



Lewis Ramsey, *Moroni Delivers the Gold Plates to Joseph on Hill Cumorah*. Courtesy of Museum of Church History and Art. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

One of the major citations Moroni shared with Joseph was the entire chapter of Isaiah 11, and he then told him that “it was about to be fulfilled.”

The Stem of Salvation and the Rod of Restoration: Revisiting Biblical Exegesis and Latter-day Saint Interpretation of Isaiah 11:1

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

—Isaiah 11:1

Students of the Bible in the twenty-first century are like a Charles Dickens character living in the best and worst of times. Today we have the advantage of thousands of years of biblical studies on which to build our interpretations and understandings of the Bible. The formation of modern academic disciplines—such as textual, historical, source, and form criticisms, to name a few—for approaching ancient texts over the past 130 years has greatly enhanced our ability to draw meaning out of the text.¹ Yet conversely, thousands of years separate us from when the sacred oracles were first conveyed. Hence, the transmission of intent and meaning to a modern-day student has been clouded through time, culture, language, and circumstances.² In addition, challenges arise from the lack of original documents, the vast quantity of textual variance from copy to copy, and centuries of interpretive

tradition with which to contend. Given such obstacles, it is a wonder interpretive agreement of any kind exists.

Latter-day Saints claim other resources for biblical understanding—namely additional scripture and modern-day revelation. Because the Bible is considered a sacred text, connoting an authoritative voice of heaven for a group of people,³ Latter-day Saints look to their prophets, seers, and revelators to provide apostolic scriptural interpretation. The interpretive outcomes of Latter-day Saint students and scholars tends to be affected by this practice.

The poetic imagery of Isaiah 11:1 provides a good example of the differences between traditional interpretations of an ancient text based solely on exegetical practices and Latter-day Saint views, which are augmented by extrabiblical sources. Therefore, my purpose in this article is to demonstrate how modern-day revelation both supports and challenges mainstream exegetical disciplines by comparing the various ways in which the principal figures of Isaiah 11:1 have been understood historically in comparison to Latter-day Saint assessments. Additionally, I seek to posit a broader interpretation of how Latter-day Saints typically understand this specific prophecy.

To accomplish this purpose, I will begin with a brief historical survey of how Isaiah 11:1 has come down to a modern-day, English-speaking audience from the original Hebrew language. Such a survey will demonstrate how exegetical choices have influenced the understanding of the passage through the ages and why it is still open to multivariant interpretations today. Next I will show how Latter-day Saint scholars have used modern-day revelation to inform their exegetical practices and interpretations with this verse. Isaiah 11:1 is a beloved passage of scripture for many different religious groups, yet how it is understood, even among Latter-day Saints, continues to be shaped by the exegetical context and sources one applies to interpret it. Finally, I attempt to expand the traditional Latter-day Saint understanding of this verse.

A Historical Survey of the Writings of Isaiah

One challenge a modern-day reader of Isaiah encounters often goes unnoticed. The challenge is inherent in every manuscript of our day—namely, it is not the original work of Isaiah. What we read on the pages of our modern Bibles has already had a long history of alteration in the form of translation from the original documents Isaiah wrote. The extent of such processes of redaction is unknown. Nevertheless, at each point of translation, the translator or the team of translators had to make interpretive choices about the words they

chose to render from one language to another. Such choices have impacted the way readers have sought to understand Isaiah's words in their day.

The following timeline of the translation history of Isaiah's writings is not intended to be exhaustive or definitive. Rather, it is meant to be illustrative of how exegetical choices have been affected by translations. To that end, I have selected only a few of the more commonly known texts and manuscripts to highlight in this article. Through the tools of textual criticism, biblical scholars have been able to trace the lineage of texts through time. Because of the richness of such findings, we have a far clearer picture of how the manuscripts of today were formed and how they differ from earlier texts.⁴ Because the text of Isaiah 11 has not always been uniformly translated the same way, the interpretations of Isaiah's passage have also varied.

The Textual Writings of Isaiah

Many textual critics feel that the entire book of Isaiah, as found in most modern Bibles, was not necessarily written by the prophet Isaiah, who lived in the eighth century BC.⁵ Rather, because of their close analysis of surviving ancient texts, such as the Hebrew texts—the Masoretic Text (MT)⁶ and the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa) from the Dead Sea Scrolls;⁷ the Septuagint (LXX), which is written in Greek; and the Aramaic writings known as the Targum,⁸ textual scholars claim Isaiah's writings are the compilation of multiple authors over different time periods.⁹ These scholars assert that the principal author lived during the eighth century BC and that his oracles were only predicting the downfall of the Kingdom of Israel at the hands of the Assyrian Empire. These chapters are Isaiah 1–39. The second half of the book, known as Deutero-Isaiah,¹⁰ has been attributed to a writer or writers who lived much later than first Isaiah and seems to match historically better with events dealing with the period of the Jewish exile (605–537 BC; see Isaiah 40–55) and the restoration of the Jews to Jerusalem at the beginning of the Second Temple period (537–500 BC; see Isaiah 56–66).¹¹

According to Edward Young, Jewish textual scholars explain that the imagery employed in Isaiah 11:1 has reference to Hezekiah, king of Judah, who would repel the advancing armies of Sennacherib, king of Assyria (705–681 BC).¹² Although this verse is located in the first half of Isaiah, some see the influence of a Deutero-Isaiah writer in chapter 11.¹³ They posit that a much later author inserted restorative language to Isaiah's oracle as a way of strengthening the association to Zerubbabel, whom Cyrus, the king of Persia,

appointed to be the representative of Jewish royalty (Ezra 1:8) and to restore the temple in Jerusalem (537 BC).¹⁴ In either scenario, for these scholars, an exegesis of Isaiah 11:1 is, at most, the prediction of a Jewish king who would help secure or reestablish the Jewish nation several centuries before Christ.

