in chronological order, the material of Isaiah 1 would probably appear between Isaiah 39 and Isaiah 40.

Isaiah 1 acts much like section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants. A chronological placement of D&C 1 would actually put it between D&C 66 and D&C 67, as suggested in the heading to section 67. Section 1 was placed at the beginning of the Doctrine and Covenants not because it was the first section given or recorded but because it was specifically delivered as “the Lord's preface” for the whole collection of Joseph Smith's published revelations. Likewise, a strict chronological ordering of the chapters in Isaiah would place Isaiah 1 directly after the report of the Assyrian attack in chapters 36–39 and probably before or alongside chapter 40, where Isaiah addresses the aftermath of the destruction of all the kingdom of Judah but Jerusalem.⁵ This was the conclusion of a disaster that had started with the total destruction of the kingdom of Israel two decades earlier.

Thus, the true commencement of Isaiah's writings was not any part of Isaiah 1 but the lead passage of Isaiah 2—the great Jerusalem temple prophecy. At some point in early Jewish history, perhaps around 620 BC, during

the reign of King Josiah, the admonitions that now constitute Isaiah 1 were placed in their current position as “the Lord’s preface” to the entire book of Isaiah. That preface notwithstanding, the nature of Isaiah 2:1–3 as the beginning oracle of all that Isaiah wrote was, and is, still obvious. It is interesting, then, that Nephi, in his lengthy quotation of Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi, began not with what we now call Isaiah 1, but with Isaiah 2 (see 2 Nephi 12).

As the lead passage of Isaiah’s writings, the Jerusalem temple prophecy also serves as the beginning of what may profitably be called “Isaiah Part One,” Isaiah 2–35. This will require a bit of background to appreciate in a Latter-day Saint setting. Biblical scholars have long recognized that the thematic trends in Isaiah 1–39 are quite different from the themes which appear in Isaiah 40–66. Isaiah 1–39 is referred to as “First Isaiah” by much of the world of biblical scholarship, and Isaiah 40–66 is generally known as “Second Isaiah,”⁶ although some subdivide it into “Second Isaiah” and “Third Isaiah.” The general consensus of non-LDS biblical scholarship is that First Isaiah was penned by Isaiah himself, in the years up to 700 BC, but that Second Isaiah (including Third Isaiah in some models) was written by one or more authors who lived as much as two centuries later (about 520 to 500 BC) following the Jewish return to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity. The widely different themes of Isaiah 1–39 and Isaiah 40–66 convince the consensus that the two general sections of Isaiah could not have been written by one person and that Second Isaiah does not fit contextually with the setting in Judah prior to 700 BC.

It is also generally recognized that Isaiah 36–39 was not authored by Isaiah himself, but by biblical writers in the late seventh century BC, who compiled and crafted the historical record of Israel and Judah found in Joshua through 2 Kings. The material in Isaiah 36–39 is more or less directly quoted from 2 Kings 18:13–20:19, as may be easily seen by comparing the two passages. Chapters 18–20 of 2 Kings were composed around 620 BC, during the reign of Josiah, and its narrative can only have been added to the compilation of Isaiah’s writings at that date or afterward.⁷

Most Latter-day Saint commentators on the Bible reject the various two-Isaiah models, due largely to the fact that extensive passages of both the earlier and later chapters of Isaiah appear or are alluded to in the writings of Nephi and the teachings of Jacob and Abinadi (see 1 Nephi 20–21; 2 Nephi 7–8; 12–24; Mosiah 14). That passages from all parts of Isaiah—early, middle, and

late chapters—appear in the Book of Mormon would seem to indicate that the whole book of Isaiah existed in Nephi’s day (ca. 600 BC) in more or less the same state as the present book of Isaiah. This would render the various two-Isaiah theories impossible models for understanding the thematic differences between the earlier and later parts of the book.⁸

The fact remains that Isaiah 2–35 is thematically very different from Isaiah 40–66, but the reason why is not so difficult to ascertain. The earlier chapters, with their thematic emphasis on the threats and destruction ancient Israel and Judah faced if they did not repent, were addressed to pre-701 BC audiences that had not yet been attacked, destroyed, or deported by the Assyrians. The later chapters, however, with their emphasis on comforting wounded Israel and looking forward to a regeneration and gathering of Israel in a distant future period, were addressed to a post-701 BC audience, essentially the small community of Israel in Jerusalem, which was the only remnant of all Israel that had not been destroyed or deported in the Assyrian attacks. The early chapters of Isaiah are thematically so different from the later chapters because their audiences were so different—the predestruction, predispersion Israel and Judah in the decades prior to 701 BC as contrasted with remnant of Judah in Jerusalem after everything and everyone else had been annihilated or carried away.⁹