An examination of Isaiah 11:1 from the MT and 1QIsa demonstrates how the above point of view is not beyond reason. As it relates to Isaiah 11:1, both the MT and 1QIsa render the verse as follows:

וַיֵּצֵא הַחֹרֶם מִגִּזְעוֹ יְשִׁי וַיִּנְצֵר מִשְׁרָשָׁיו יְפָרְהוּ:

One of the most recent English translations of this verse reads:

A shoot (*hōṭēr*) shall come forth (*yāšā'*) out from the stump (*mīgēza'*) of Jesse (*Yīshāy*), and a branch (*vēnēšēr*) shall grow out of (*yīpērah*) his roots (*mīshārāshāv*).¹⁵

Three of the Hebrew nouns found in Isaiah 11:1—*choter*, *geza'*, and *netser*—are rarely used elsewhere in the MT, which may suggest they have definitions specific to this oracle. The fourth noun, *sheres*, is a far more common noun within the MT.

The rarity of the previous three words is interesting to note and is not always apparent to English readers today because translation choices tend to link them to more frequently used English words in more modern manuscripts. For example, the King James Bible translators selected the English word *rod* to translate *choter*. Although the English word *rod* appears over eighty times throughout the KJV, *choter* is found only one other time in the MT (see Proverbs 14:3). Likewise, the English word *branch* is used over thirty times in the KJV, yet only three of those occurrences match the way *netser* is used by Isaiah in the MT (see Isaiah 14:19; 60:21; and Daniel 11:7). For those scholars seeking to understand as closely as possible what the original text means, such exegetical details may come into play.

For example, by applying principles of historical linguistics to compare how these words are used throughout the Masoretic Text or the Great Isaiah Scroll,¹⁶ it seems plausible to support the conclusion that Isaiah 11:1 may only be foretelling the liberation of a Jewish king.¹⁷ The Hebrew word *choter* means “rod, switch; shoot, or twig”¹⁸ and, as previously mentioned, is found in only one other place within the MT with no clear allusion to any future figure (see Proverbs 14:3). Similarly, *netser* means “branch or shoot of a plant,” and when used figuratively means a descendant or “a sprout.”¹⁹

Examining the other places the word *netser* is used in the MT does not overwhelmingly suggest this word should be interpreted beyond the immediate context of eighth century BC.²⁰ In fact, Isaiah 14:19 is a good example of how differently the word has been interpreted by various translators. Below are two examples of Isaiah 14:19 translations. Speaking in the form of a proverb against the King of Babylon, Isaiah declares:

“But you are cast out, away from your grave, like loathsome carrion [*netser*], clothed with the dead.” (New Revised Standard Version; hereafter referred to as NRSV)

“But you are discarded, unburied, like a loathed branch [*netser*], clothed like the slain who were pierced by the sword.” (Complete Jewish Bible)²¹

In Isaiah 60:21 (NRSV), the oracle identifies the figure of a branch to be Jehovah’s covenant people, “Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever. They are the shoot [*netser*] that I planted, the work of my hands, so that I might be glorified.” Furthermore, Daniel 11:7 uses the term in almost the exact same phrase as found in Isaiah, “a branch [*netser*] from her roots shall rise in his place.” The figure portrayed in Daniel is then predicted to prevail against a king’s army from the north. In all three instances above, the contextual imagery of the word *netser* is too varied within the MT for definitive exegesis declaring the branch of 11:1 to be something more than a future descendant of Jesse.

A similar examination of the Hebrew word *geza* in Isaiah 11:1 is likewise informative as to the interpretative choices of source critics. *Geza* means “stump or root stock” and occurs only three times in the MT—in Isaiah 11:1; 40:24; and Job 14:8. It is interesting to compare the context of Job 14:8 to Isaiah 11:1 for similarities, “For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. / Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump [*geza*] dies in the ground, / yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant” (Job 14:7–9, NRSV). Isaiah 40:24 shows a similar usage, “Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem [*geza*] taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble” (NRSV). In each of the above examples, the imagery of a tree, with its attending parts, is representative of a person or a group of people. In the case of Isaiah 11:1, the relationship of the branch to the roots is clearly tied to the family of Jesse, the father of David, the celebrated royal line of Jewish monarchs.

A Latter-day Saint Perspective on the Origins of the Writings of Isaiah

While textual and source criticism have provided compelling arguments for reading the MT a certain way, Latter-day Saint views on the book of Isaiah have been shaped by the inclusion of Isaiah's writing found in the Book of Mormon.²² The Book of Mormon text tells of a set of brass plates that came out of Jerusalem with the Lehites prior to the main period of Jewish exile (587 BC). The brass plates included, among other things, the writings of Isaiah. Because entire chapters and smaller quotes from both the first half of Isaiah and Deutero-Isaiah are found within the Book of Mormon text, Latter-day Saint scholars feel this fact demonstrates a unified Isaiah text as early as 600 BC. Thus, many Latter-day Saints see this as evidence that Deutero-Isaiah could not be the work of a late sixth century BC anthology.²³

Yet Latter-day Saint scholars have not ignored the most common tools of biblical exegesis. Instead, for many of them, the acceptance of other ancient texts and manuscripts provides more information with which to understand biblical writings. For example, the Book of Mormon prophet Nephi explained why he included the words of Isaiah in his record. He wrote, "But that I might more fully persuade [my people] to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah" (1 Nephi 19:23).²⁴ Latter-day Saints frequently cite Nephi's rationale as one reason for their own interpretations of Isaiah's writings, which expands Isaiah's prophecies to reach beyond his own time and declares the coming of the Son of God, the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. Of course, Latter-day Saints are not the only ones to explicate Isaiah with a Christocentric lens.²⁵ Rather, they join a larger community of biblical readers who have been anticipating the fulfillment of Isaiah 11 for thousands of years.