With this in mind, it would not be inaccurate—in fact, it would probably be quite helpful—for Latter-day Saint teachers and students to refer to Isaiah 2–35 as “Isaiah Part 1,” and to Isaiah 40–66 as “Isaiah Part 2.” This distinction would not only reflect the contextual and thematic reality of the two different parts of the book of Isaiah, but would also assure Latter-day Saint students that recognizing the division does not obligate us to accept the two-Isaiah theory of authorship. It might even serve as a beginning point for conversation between Latter-day Saint students of Isaiah and those of other religious or scholarly backgrounds who subscribe to the notion of two or more different “Isaias.” The actual structure of the book of Isaiah, as we now have it, may thus be displayed in these terms, ordered chronologically:

- A. Isaiah 2–35 (“Isaiah Part 1”)—composed by Isaiah prior to 701 BC
- B. Isaiah 36–39 (historical bridge)—excerpted from 2 Kings 18–20

C. Isaiah 1—a post-701 BC oracle, later placed as a preface for all of Isaiah’s writings

D. Isaiah 40–66 (“Isaiah Part Two”)—composed by Isaiah after 700 BC

As seen in this diagram, the chapter we now refer to as Isaiah 2 was the first of all Isaiah’s writings. The great Jerusalem temple prophecy of Isaiah 2:1–3 seems deliberately placed in its position at the very beginning of Isaiah’s works as the grand opening oracle of the his entire composition. So what is it that makes this temple prophecy great?

The Context of Isaiah 2

In exploring the Bible, it is valuable to know the actual historical context behind the writings. The actual name of the man we call (in English) Isaiah was ישעיהו—pronounced *Yeshayahu*. He is called (in English) the son of Amoz, which is the Hebrew name אמוץ—pronounced *Amotz*. *Yeshayahu ben Amotz* lived in the kingdom of Judah from approximately 760 to 685 BC and presumably spent all or most of his life residing at Jerusalem. His calling as a prophet, at a young age, came in a vision he dated to “the year that King Uzziah died” (Isaiah 6:1), which can be calculated to 742 BC. His relationship with the kings of Judah was mixed: he was mostly ignored by Ahaz but was a valued counselor of Ahaz’s son, Hezekiah, who became the sole monarch of Judah in 715 BC. In his lifetime, Isaiah witnessed the destruction of Judah’s northern neighbor, the kingdom of Israel, and the deportation of many thousands of its survivors to captivity in the northern and eastern regions of the Assyrian empire. In 701 BC, Isaiah also witnessed the near-complete destruction of the kingdom of Judah and the deportation of over two hundred thousand more people into Assyrian captivity. Isaiah’s final years, after 700 BC, were spent in the only surviving city of Judah—Jerusalem was essentially a lone city-state for two generations. Upon Hezekiah’s death in 687 BC, Isaiah became *persona non grata* in the city and according to Jewish tradition was torturously executed by Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh.¹⁰

Isaiah’s great Jerusalem temple prophecy appears to have been written at the outset of his prophetic ministry; when he was a young man, reporting a vision in which he “saw” the word of God “concerning *Judah and Jerusalem*”

(Isaiah 2:1; emphasis added). In terms of interpretation, it is vital here to emphasize that the context of this revelation was “Judah and Jerusalem,” *not* Ephraim and Salt Lake City, *not* Joseph and Jackson County, and *not* America and the Mormons. Though this will seem shocking to Latter-day Saints, Isaiah, in context, was *not* speaking of the Mormons and their temples throughout the world. (How these figure into Isaiah’s prophecy will be discussed below.) The context of this oracle is very clearly stated at the outset—Isaiah’s revelation was about Judah and Jerusalem, and the time context of the prophecy is set in the last days. I mention this rather obvious fact only because commentaries occasionally attempt to confine Isaiah’s sayings to his own era. And it is true that many of Isaiah’s references have a context in his own time and locale. But the Jerusalem temple prophecy was separated from Isaiah’s own era with deliberate contextual phrasing: “it shall come to pass in the last days” (Isaiah 2:2).