Isaiah 11:1 and Christian Messianic Expectations

As Christianity spread throughout the ancient world, so too did the proliferation of biblical texts and manuscripts. As early Christians debated which texts should be included in their collection of sacred writings, they were essentially making theological statements as to what writings were deemed authoritative.²⁶ With each translation and fresh copy of biblical text Christian scribes and priests made, exegetical interpretations were being either challenged or reinforced. For Christians, the figures represented in Isaiah 11:1 were not limited to a localized Jewish ruler; rather they were clearly being understood

as a messianic prophecy of a new Davidic king whose reign would affect the entire world, namely Jesus Christ.²⁷

It is widely believed the earliest Old Testament text Christians utilized in the first and second century AD was the Septuagint (LXX). Tradition holds that Ptolemy II Philadelphus directed a Greek version of the Hebrew Bible to be created in Koine Greek to add to the great library of Alexandria, since Greek was the lingua franca of the Eastern Mediterranean during the third century BC. Consequently, the use of the LXX was helpful in the spread of Christianity, as it gave early missionaries a common text to share with Jews and Gentiles alike.²⁸

Rodrigo F. de Sousa, in his work *Eschatology and Messianism in LXX Isaiah 1–12*, argues that early Christians may have begun to interpret Isaiah 11:1 as messianic prophecy in part because of the Greek words chosen by the LXX translators for this particular verse.²⁹ The LXX renders Isaiah 11:1 this way:

καὶ ἐξελεύσεται ῥάβδος ἐκ τῆς ῥίζης Ἰεσσαὶ καὶ ἄνθος ἐκ τῆς ῥίζης ἀναβήσεται

De Sousa's English translation reads:

And a Sceptre will go out from the root of Jesse,
and a flower will come up from the root.

If early Christians did in fact interpret the Greek word ῥάβδος to mean *Sceptre*, then it has a strong tie to an earlier Old Testament oracle found in Numbers 24:17–19, which John Collins argues was being viewed as a messianic text by Jews as early as the third century BC, as seen in the Dead Sea Scrolls.³⁰ The ancient apostle Matthew may have been tying the new star seen at the birth of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 2:1–10) to this same prophecy in Numbers 24:17, which reads, "there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (KJV).

By the fourth century AD, Christianity had become the state religion of the Roman Empire through the instrumentality of Constantine and his successors.³¹ Consequently, Christianity had become the exegetical lens of the Catholic Church, and any who chose to read the Bible differently were branded as heretics and persecuted. In AD 380, emperor Theodosius imposed the following command: "It is Our Will that all the peoples we rule shall practice that religion which the divine Peter the Apostle transmitted to the Romans. . . . We command that those persons who follow this rule

shall embrace the name of Catholic Christians. The rest, however, whom We adjudge demented and insane, shall sustain the infamy of heretical dogmas, their meeting places shall not receive the name of churches, and they shall be smitten first by divine vengeance and secondly by the retribution of Our own initiative, which We shall assume in accordance with divine judgement.”³² It was under these state-sanctioned conditions that St. Jerome translated Old and New Testaments into Latin, which is known as the Vulgate (VUL).

Through the use of textual criticism, scholars have determined that Jerome’s translation of the Old Testament books were drawn from existing Hebrew texts that preceded the MT as well as the Greek text of the LXX.³³ The Latin renders Isaiah 11:1 as follows:

et egredietur virga de radice Jesse et flos de radice eius ascendet

Several of the earliest English translations of the Bible were heavily influenced by the Vulgate. Their translations of the Latin are shown in table 1 below, which also demonstrates the way the interpretation of the Latin changed through time.

Table 1. Early English translations of Isaiah 11:1 from the Latin

English Bible	Year	Isaiah 11:1
Wycliffe Bible (WYC)	1395	And a yerde schal go out of the roote of Jesse, and a flour schal stie of the roote of it.
Geneva Bible (GNV)	1599	But there shall come a rodde foorth of the stocke of Ishai, and a grasse shall growe out of his rootes.
Douay-Rheims Bible	1609	And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root.
King James Version (KJV)	1611	And there shall come forth a rod out the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

The most common English translation for Latter-day Saints is from the King James Version as it is the official Bible of the Church.³⁴ Notably, the word *Branch* in the KJV is rendered with a capital letter, clearly identifying to the readers that the translators felt this word was to be understood

messianically. Most English Bible translation after the KJV have retained this distinction. Nephi included Isaiah 11:1 in his writings (see 2 Nephi 21:1); yet, as it is rendered in the Book of Mormon, this verse has the notable exception of lacking a capital letter on the word *branch*.³⁵ Consequently, some Latter-day Saint scholars have cited this difference between the manuscripts as a part of their rationale when explaining the meaning of this oracle.³⁶

The Poetic Form of Isaiah 11:1

Despite an increased uniformity of translating Isaiah 11:1 into English among Christian Bibles, because Isaiah is a multivalent text—one that is open to different interpretations—biblical scholars struggle to totally agree on Isaiah’s intended meanings.³⁷ This has also been true in Latter-day Saint scholarship. The heart of the discussion seems to surround the four principal noun phrases—“a rod,” “the stem of Jesse,” “a Branch,” and “his roots”—in relation to the poetic form Isaiah was employing in his writing.

According to form criticism, a sound understanding of the poetic form employed in Isaiah 11:1 is an important aspect of gaining clarity as to the meaning of Isaiah’s oracle. This approach is echoed by Nephi as one reason why he understands the prophecies of Isaiah and his people do not: “For behold, Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of my people to understand; for they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews” (2 Nephi 25:1; see 25:5). Thus, in less than two hundred years from the time Isaiah first uttered the prophecy in chapter 11 until the time of Nephi in the Americas, misunderstanding regarding the forms of Jewish prophecy had already arisen.

Scholars today have shown that Isaiah, in particular, was fond of several different literary forms. Each form was meant to draw the listener’s or reader’s attention to the fundamental message of the passage. The most common form employed by Isaiah is poetic parallelism, which itself has several different variations.³⁸ Describing this form, Donald Parry writes, “In poetic parallelism, the prophet makes a statement in a line, a phrase, or a sentence and then restates it, so that the second line, phrase, or sentence echoes or mirrors the first. There are approximately eleven hundred of these short poetic units in the book of Isaiah.”³⁹ Therefore, the majority of biblical scholars state there are only two figures represented by Isaiah in poetic parallelism—once in each line.⁴⁰ To demonstrate this form, all capitals and italics are used below to show the two figures in their pairs:

And there shall come forth a ROD out of the *stem of Jesse*,
and a BRANCH shall grow out of *his roots*.