The specific location context of the prophecy, within Jerusalem, is “the mountain of the LORD’s house” (Isaiah 2:2). The apostrophe possessive in the King James Version phrasing slightly obscures the exact wording of Isaiah’s original Hebrew, which reads *הַר בֵּית־יְהוָה*—*har beyt-Yahuweh*.¹¹ Literally, this means “mountain of the house of Jehovah.” But holding to the ancient Jewish tradition that limits pronunciation of the Divine Name (compare D&C 107:4), and as adapted by the King James translators, we express the phrase in English as “mountain of the house of the LORD.”¹² This mountain is a very specific place, not merely a metaphoric reference to any holy location in general. It is the hill-top also known in the Hebrew Bible as Mount Moriah (2 Chronicles 3:1), the well-known Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The Temple of Solomon, which stood on Mount Moriah, was commonly called “the house of the LORD” (*בֵּית־יְהוָה*—*beyt Yahuweh*) from the time of its construction around 950 BC (1 Kings 6:1) until the day of its destruction in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:9). Therefore, the phrase “mountain of the house of the LORD,” as used by Isaiah, is a clear and specific reference to one place, and one place only: the Temple Mount in Jerusalem—the site of Solomon’s Temple.

But it was not Solomon’s Temple of which Isaiah was speaking in his great temple prophecy. The edifice built by Solomon would be destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC, just a century after Isaiah’s death. By contrast, the “last days” mentioned in the prophecy would be more than twenty-seven centuries in Isaiah’s future. The only possible contextual meaning of Isaiah’s oracle is that the “house of the LORD” of which he spoke is a temple

of the people of Judah to be built in Jerusalem, upon Mount Moriah, in the last days.

It is instructive to consider the title by which Jews have referred to Mount Moriah for more than two millennia. Many years before the birth of Christ, Jewish custom, as mentioned, came to require refraining from pronouncing the Hebrew divine name *Yahuweh*. By the time of Jesus, Mount Moriah was no longer publicly referred to as “the mountain of the house of *Yahuweh*” but simply as “the mountain of the house”—*har habayit* (הַר הַבַּיִת) in Hebrew—leaving the name of “the LORD” unspoken. This is the title by which it is still known among all Jews in the State of Israel and throughout the world: *har habayit*, “the mountain of the house.” It is the place where Jews who had returned to Jerusalem built the temple of Zerubbabel in 520 BC and where the temple of Herod was subsequently constructed in 20 BC to replace Zerubbabel’s five-hundred-year-old edifice. Both the temple of Zerubbabel and the temple of Herod are referred to in Jewish conversation as the Second Temple. It was the temple of Herod which Jesus knew and revered and which was destroyed by the Romans when they obliterated Jerusalem in AD 70, ending the Second Temple Period. Jewish tradition recognizes Isaiah’s great temple prophecy as predicting a latter-day Jewish temple on *har habayit*, a future temple which is referred to in Jewish conversation as the Third Temple.

That the “Third Temple” would be a temple of the people of Israel is clear from the wording of Isaiah 2:3: “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob.” Jacob, of course, was also known as Israel (see Genesis 32:28); therefore, the house of the God of Jacob is the house of the God of Israel—the house of the Lord. But it is also of note that the latter-day Jerusalem temple is predicted to be a place to which “all nations shall flow” (v. 3). The Hebrew term translated as “nations” in Isaiah 2:3 is *hagoyim* (הַגּוֹיִם), which literally means “the Gentiles.” This passage could legitimately be rendered “to it shall flow all the Gentiles,” meaning that the latter-day Jerusalem temple would attract all people, its administration by the people of Judah notwithstanding. The divine judgment and peace which would prevail at the time of that temple, as described in Isaiah 2:4, would be conducive to a worldwide appreciation of the latter-day Jewish temple in Jerusalem.

At this juncture, it is important to emphasize that this study does not attempt to predict how or when the latter-day Jerusalem temple referred to in Isaiah 2 will be built upon “the mountain of the house.” Nor does this study

take any position on religious, cultural, or political issues concerning present-day Jerusalem. It is common knowledge that the Jewish Temple Mount in Jerusalem is presently occupied by an Islamic shrine built in AD 687 known as the Dome of the Rock. The entire Temple Mount is referred to in Islamic conversation as *Haram al-Sharif* (the Noble Sanctuary), and conversely as *al-Aqsa*, in reference to the *al-Aqsa* mosque, built in AD 710 just south of the Dome of the Rock. It is generally agreed that the Dome of the Rock stands on the very site of the ancient temples on Mount Moriah. Only time will tell just how the plot on which the Muslim shrine is now located could come to be the site of a temple built by the people of Judah. All that this study aims to do is to clarify that this is the implication of the temple prophecy in Isaiah 2, which cannot be changed or ignored.

Out of Zion Shall Go Forth the Law

The final component of Isaiah 2:3 is a well-known couplet: “for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” This type of couplet is called a synonymous parallel, and employs two synonymous elements within a single parallel couplet: (1) Zion, a synonym and alternative name for Jerusalem, and (2) law, an alternative expression for the word of the Lord. Let us examine these two terms more closely.

The name Zion (Hebrew צִיּוֹן, pronounced *tziyon*) is another name for Jerusalem. It first appears in the Hebrew Bible in 2 Samuel 5:7, where it is a clear reference to the city of Jerusalem at the time of David’s conquest. And every other time (I emphasize *every other time*) that Zion appears in the Bible, it is a direct and contextual reference to Jerusalem. Latter-day Saints have a variety of ways in which they understand the term Zion (and these are perfectly legitimate), so it generally comes as a surprise to them to learn that in the Bible, Zion always means Jerusalem, in every primary context where the name is found, including all references to Zion in the writings of Isaiah.

The word translated into English as “law” in Isaiah 2:3 is the Hebrew term *torah* (תּוֹרָה). The term *torah* refers to the law of Moses in most passages where it appears in the Hebrew Bible text. The full expression is *Torat Moshe*—literally the “Torah of Moses”—but even though the term appears frequently without the accompanying name of Moses, it is still generally understood as referring to the Mosaic law. Sometimes the term *torah* appears in the Bible describing not the whole law of Moses, but a component part

of the law (such as a sacrifice or other ordinance), and sometimes the word *torah* is personalized to reflect an individual's commitment to the law from Sinai.¹³ Contextually, Isaiah 2:3 is predicting that, in the last days, "out of Zion shall go forth the law of Moses," although it is possible that *torah* could have additional meaning in a latter-day context to come.

A contextual understanding of "out of Zion shall go forth the law" can be a bewildering issue for Latter-day Saints, since they have generally been led to think that this phrase is describing something entirely different than Jerusalem and the law of Moses (a topic I will address shortly). Yet, it is contextually the case that to say "out of Zion shall go forth the law" is simply another way of saying "out of Jerusalem shall go forth the word of the Lord." The two phrases of Isaiah's final couplet in this synonymous parallel are expressing the same thing, identifying the same city, and indicating the same divine law. To say "out of Zion shall go forth the law" is also to say "the word of the LORD (will go out) from Jerusalem." Isaiah's great temple prophecy is indicating that when a latter-day temple is built in Jerusalem, it will be the location from which God's word and sacred law will go forth to the people of Israel.

Latter-day Saint Commentaries on Isaiah 2

Having established the contextual meaning and understanding of Isaiah 2:1–3, it is interesting to explore what Latter-day Saint commentaries on the passage have to say. Of all the Latter-day Saint commentaries on Isaiah or the Old Testament currently in print, none identifies this passage as having its primary context in Jerusalem or as primarily referring to a latter-day temple in Jerusalem.¹⁴ A brief survey of the most respected of these commentaries is instructive. The only Church-correlated commentary on Isaiah is the *Old Testament Student Manual: 1 Kings–Malachi, Religion* 302. It is widely and heavily used by both professional and lay teachers of Old Testament courses, college religion courses, and Church classes. The manual's segment explanation (13–10) of Isaiah 2:1–5 does not mention Jerusalem at all. "The establishment of the Church headquarters in Salt Lake City" is described as "only a beginning of the fulfillment of that inspired declaration," although the entry notes that "other world centers will be included." The Salt Lake Temple is referred to, but no mention is made about a temple in Jerusalem.¹⁵ The specific explanation (13–11) for Isaiah 2:3 quotes President Joseph Fielding Smith, who identified "Jerusalem of old" as a holy city for the Jews, whereas

“on this continent [North America], the city of Zion, New Jerusalem, shall be built, and from it the law of God shall also go forth.”¹⁶ A 1945 statement by Elder Harold B. Lee is also quoted to suggest that the “law” of Isaiah 2:3, which should go forth from Zion would be the principles of the United States Constitution, which would be used by other modern governmental systems.¹⁷ No mention of the Judah/Jerusalem context, the Jerusalem temple, *Zion* as a name for Jerusalem, the “law” as the law of Moses, or any other attempt at contextual explanation for the Isaiah temple prophecy appears anywhere in this Old Testament manual.