The first figures in each line are paired together, or are parallel with one another, as are the last two figures in each line. Thus, according to a christological interpretation of this verse, set up by the form, the “rod” becomes synonymous with “Branch” and is referring to Jesus Christ, while the “stem of Jesse” is synonymous with “his root” and refers to the royal house of David.⁴¹ Furthermore, the parallel nature of these noun phrases is reinforced by the verb phrases of each line. It is the rod and the branch that “come forth . . . out of” and “grow out of” Jesse’s stem and roots, like Christ would descend from Jesse.

Just as the addition of the Book of Mormon has shaped Latter-day Saint views on the compilation of the textual writings of Isaiah, modern revelation has shaped their views on the poetic form of Isaiah 11:1. While some Latter-day Saint scholars agree with a synonymous parallel approach to the verse, others posit that the poetic form of Isaiah 11:1 should be understood in the reverse, or antithetically.⁴² Thus, the pairing of the figures is as follows:

And there shall come forth a ROD out of the *stem of Jesse*,
and a *Branch* shall grow out of his ROOTS:

While some might argue that the verb phrases are not as strong in this poetic form, the interpretational choice of these scholars seems to be primarily influenced by Doctrine and Covenants 113:1–6. Additionally, because Latter-day Saints tend to reserve scriptural interpretive right-of-way to Church leadership, statements by them have reinforced the rationale for an antithetical parallel point of view. The following sections will examine these two influential interpretive sources for Latter-day Saint scholarship.

The Interpretive Impact of Doctrine and Covenants 113

In Doctrine and Covenants 113, Joseph Smith is given two definitive statements that shed light on how Latter-day Saints interpret the identities of the figures of Isaiah 11:1. In both cases, the interpretations differ from mainstream exegetical views of Isaiah’s writings. From Doctrine and Covenants 113:1–2, Christ is identified as the *Stem of Jesse*, rather than its referring to the royal line of David. Likewise, Doctrine and Covenants 113:3–4 states that the *rod* is “a servant in the hands of Christ,” rather than being understood as referring specifically to Jesus.

Now, because only the *Stem of Jesse* and the *rod* were defined in the Doctrine and Covenants verses, this has given rise to some variance among Latter-day Saint scholarship regarding the parallel poetic form Isaiah used. Proponents of a synonymous parallel view cite the *rod* and the *branch* as being equated to “the servant in the hands of Christ,” while the *Stem of Jesse* and *his roots* are Christ. Those who support this view tend to cite the lack of a capital letter for *branch* in the Book of Mormon, which deflects the term from referring to Christ, while the capitalization of *Stem of Jesse* is clearly related to him by its given definition in the Doctrine and Covenants.⁴³

Those in favor of a synonymous view also point to the stronger correlation of the verb phrases in a synonymous construction, arguing that if Christ is the *Stem of Jesse* and is parallel to the *branch*, then the poetic form makes it seem like Christ is coming out of himself, a visual that is difficult to explain. On the other hand, if the *Stem of Jesse* is parallel to *his roots*, then the “servant in the hands of Christ” is the *rod* and *branch* growing out of Christ, which seems like a more natural correlation.⁴⁴ Hyrum Andrus states, “In the way the Saints now use a ‘genealogical tree’ to show the blood relationship of individuals and families who spring from a common stock, Isaiah made use of a plant as a symbol of the divine patriarchal order in ancient and modern times, with certain parts of the plant representing presiding figures within the chosen lineages in the flesh who have a right by promise to the keys and powers of the divine family order.”⁴⁵ Hence, since Christ is the Stem of Jesse, he cannot also be the branch growing out of himself; instead, it is a servant that comes forth in the last days to restore all things.

On the other hand, for those Latter-day Saint scholars who view Isaiah 11:1 as being antithetically paired, they might see Doctrine and Covenants 113:5–6 as strengthening their position. In these two verses, the *root of Jesse* spoken of in Isaiah 11:10 is defined in very similar terms to the servant figure defined as the *rod* in Isaiah 11:1. In their view, because Doctrine and Covenants 113:3–4 and 5–6 seem to connect the terms *rod* and *root of Jesse* in Isaiah 11, they take their exegetical cues from this pairing.

Furthermore, an antithetical parallel form is strengthened by the interpretive statements of two modern-day Church leaders.⁴⁶ In 1978 Elder Bruce R. McConkie published the first volume of the Messiah Series, in which he referred to Isaiah 11:1: “As to the identity of the Stem of Jesse, the revealed word says: ‘Verily thus saith the Lord: It is Christ.’ (D&C 113:1–2.) *This also means that the Branch is Christ*, as we shall now see from other related

scriptures.⁴⁷ Elder McConkie then proceeded to provide a scriptural defense of his declaration using the following scriptures to show how Christ is the branch: Jeremiah 23:3–6; Jeremiah 33:15; Zechariah 3:7–10; and Zechariah 6:12–13. Although the KJV uses the English word *Branch* in each of those verses, the Masoretic Text word *netser* found in Isaiah 11:1 is not used in any of them. Thus, strict source critics might disagree with Elder McConkie's connecting of Isaiah 11:1 to the other four verses.

The second statement comes from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, who acknowledges that Isaiah 11:1 is “one of the most important passages in all of Isaiah” for Latter-day Saints because it “is rich with nuances of the Restoration.”⁴⁸ Linking the overall imagery of Isaiah 10 and 11 to the allegory of the olive tree in Jacob 5, he said: “So it is with the restoration of the gospel. It is like the new shoot out of the old stump, and we see the fruits of those labors in—and with—Zion.”⁴⁹ He then reaffirms Elder McConkie's assertion that Christ is the Branch spoken of by Isaiah, as well as in the other verses Elder McConkie cited.

Thus, by merging the definitions provided in the Doctrine and Covenants with the interpretive statements of two latter-day apostles, the majority of Latter-day Saints feel the *rod* and *root* are one and the same, a Latter-day servant who is aided by the Lord to bring about a millennial reign of peace for all mankind. They also declare that the *Branch* and the *Stem of Jesse* refer to the Savior, Jesus Christ, from whom the rod derives his power.

The Rod of Restoration—Latter-day Saint Views

Having shown that Latter-day Saints generally choose exegetical practices that differ in some ways from mainstream biblical analysis, it should come as no surprise that their conclusions are not always in agreement with the rest of the academic field. While both Latter-day Saint and other Christian biblical scholars agree that Isaiah 11:1 is messianic, none of the researchers outside the Latter-day Saint tradition explicate the verse to include Christ and a servant in his hands. This view appears to be uniquely held by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This section details the most common interpretation of who the rod, the servant in the hands of Christ, is assumed to be according to most Latter-day Saint scholars. It concludes with an expanded view of that interpretation.

A Restoration Backdrop

As one reads from early Hebrew texts, like the Great Isaiah Scroll, there are no breakdowns of chapter and verse. Such literary devices came about much later. Thus, an examination of the poetic imagery employed by Isaiah in chapter 10 suggests that Isaiah 11:1 may function as a continuation of that oracle rather than the beginning of an altogether new prophecy. This view is held by most biblical scholars.⁵⁰ In Isaiah 10 we find a grove of trees that has been destroyed. The Lord, figuratively portrayed as a forester, thins the thickets, lops the tops off the proud and boastful boughs, and allows only the once-burdened stumps of a forsaken forest to remain (see Isaiah 10:5–34).⁵¹ With such imagery, Isaiah illustrates the Lord's anger with both the proud and mighty Assyrian Empire and prefigures the apostate house of David as nothing more than a stump. The warning is clear: humble yourselves or be cut down. Destruction ultimately comes to both groups. Yet then comes the beautiful promise of restoration contained in Isaiah 11.

Addressing the imagery of Isaiah 11:1, Joseph Fielding McConkie writes, “The story is told in prophetic imagery. . . . The imagery is most excellent—the ‘slender twig shooting out from the trunk of an old tree, cut down, lopped to the very root, and decayed; which tender plant, so weak in appearance, should nevertheless become fruitful and prosper.’”⁵² Ann Madsen points out that such an occurrence is rather normal in the land of Israel. She says, “In Jerusalem it is common for such stumps to sprout and grow (one whole garden of such fruitful stumps is called Gethsemane).”⁵³ Hence, the context of this metaphor is one of restoration, which naturally follows a period of apostasy. Thus, Isaiah's oracle is a prophecy of restoring the power and authority of Christ to his chosen people through a new shoot, or servant in the hands of Christ, just as Doctrine and Covenants 113:3–4 teaches. Not only does the servant bring new life to the tree through the power of the Lord, such a restoration enables an ushering in of the redemptive, millennial reign of the servant's Master, the Stem of Salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ, of which Isaiah 11:2–9 prefigures.

Joseph Smith as the Rod of Restoration: A Narrow Interpretation

In Doctrine and Covenants 113:3–4, a description is given of the rod who proceeds out of the Stem of Jesse: “Behold, thus saith the Lord: It is a servant in the hands of Christ, who is partly a descendant of Jesse as well as of Ephraim, or of the house of Joseph, on whom there is laid much power.” By

examining each characteristic of the servant outlined for us in verse 4, the evidence highlighted below provides a compelling argument that the servant spoken of is the Prophet Joseph Smith, a near-consensus view among Latter-day Saint scholars.⁵⁴

It is a servant in the hands of Christ. The Septuagint's word for rod is *rabdos*, which connotes something handheld, hence the possible translation of a scepter discussed earlier. It has several interpretations that adequately describe how the Prophet of the Restoration acted as a rod in the hands of Christ. "The basic meaning of *rabdos* is 'flexible twig.'"⁵⁵ Like Samuel in the Old Testament, Joseph Smith was a young boy, the tender age of fourteen, when he first communed with God. Metaphorically speaking, the twig, Joseph, was grafted into the true vine, Christ, the day he entered the grove of trees to seek an answer to his prayer. Similarly, "Olive trees [are] grown by inserting a graft from a cultivated tree into a wild stock. . . . The tree takes about fifteen years to grow to maturity, and then it bears fruit for centuries."⁵⁶ Certainly, we are the partakers of the fruit that Joseph produced through the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

A less common definition of *rabdos* is an oracle staff or divining rod. While admittedly it is not as common a definition, it does show an aspect of Joseph's role as the *rabdos* in the hands of Christ. The simplest form of oracular staffs was by writing "yes" and "no" on two rods that were then drawn by the one seeking divine guidance or intervention. In this way revelation was obtained.⁵⁷ We would refer to such a practice as drawing straws or as a form of "letting fate decide." However, to the ancients it was a way of exercising faith in God to direct them.⁵⁸ Certainly, no other prophet has given to mankind more of the revelations of God than has Joseph Smith. He was the Lord's living oracle drawn out to direct an apostate world back to the roots of the gospel covenant.

Joseph Fielding McConkie adds another image of a handheld *rabdos* when he wrote, "The rod . . . grows as an offshoot from the stem or trunk of the tree. It is allowed to grow into a sturdy branch that, when cut from the tree, is used as a shepherd's staff. The point of attachment to the tree is taken with the branch and worked into a thick knot on the head of the staff, which the shepherd uses both as a weapon against predators and to direct his flock. Isaiah's imagery is a perfect description of a rod that 'is a servant in the hands of Christ . . . the Good Shepherd.'"⁵⁹ Joseph was called upon by the Lord both to expose the enemies of Christ and to open the great latter-day work

of gathering together the Saints of God. Joseph Smith did not take this role of a rod upon himself; rather, ancient prophets restored the keys of gathering Israel to him (see Doctrine and Covenants 110:11).

Who is partly a descendant of Jesse as well as of Ephraim, or of the house of Joseph. While it is difficult to establish all of Joseph Smith's bloodlines, one scholar noted: "With respect to Joseph's lineage, Brigham Young declared he was 'a pure Ephraimite' (JD 2:269). However, as Joseph Fielding Smith pointed out, 'No one can lay claim to a perfect descent from father to son through just one lineage' (AGQ 3:61). Therefore, though Joseph's lineage may be traceable directly back to Ephraim through a given line, of necessity there were intermarriages that took place, making it possible for his descent to have also come from Jesse through his forefather, Judah."⁶⁰ Perhaps in a future day, when all the records of the human family have been pieced back together, we will see the intricate ways in which this description fits Joseph Smith.