The very highly respected book *Understanding Isaiah* does make reference to Jerusalem, but only after identifying the temple of Isaiah’s prophecy in other terms: “Isaiah 2:2 is a prophecy with multiple applications; it refers to the Salt Lake Temple, nestled in the hills and mountains; to the future temple of Jerusalem, established in the mountains of Judea; and to other temples.”¹⁸ This brief sentence is all that appears on the subject. There is no reference to the Judah/Jerusalem context, nor is context referred to—only Latter-day Saint applications of the passage are offered. Specifics on the location of the Jerusalem temple are not discussed. Regarding “out of Zion shall go forth the law,” there is no explanation of the phrase as part of a synonymous parallel couplet, and Independence, Missouri, is paired with “old Jerusalem” in an explanation that “both centers will be called Zion and Jerusalem.” Although Donald W. Parry, the lead author, is an excellent and accomplished Hebrew scholar, no mention is made of the fact that “law” is translated from *torah*. Rather, the “law” is identified as modern governmental systems inspired by the United States Constitution, based on the same 1945 statement by Elder Harold B. Lee that appears in the Old Testament student manual.¹⁹

Another highly respected book, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* by Victor L. Ludlow, also makes only passing reference to Jerusalem. Ludlow’s first focus in discussing Isaiah 2:3 is the Salt Lake Temple, followed by the Kirtland Temple, and then a “last great temple to be built in Jackson County, Missouri.” He follows up with the idea that “temples to be built in the last days in both Old and New Jerusalem will serve as the Lord’s ‘holy mountains.’” Ludlow describes how “numerous prophets and apostles of this dispensation have quoted verses 2–4 of Isaiah and related how the prophecy has been fulfilled by the Latter-day Saints going to the Rocky Mountains, building temples, sending out missionaries, gathering converts, conducting general conference sessions, and presiding

over the Lord's kingdom." He then allows that "Jewish readers of these verses will, of course, find ready application of the ideas to themselves."²⁰ There is, however, no reference to the Judah/Jerusalem context, the location of the Jerusalem temple, or its status as the chief subject of the prophecy. Ludlow's approach to the synonymous parallel couplet in verse 3 is instructive but equivocal. He recognizes that "a Latter-day Saint might consider both 'Zion' and 'Jerusalem' to mean 'America,' while a Jew would believe both terms to mean 'Israel,'" but he suggests that readers "consider the phrases to be a composite and consider that 'Zion' and 'Jerusalem' could have a broad range of possible applications."²¹ Ludlow's main approach seems to be application. There is no specific explanation of the term *Zion* as a synonym for Jerusalem throughout the Bible, nor of the "law" as a translation of *torah*.

The utilitarian commentary by W. Cleon Skousen, *Isaiah Speaks to Modern Times*, makes only the most passing of references to Jerusalem in its commentary on Isaiah 2. Skousen does not discuss the Judah/Jerusalem context of verse 1. He maintains that Zion is America, specifically the Latter-day Saint center in America, and does not discuss the notion that Zion is a synonym for Jerusalem. With regard to the latter-day temple of verse 2, Skousen's first focus is on the Latter-day Saints: "This great prophecy has already been literally fulfilled in Zion and will be duplicated in its fulfillment when the Lord's temple is finally built in Jerusalem." He quotes from verse 3 with a definitive parenthetical identifier when he explains, "Isaiah makes an interesting comment that 'out of Zion' (America) would 'go forth the law,' and the 'word of the Lord from Jerusalem.'"²² Skousen clearly does not see Zion as a synonym for Jerusalem, nor does he see the passage in which the term occurs as a synonymous parallel couplet, and there is no hint of the fact that "law" is translated from *torah*. But, like those who wrote after him, Skousen sees that "law" as a reference to the effect of the United States Constitution, and he quotes from the Idaho Falls Temple dedicatory prayer by President George Albert Smith to that effect.²³

Two other popular Isaiah commentaries, the simple but instructive book "*Great Are the Words of Isaiah*" by Monte Nyman²⁴ and the idiosyncratic translation and narrative by Avraham Gileadi,²⁵ make no mention whatsoever of the Jerusalem Temple in their treatments of Isaiah 2, focusing strictly on Latter-day Saint temples and issues. And none of the shorter, more holistic, or populist books on Isaiah themes, such as *Making Sense of Isaiah* by Terry B. Ball and Nathan Winn²⁶ or *Isaiah for Airheads* by John Bytheway,²⁷ contains any

reference to the Jerusalem Temple, the Judah/Jerusalem context, or the biblical identity of Zion as Jerusalem.