On whom there is laid much power. What type of power? Priesthood power. As the rod, Joseph had the natural right because of his lineage and as a "lawful heir" to the priesthood (see Doctrine and Covenants 86:8–11; 113:7–8).⁶¹ On 15 May 1829, he received the power and keys associated with the Levitical Priesthood, under the hands of John the Baptist (see Doctrine and Covenants 13). Later that spring, he received the power and authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood under the hands of Peter, James, and John, who received it from Jesus Christ. Then on 3 April 1836, in the Kirtland Temple, Joseph was given additional keys of the priesthood from Moses and Elijah (see Doctrine and Covenants 110).

As has already been shown, the LXX's *rabdos* has been translated into English as *scepter*, which invokes the imagery of authority and kingship. The rights, privileges, powers, authorities, and keys of the priesthood that were laid upon Joseph have been passed down to every prophet and every worthy male of this last dispensation. The Lord promised, "thy scepter [shall be] an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever" (Doctrine and Covenants 121:46). Truly, the tree bough is once again full of beautiful branches because the roots of priesthood power have been restored by Joseph Smith in preparation of the Second Coming of Christ.

Moroni's initial visitation to Joseph Smith. In addition to the similarities of the definition of the rod in the Doctrine and Covenants to the Prophet Joseph Smith, there is another compelling argument that leads Latter-day Saints to see the Prophet in Isaiah's prophecy. On 21 September 1823, as a seventeen-year-old young man, Joseph was engaged in prayer and meditation when he was visited by the angelic being named Moroni. In about AD 421, Moroni deposited the records that would eventually become the Book of Mormon. Appearing as a resurrected being, Moroni heralded the boy prophet and immediately informed Joseph that his name would be had for good and evil throughout the world because of the work God was calling him to perform.

Over the course of that night, Moroni instructed Joseph on his foreordained mission through the use of biblical verses of scripture. One of the major citations Moroni shared with Joseph was the entire chapter of Isaiah 11, and he then told him that "it was about to be fulfilled" (Joseph Smith—History 1:40; see 1:27–54). It seems that the purpose of the citation, along with all the other verses Moroni shared, was intended to provide Joseph a brief overview of what the Lord was expecting him to do and to become. In this case, it is plausible he was being identified as a rod in the hands of Christ to restore the fullness of the gospel to the earth in preparation for a millennial reign of Christ.

The Rod as a Function of Restoration: A Broader Interpretation

While the previous section posits a strong argument for the identity of the rod to be associated with Joseph Smith, such a strict interpretation should not shut the door on considerations of the rod being identified with others. After all, the servant described in Doctrine and Covenants 113:3–4 goes unnamed. Hence, if it were solely Joseph Smith, the Lord could have declared him as such as was done with Christ in the first two verses of the section. I would argue that the ambiguity of the identity of the servant is intentional and thus opens the door for a much broader interpretation than is typically taken.

A quick digital search of the phrase "my servant(s)" within the standard works reveals that the exact phrase is stated ninety-one times in the Old Testament, ten times in the New Testament, sixteen times in the Book of Mormon, twice in the Pearl of Great Price, and 328 times in the Doctrine and Covenants. Of those times where God or Christ is the voice in the narrative, more than one hundred distinct individuals are identified as his servants.

While many of those phrases can be attributed to the same person (e.g., Joseph Smith is referred to as the Lord's servant at least thirty times in the Doctrine and Covenants), other verses identify groups of people as the Lord's servants, such as the house of Jacob/Israel (e.g., Isaiah 44:1–2), the Lord's prophets (e.g., Jeremiah 26:5), and the followers of Christ (e.g., John 12:26). It would seem that keeping the identity of the servant undeclared in Doctrine and Covenants 113:4 allows for multiple fulfillments of this prophecy and shifts the focus of the verse onto the functionality and qualifications of the rod.

Additionally, the question posed about the rod in Doctrine and Covenants 113:3 begins with the word *what* rather than *who*, as was the case in Doctrine and Covenants 113:1, which is emphasizing the identity of the Stem of Jesse. Beginning the question with *what* in verse three seems to further suggest that the identity of the rod is not the focus of the answer. The first part of the response in Doctrine and Covenants 113:4 is the function of the rod, namely that it is to be a servant in the hands of Christ or directed by him. The rest of the verse qualifies the servant as being partially related to Jesse and partially a descendent from the house of Joseph through Ephraim. Furthermore, the servant will have had much power laid upon him.

Since the time of Isaiah, there have been many who have functioned as a rod in the hands of Christ. For each of the ways that Joseph Smith fits the identifying markers as the rod, as was discussed in the previous section, could not the same be said of Peter, James, John, and the rest of the twelve apostles of the Lamb? Like Joseph, their ministry followed a period of apostasy. Like Joseph, they had hands laid upon their heads and were given keys of the priesthood to administer with its power and authority. Like Joseph, they were grafted into the gospel of Jesus Christ and demonstrated the ability to submit to the will of the Savior in their efforts to gather his sheep. Could not the same also be said of the Book of Mormon prophets? How many of them were restoring their people back to the covenants of the Father through his revelatory guidance? For example, both Abinadi and Samuel the Lamanite were declared to be the Lord's servants as they preached to apostate groups (see Mosiah 26:15 and 3 Nephi 23:9).

At the conclusion of Nephi's final prophecy of the scattering and gathering of Israel in the last day as it pertains to the Jews, the remnant Lamanites, and the Gentiles (see 2 Nephi 25–30), he restates the Isaiah oracle in Isaiah 11:4–9, which declares the conditions of the earth during the millennial reign of Christ (see 2 Nephi 30:9–15). Where Isaiah used poetic imagery to

prophecy of the role of the rod and branch to bring out restoration (see Isaiah 11:1), Nephi's prophecy is much plainer. Putting the poetry aside, Nephi's rod is the instrumentality of restoration efforts of latter-day servants who will declare the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the world (see 2 Nephi 30:4–8). Today, thousands of young missionaries and senior couples accept this prophetic charge to gather Israel from the four corners of the earth. The titles they wear on their badges of Elder or Sister designates them as duly called servants of the Lord.

Reinterpreting the verb phrases and poetic form of Isaiah 11:1. The knowledge gained from Doctrine and Covenants 113:1–4—namely, that the identity of the Branch and Stem of Jesse is Christ and the rod functions as a servant in the hands of Christ with priesthood power—can shape our understanding of the verb phrases and the poetic form of Isaiah 11:1.

The verb phrases, while initially appearing as synonymously paired, can also work in an antithetical poetic construction. In the first line, the servant (rod) is coming out of Christ (Stem of Jesse), or in other words, Christ comes first followed by his servant. Then, Christ (Branch) comes out of his servant (roots), or in other words, the servant comes first followed by Christ. If the servant is likened to the Church, this antithetical construction of the verb phrases makes sense. Christ's first appearance would come in the meridian of time prior to establishing his servant, the Church, led by priesthood leadership. At the time of his first coming, Christ, the Stem of Jesse, established his Church (a rod) between two continents—first among the Jews in Jerusalem as recorded in the New Testament, and second among the remnant of Joseph in the Americas as recorded in the Book of Mormon. In this case, the Church was being led partially by priesthood leaders principally from the tribes of Judah (Peter and the other twelve apostles) and from the tribes of Joseph (the chosen twelve Nephite disciples). However, in both locations, a period of apostasy followed. Thus, in the last days, the Church and her covenants, led by priesthood keys (the roots), has been restored first through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith, which is preparing the world for the Second Coming of the Christ (the Branch) by sharing the gospel as found in the stick of Judah and the stick of Ephraim (see Ezekiel 37:15–17). Such a construct could be seen as fulfilling another biblical prophecy, “So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen” (Matthew 20:16).

Conclusion

In a time when so many tools of biblical exegesis are literally at our fingertips, there are still many different ways we can approach an ancient text today. The purpose of this paper has been to show that through time the meanings and interpretations of the oracles of Isaiah have been fluid for millennia of readers and scholars alike. Each of us has been influenced by the exegetical choices of prior generations. For Latter-day Saints, understanding the passage of Isaiah 11:1 has been primarily shaped by additional scripture and modern prophetic commentary.

While the majority of biblical scholars today view this verse as being messianic, Latter-day Saints see a broader scope of what this verse foretells. They not only see the poetic imagery of the Stem of Salvation figured in the Savior, Jesus Christ, but identify another millennial figure in the Prophet Joseph Smith, the rod of Restoration. When the rod is understood by way of function rather than identity, a multiplicity of restorative figures emerges, each one striving to lead the willing to the covenantal roots of Christ's Church. Today, those actions are seen in the efforts of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as it strives to spread the message of the Restoration to all the earth in order to prepare all nations for the return of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Only then can we all rest in the shade of his glorious, millennial branches. **RE**

Notes

1. John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987), 27–30. See Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009); Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 4th ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011); and Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
2. Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, 8–14.
3. Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, 17; David H. Kelsey, “The Bible and Christian Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48, no. 3 (September 1980): 385–402; Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3–25; Nicholas Thomas Wright, “How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?,” *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7–32.
4. See Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 121–54.
5. *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books in*

Twelve Volumes (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 6:32–35; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 4; and John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, vol. 24, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), xxvi–xxvii.

6. The Masoretic Text (MT) has been deemed to be the authoritative text for the majority of Biblical Hebrew studies and translations. It was compiled between the seventh and tenth centuries AD by a group of Jews known as Masoretes. The majority of biblical translations into English today are based upon the MT. See John Goldingay, *Isaiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 13:22–23.

7. The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa), while written much earlier than the MT, was only recently discovered in caves near Qumran in 1947 as a part of the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is the earliest complete Hebrew text of the book of Isaiah and has been given a date range of the second or third century BC. The scroll 1QIsa has proved to be a valuable tool in understanding how some Jewish communities understood the writings of the Hebrew Bible. “The Great Isaiah Scroll,” “The Digital Dead Sea Scrolls,” Israel Museum, <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah>.

8. The Targum consisted of Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible. It is believed to have been compiled for the benefit of those Jews who had lost a knowledge of Hebrew because of their period of exile. Aramaic was the common language of the Jewish people when they returned to Jerusalem. The Targum is dated to the time period preceding Christ. See Richard N. Holzapfel, Eric D. Hunstman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 8; James Orr, ed., “Targum,” Bible Study Tools, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/encyclopedias/isbe/targum.html>.

9. *New Interpreter’s Bible*, 28–30; Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 121–54.

10. “The Great Isaiah Scroll.”

11. Terry B. Ball and Nathan Winn, *Making Sense of Isaiah: Insights and Modern Applications* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009); and Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 4.

12. Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:380.

13. Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 84–86; and *New Interpreter’s Bible*, 240.

14. Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 380.

15. New Revised Standard Version Bible, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/isaiah/11-1.html>.

16. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, 237.

17. Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 84–86; *New Interpreter’s Bible*, 28–30; Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 121–54; Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 380.

18. James Strong, *The Strongest Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, rev. John R. Kohlenberger III and James A. Swanson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2001).

19. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 9:549–51; and Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 171.

20. Botterweck, Ringgren, and Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 9:549–51.

21. “Isaiah 14,” in The Complete Jewish Bible, Bible Study Tools, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/cjb/isaiah/14.html>.

22. See Ball and Winn, *Making Sense of Isaiah*; Hoyt W. Brewster Jr., *Isaiah Plain and Simple: The Message of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995);

Victor L. Ludlow, *Unlocking Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003); Monte S. Nyman, *Isaiah: Prophecies of the Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Millennial Press, 1998); Donald W. Parry, Jay A. Parry, and Tina M. Peterson, *Understanding Isaiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998); and Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, eds., *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998).

23. See previous note for examples of those who feel that the Book of Mormon’s inclusion of Isaiah argues for a unified text as early as 600 BC. There are others who believe that the Book of Mormon is an ancient text but that it does not prevent a belief in the redactive influence of Deutero-Isaiah. See Blake T. Ostler, “The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 1 (1987): 66–123.