From the sources above, and numerous others which are not specifically Isaiah commentaries,²⁸ it seems clear that standard Latter-day Saint interpretations of Isaiah 2:1–3 do not focus on Judah, Jerusalem, the Jerusalem Temple, the *torah* (law of Moses) that should come forth from Zion, or the fact that Zion is Jerusalem. Instead, Latter-day Saint understandings of the passage feature these themes: (1) the Salt Lake Temple, and other Latter-day Saint temples, as the “house of the Lord” spoken of, (2) Church headquarters in Salt Lake City as “established in the tops of the mountains,” (3) general conference as the entity to which all nations flow, (4) Church headquarters, either in Salt Lake City or eventually in Independence, Missouri, as Zion and therefore the site from which the law should go forth, (5) the law as the gospel teachings of the restored Church, (6) the law alternatively as modern government inspired by the United States Constitution, and finally (7) Jerusalem as the site from which the word of the Lord would come in the millennial day.

The question that may be legitimately posed at this point is whether this is a proper and credible course of interpretation. The issue of actual context aside, may we as Latter-day Saints approach Isaiah 2 in this manner and consider it a worthy and truly instructive understanding of the passage? The answer to this, in my opinion, comes in two parts.

“Ye May Liken Them unto You”

The first part of the answer is, of course, that we ought to be teaching the actual context of Isaiah 2, as outlined above in this presentation. In addition to all of our usual Latter-day Saint interpretations, we have a duty to faithfully represent the original meaning and context of all ancient scripture. The Judah/Jerusalem context and meaning of Isaiah 2, and of the rest of the book of Isaiah, should be among the first components of any lesson or commentary we deliver on the writings of the great prophet. Providing an overview of actual context *before* offering traditional Latter-day Saint interpretations should be considered a requirement of good teaching. In the spirit of Jesus’ instruction given at Jerusalem’s very Temple Mount—“These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Matthew 23:23)—context should be offered first. And, in fact, by explaining context first, any Latter-day Saint teacher will actually strengthen the impact of additional interpretations and applications.²⁹

The second part of the answer, however, is very clearly given in the Book of Mormon: we are to liken all scriptures unto ourselves, especially Isaiah! Nephi emphasized how much we can benefit from the gift of having holy scriptures. Explaining how he taught his own brothers, and speaking of scripture in general but of Isaiah in particular, Nephi said the following: “I did read many things unto them which were written in the books of Moses; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah; for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23). Nephi also told his brothers: “Hear ye the words of the prophet . . . and liken them unto yourselves” (1 Nephi 19:24).

When we liken scriptures unto ourselves, such as the Isaiah 2 prophecy explored in this presentation, we do not necessarily dwell at great length on the original context of the passages we examine. The context of those passages is not affected by our creative attempts to apply the scriptures to our own situations in modern life. That we have a clear obligation to understand and teach the actual context of scripture should be obvious. But the instructions of Nephi also make it clear that we are allowed, and even specifically instructed, to take scripture passages out of their original context and interpret them in new and even unique ways that help us understand our own position and potential in the plans of God.

When preparing to copy lengthy selections from the writings of Isaiah into his own record on metal plates, Nephi emphasized how important it would be for latter-day readers to apply the Isaiah passages to themselves. In the very last verse that appears before the Isaiah 2:1–3 prophecy in 2 Nephi, Nephi once again exhorted us with these explicit instructions: “And now I write some of the words of Isaiah, that whoso of my people shall see these words may lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men. Now these are the words, and ye may liken them unto you and unto all men” (2 Nephi 11:8).