24. Nephi unequivocally understood the Redeemer to be Jesus Christ, the Messiah; see 2 Nephi 11:2–4 and 2 Nephi 25:12–26.

25. Latter-day Saints are not unique in their view of the book of Isaiah being the works of one author, namely the eighth-century-BC prophet. See John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 1029–31, but they are unique in using the Book of Mormon text as part of their rationale.

26. Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 4th ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 64–74. See Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Book* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

27. Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 277–78; *New Interpreter’s Bible*, 139; Walvoord and Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1056; and Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 380.

28. See Holzapfel, Hunstman, and Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament*, 8.

29. Rodrigo F. de Sousa, *Eschatology and Messianism in LXX Isaiah 1–12* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2010), 4:139.

30. John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 65.

31. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 99–100.

32. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 96–97; capitalization follows the original.

33. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 121–54.

34. For an understanding of Latter-day Saint views of the KJV, see Kent P. Jackson, ed., *The King James Bible and the Restoration* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011).

35. This appears to be a translation decision by those who prepared the manuscript of the Book of Mormon for print rather than an authorial decision taken from the gold plates. See Royal Skousen and Robin Scott Jensen, eds., *Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 1–Alma 35*, facsimile edition, part 1, vol. 3 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2015), 173.

36. For a more thorough treatment of the lack of capitalization in 2 Nephi 21:1, see RoseAnn Benson, “Joseph Smith and the Messiah: Prophetically Linked,” *Religious Educator* 3, no. 3 (2002): 65–81.

37. Ben Witherington III, *Isaiah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 100–116. See also Ann N. Madsen

and Shon D. Hopkin, *Opening Isaiah: A Harmony* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018).

38. James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 7.

39. Parry, Parry, and Peterson, *Understanding Isaiah*, 603.

40. Goldingay, Isaiah, 83; Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 277–78; Walvoord and Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1056; Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 169; and Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 378–80.

41. Goldingay, Isaiah, 83; Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 277–78; Walvoord and Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1056; Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 169; and Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 378–80.

42. While some Latter-day Saint scholars agree on the form, they view the identities of the figures differently. Hyrum Andrus suggested: “There are four figures depicted in Isaiah’s statement, each constituting a distinct part of the plant, or a presiding person within the divine patriarchal order.” See Hyrum L. Andrus, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), 464. Donald Parry and others, in the book *Understanding Isaiah*, determined that there are only two principal characters depicted by the primary images of the rod and the branch. See Parry, Parry, and Peterson, *Understanding Isaiah*, 116–17. Still, other scholars surmised that there are three characters portrayed in this prophecy: the rod, the stem, and the branch. See Rodney Turner, “The Two Davids,” in *A Witness of Jesus Christ: The 1989 Sperry Symposium on the Old Testament*, ed. Richard D. Draper (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 248. To complicate the matter, the actual identities of these images differ from scholar to scholar even among those who agree upon the number of characters depicted within the verse. For instance, both Sidney Sperry and Victor Ludlow agreed that there are only two principal figures; however, Sperry claimed that those figures are Christ and his servant Joseph Smith, while Ludlow argues that the servant will be a great Jewish leader in the last days with the name of David. Sidney B. Sperry’s view is cited in Leann G. Otten and C. Max Caldwell, *Sacred Truths of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982–83), 2:264, while Victor L. Ludlow’s are found in his book *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 169.

43. Benson, “Joseph Smith and the Messiah,” 65–81.

44. Ludlow, *Unlocking Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 167–69.

45. Andrus, *Doctrinal Commentary*, 464.

46. Interestingly, as of 31 March 2019, according to the Latter-day Saint Scripture Citation Index (see <http://scriptures.byu.edu/>), Isaiah 11:1 has never been cited in a general conference address of the Church. Second Nephi 2:1 has been referenced only in the footnotes of a talk by Elder Russell M. Nelson in October 1999. The verses in Doctrine and Covenants 113:1–4, which are directly related to Isaiah 11:1, have also never been cited.

47. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 192; emphasis added. Notably, Elder McConkie does not engage with the identity of the rod or roots.

48. Jeffrey R. Holland, “‘More Fully Persuaded’: Isaiah’s Witness of Christ’s Ministry,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 12.

49. Holland, “‘More Fully Persuaded,’” 13.

50. Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 83–84; Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 274; Walvoord and Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1056; and Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 378.

51. Parry, Parry, and Peterson, *Understanding Isaiah*, 115.

52. Joseph Fielding McConkie, “Joseph Smith as Found in Ancient Manuscripts,” in *Isaiah and the Prophets: Inspired Voices from the Old Testament*, ed. Monte S. Nyman (Provo,

UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 17.

53. Ann N. Madsen, “Joseph Smith and the Words of Isaiah,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 355.

54. Generally, most Latter-day Saint scholars agree that Joseph Smith is the “rod” spoken of in Doctrine and Covenants 113. See Andrus, *Doctrinal Commentary*, 464; Brewster, *Isaiah Plain and Simple*, 113; George A. Horton Jr., “Prophecies in the Bible about Joseph Smith,” *Ensign*, January 1989, 20; Kent P. Jackson, ed., *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 4, *1 Kings to Malachi* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 102; Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, eds., *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 1, *The Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 331–33; and Parry, Parry and Peterson, *Understanding Isaiah*, 115. However, they don’t all agree that he was the “branch,” as has been shown.

55. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:966.

56. Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 113.

57. Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 966.

58. Nephi and his brothers may have been doing something similar in 1 Nephi 3:11 when they “cast lots” to see which of them would go seek the plates of brass from Laban first. The lot fell on Laman, and he responded without complaint.

59. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 910–11.

60. Hoyt W. Brewster Jr., *Doctrine and Covenants Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 479. For a fairly in-depth discussion of Joseph’s lineage from both Ephraim and Jesse, see Hyrum L. Andrus, *Doctrines of the Kingdom* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 533–40.

61. Millet and Jackson, *Doctrine and Covenants*, 332; and Andrus, *Doctrinal Commentary*, 464.