In light of Nephi’s remarks, it seems most appropriate that we, in our teaching and commentary, would creatively liken Isaiah 2:1–3 to our own temples, cities, conference gatherings, proselyting, gospel teachings, civil jurisprudence, and even political aspirations. And the words of the Lord himself in Doctrine and Covenants 133:12–13 represent perhaps the most appropriate example of how Isaiah’s great temple prophecy may be applied to our own Latter-day Saint context: “Let them, therefore, who are among the Gentiles flee unto Zion. And

let them who be of Judah flee unto Jerusalem, unto the mountains of the Lord's house." In conclusion, it is clearly proper, and even vital, that having considered the contextual reality of the great Jerusalem Temple prophecy, we move beyond that context to apply the passage to ourselves in ways that enlighten and inspire us to carry forth the great works of the Restoration with which we have been charged.³⁰

Notes

1. In this passage the font devices of the King James Version are retained, including the use of italics for words added that do not appear in the Hebrew original (such as "that" in verse 2), and the use of all capital letters for the term "LORD" when it is rendered from the divine name יהוה (*Yahuweh*, or Jehovah). It is noteworthy that there is no difference of any substance in the way this passage appears in the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 12:1–3) as compared to the King James Version. The only differences are that the italicized word "that" appears as "when" in the 2 Nephi version, and that the term "Lord" does not appear in capital letters. There is likewise no difference of any substance in the Joseph Smith Translation version of Isaiah 2:1–3.

2. Chronologically, the book of Isaiah begins with chapter 2. Isaiah 2–4 constitutes the first unified literary block in the collection of Isaiah's writings, an oracle contrasting the ideal of a righteous latter-day Israel with the corrupt ancient Israel of Isaiah's own day. Isaiah 5, by itself, constitutes the second distinct literary block, a declaration of divine judgment upon that wicked Israelite nation. Isaiah 6, the third literary unit of the book, flashes back to the calling received by young Isaiah to be a prophet of warning to his people, and even though it comes after the first two literary blocks (2–4 and 5), chapter 6 appears to be in its original placement. Isaiah 7–12 then relates the historical-prophetic narrative beginning with the Syro-Ephaimite war with Judah.

3. That Isaiah chapter 1 serves as a forward to the collection of Isaiah's writings, whereas the actual beginning of Isaiah's prophecies begin with the second chapter, is acknowledged by Young, who notes that "Chapter 1 is an introduction to the entire prophecy, whereas with chapter 2 the prophetic messages proper begin." Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, With Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, vol. 1, chapters 1–18 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 94ff. See also the view of Blenkinsopp, "As it stands . . . this first superscription introduces the entire book of Isaiah. The poem in the first chapter was prefixed at some point to the passage (Chapter 2) predicting the restoration of Jerusalem." Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 175ff.

4. The first chapter of Isaiah alludes to events in the aftermath of the 701 BC attack on Judah by the Assyrian armies of Sennacherib, as well as the earlier attacks upon and deportations from Judah's northern neighbor, the kingdom of Israel, in the years between 733 and 720 BC: "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers"

(Isaiah 1:7). The reference to “strangers” alludes to the Assyrians having resettled areas of Samaria and the Galilee (in territory of the defunct kingdom of Israel) with Gentiles brought from other regions in the ancient Near East which Assyria had conquered (see 2 Kings 17:24; see also Isaiah 9:1’s “Galilee of the nations,” which refers to residents from gentile nations, cf. Matthew 4:15 “Galilee of the Gentiles”). Much of the depopulated territory of Hezekiah’s kingdom of Judah was occupied, in the aftermath of the 701 BC attack, by Philistines, whom Sennacherib charged to move there from their coastal state. The Prism of Sennacherib reports: “As for his (Hezekiah’s) towns which I plundered, I detached from his country and gave them to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, to Padî, king of Ekron, and to Sil-Baal, king of Gaza”—English translation by Rainey in Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta’s Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 245. That Jerusalem, alone, of all the cities of Judah, avoided conquest, destruction, and deportation in 701 BC is alluded to in Isaiah 1:8–9: “And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.” In other words, had Jerusalem (Zion) not avoided conquest and deportation, the entire people of Israel would have become extinct. Because Jerusalem was spared, however, the kingdom of Judah was able to recover and grow again in the century after 700 BC.

5. The lead verses of Isaiah 1 serve not as a heading for that chapter itself but for the entire book of Isaiah. For a discussion of this point and the suggestion that Isaiah 1 was composed around the same time as Isaiah 40–66, see Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 1:27–28, 28n3.

6. For non-LDS scholarly perspectives of the two-Isaiah model, prepared for a general audience, see the introductions in Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, and John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, *The Anchor Bible 20* (New York: Doubleday, 1968).

7. For a discussion of the dating and authorship of 2 Kings (as well as the rest of the Deuteronomistic history found in the Old Testament), see chapters 5 and 6 in Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Summit Books, 1987).

8. For a scholarly Latter-day Saint perspective on the theory of multiple authorship in Isaiah, see Richard Neitzel Holzappel, Dana M. Pike, and David Rolph Seely, *Jehovah and the World of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 295.

9. For a scholarly Latter-day Saint perspective on ancient Israel and Judah under Assyrian control, as well as the devastation of both kingdoms by Assyrian invasions and deportations, see Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Lehi’s House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo UT: FARMS, 2004), 87–105.

10. It can be inferred from two Hebrew Bible references that Isaiah died during Manasseh’s reign, and his death is mentioned specifically in two early Jewish sources and two early Christian sources. Isaiah 1:1 mentions that the prophet’s visions dated to the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, but it omits Manasseh. The reference that “Manasseh shed innocent blood very much” (2 Kings 21:16) is generally viewed as including his execution of Isaiah. The Babylonian Talmud (TB Yevamot 49b) and the Jerusalem Talmud (TJ Sanhedrin 10) say that the aged Isaiah found refuge from Manasseh inside a tree but that Manasseh had the tree sawed through, thus killing

the prophet. The Christian pseudepigraphic *Ascension of Isaiah* reports the prophet's death in the same general manner. The Epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament makes reference to the fate of ancient prophets, mentioning one who was "sawn asunder" (Hebrews 11:37), which is generally thought to be a reference to Isaiah and the Talmudic tradition of his death.

11. The divine name יהוה is usually rendered in English as *Yahweh*; however, I prefer the longer *Yahuweh*, with the middle *u* preserving a lengthened *oo* sound evident in the theophoric *yahu* element of many Israelite proper names from the Hebrew Bible. See Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Sariah in the Elephantine Papyri," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 197n7.

12. The English phrase "mountain of the house of the LORD" was actually used by the King James translators in their rendition of *har beyt-Yahuweh* from Micah 4:1. The passage in Micah 4:1–2 is a nearly complete parallel of Isaiah's great Jerusalem temple prophecy. "Micah the Morasthite" (Micah 1:1) was a contemporary of Isaiah who lived in the low hills (*Shfelah*) of Judah. He was either a native of Moresheth-gath (Micah 1:14), to the view of most commentaries, or a native of Mareshah (Micah 1:15), according to my own reading of the Hebrew text. The notion that Micah is the original source of the Jerusalem temple prophecy should, in my opinion, be disregarded. Micah seems clearly to be repeating the chief oracle of his more famous prophet contemporary, Isaiah.

13. The Hebrew Bible term *torah* literally means "direction" or "instruction." See חֻרָה in Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 4:1710. In the context of the Hebrew Bible, the term generally refers explicitly or implicitly to the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai, although there are a few exceptions. For example, in the passage "this is the law of the burnt offering" (Leviticus 6:9), *torah* refers to a specific sacrificial ordinance in the law of Moses, and the admonition "My son, forget not my law" (Proverbs 3:1) shows the speaker (traditionally Solomon) personalizing the *torah* as his own, though it is clear from the chapter's context that the law is that of God.

14. In researching this issue I examined every available book and commentary on Isaiah produced by Latter-day Saint authors over the last forty years, both in and out of print, as well as every available Old Testament commentary that might contain a section on Isaiah.

15. *Old Testament Student Manual: 1 Kings–Malachi, Religion 302*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 138.

16. *Old Testament Student Manual*, 138–39.

17. *Old Testament Student Manual*, 139. See also Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 3:69–71.

18. Donald W. Parry, Jay A. Parry, and Tina M. Peterson, *Understanding Isaiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 26.

19. Parry, Parry, and Peterson, *Understanding Isaiah*, 27.

20. Victor L. Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 87.

21. Ludlow, *Isaiah*, 88.

22. W. Cleon Skousen, *Isaiah Speaks to Modern Times* (Salt Lake City: Ensign Publishing, 1984), 153.

23. Skousen, *Isaiah Speaks to Modern Times*, 154.

24. Monte S. Nyman, "Great Are the Words of Isaiah" (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980).

25. Avraham Gileadi, *The Book of Isaiah: A New Translation with Interpretive Keys from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988).

26. Terry B. Ball and Nathan Winn, *Making Sense of Isaiah: Insights and Modern Applications* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009).

27. John Bytheway, *Isaiah for Airheads* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006).

28. See, for example, LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 235.

29. Eric D. Huntsman, "Teaching through Exegesis: Helping Students Ask Questions of the Text," in *Religious Educator* 6, no. 1 (2005): 107–26.

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