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Isaiah 52 in the Book of Mormon
Notes on Isaiah's Reception History

Despite increasing recognition of the importance of Mormonism to American religion, little attention has been given to the novel uses of Isaiah in foundational Mormon texts. This paper crosses two lines of inquiry: the study of American religion, with an eye to the role played in it by Mormonism, and the study of Isaiah's reception history. It looks at the use of Isa 52:7–10 in the Book of Mormon, arguing that that volume exhibits four irreducibly distinct approaches to the interpretation of Isaiah, the interrelations among which are explicitly meant to speak to nineteenth-century American Christianity.

Recent years have witnessed drastically increased interest in the reception history of the Book of Isaiah.[1] Serious efforts are being made to provide English-language translations of Greek and Latin commentaries on

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[1] This began in earnest with the publication of John F. A. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Isaiah,[2] and renewed attention has been given to early Reformation-era inter-pretations.[3] Many have begun to analyze critically the rise of modern Isaiah scholarship,[4] and some recent commentaries draw on pre-critical approaches to the text.[5]

In this paper, I wish to look at an important but overlooked aspect of Isaiah's reception history: the use of Isaiah texts in uniquely Mormon scripture. Despite increasing recognition of Mormonism's importance to the American religious experience, little attention has as yet been given to the novel uses of Isaiah in foundational Mormon texts.[6] Much might therefore be gained by crossing two lines of inquiry: Mormon studies and the reception history of Isaiah.[7] It may yet prove to be no coincidence that Mormonism's deep invest-

[2] See, most recently, Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah: Including St. Jerome's Translation of Origen's Homilies 1-9 on Isaiah*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (New York: Newman, 2015).

[3] See the rich treatment, for instance, in Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 181–229.

[4] For examples, see Claire Mathews McGinnis and Patricia K. Tull, "Remembering the Former Things: The History of Interpretation and Critical Scholarship," in *"As Those Who Are Taught": The Interpretation of Isaiah from the LXX to the SBL*, ed. Claire Mathews McGinnis and Patricia K. Tull (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 1–27, as well as Childs, *Isaiah as Christian Scripture*, 230–90.

[5] See not only compilations like those in the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* series, edited Thomas C. Oden and published by InterVarsity Press, but also commentaries published in the *Historical Commentary on the Old Testament* series: Willem A. M. Beuken, *Isaiah II*, trans. Brian Doyle, vol. 2, *Isaiah Chapters 28–39* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000); and Jan L. Koole, *Isaiah III*, trans. Antony P. Runia, vol. 3, *Isaiah Chapters 56–66* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001).

[6] The only available literature on Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, for instance, is directed to a largely lay readership interested either in developing a basic understanding of Isaianic texts or in deciding the implications of Isaiah's inclusion in the Book of Mormon for the volume's claims to historicity. For the best of the literature, see Victor L. Ludlow, *Unlocking Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003); Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, eds., *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research & Mormon Studies, 1998); John A. Tvedtnes, ed., *Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon* (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research & Mormon Studies, 1981); David P. Wright, "Isaiah in the Book of Mormon: Or Joseph Smith in Isaiah," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 157–234.

[7] Several studies look at early Mormonism's relationship to biblical culture in its historical context, albeit without focusing in any substantial way on the Isaianic corpus that plays such a dominant role in Mormon texts. See Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777–1880* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); and David F. Holland, *Sacred Borders: Continu-*

ment in Isaiah in the early nineteenth century coincides historically with the rise of modern critical study of the Book of Isaiah. For this paper, however, a narrower scope is necessary. Joseph Smith, Mormonism's founder, produced several volumes of new scripture,[8] attempted a full revision of the Christian Bible,[9] preached several volumes' worth of sermons,[10] and left behind diaries, histories, letters, and numerous other texts.[11] All these sources draw extensively on the language of Isaiah. In addition, there is the literary output of Smith's followers, sources that might also be mined in reconstructing early Mormon understandings of Isaiah. Faced with so much material, how might one establish a foothold? Here I will focus just on the Book of Mormon, the earliest and most influential of published Mormon sources. Further narrowing my scope, I will look here only at how the Book of Mormon uses just one passage from Isaiah—specifically Isa 52:7–10—and ignore the other twenty-or-so chapters of Isaiah on which the Book of Mormon explicitly draws.[12] The volume's use of this particular text from Isaiah is, I believe, illustrative of Mormonism's earliest engagement.

ing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[8] These are the Book of Mormon, The Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price, available in print in a variety of editions.

[9] This was not published during Smith's lifetime, but the manuscripts of the revision have been made available in full since. See Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004).

[10] The most significant of these have been collected, in a preliminary form, in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980).

[11] Joseph Smith's collected papers are currently being published serially, with a projected completion date in the next few years. Twenty-three volumes are projected. See http://www.josephsmithpapers.org.

[12] The Book of Mormon directly quotes the whole of Isaiah 2–14, most of Isaiah 29, and the whole of Isaiah 48–54 (minus a few verses of Isaiah 52). Except in the case of Isaiah 29, the text explicitly identifies the Book of Isaiah as its source for the quotations (although it claims to draw on an ancient manuscript kept on brass plates, and hence it often provides variant readings of the text). In addition to these lengthier quotations, passages in the Book of Mormon often draw in obvious but unacknowledged ways on the language of Isaiah. Several scholars have attempted to produce comprehensive lists of the Isaiah passages quoted or alluded to in the Book of Mormon. For the best available lists, see Royal Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations in the Book of Mormon," in Parry and Welch, *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 369–71; and the citation footnotes throughout Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

My thesis is that the Book of Mormon outlines several distinct interpretations of Isa 52:7–10.[13] In essence, the book presents itself as (in part) the history of a debate regarding the interpretation of this passage. That it couples this history with an attempt to address nineteenth-century American Christianity directly makes it clear that the Book of Mormon should be read as contributing to Isaiah's reception history. It seems that the Book of Mormon is aimed in part at recommending that Western Christianity, struggling with secularism at the time of the book's appearance, revisit the prophecies of Isaiah.[14] And the book suggests that the meaning of Isaianic prophecy is unstable, outlining possible approaches to Isaiah and adjudicating among them—apparently in the hopes of assisting in Christianity's struggle in an increasingly secular context.

Isa 52:7–10 for Nephi

The Book of Mormon's narrative opens in ancient Jerusalem "in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah" (1 Nephi 1:4).[15] This setting makes the book's sustained interest in Isa 52 perfectly sensible. Zedekiah's reign (which ended in 587 BCE) resulted in the exile of Judah in Babylon, to which exile (and its imminent end with Babylon's demise) Isa 52:7–10 and surrounding prophecies directly respond. Whether

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[13] Certain of these interpretations have been helpfully reviewed in Dana M. Pike, "'How Beautiful upon the Mountains': The Imagery of Isaiah 52:7–10 and its Occurrences in the Book of Mormon," in Parry and Welch, *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 249–91; and Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology*, 2nd ed. (Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, Brigham Young University, 2016).

[14] The Book of Mormon is explicitly aware of the secular context in which it makes its nineteenth-century appearance. Prophets especially at the volume's opening and closing focus intensely on the secular "gentiles" (read "people of European descent") who are among its intended readers. On this aspect of the book, see Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 217–47; and Jared Hickman, "*The Book of Mormon* as Amerindian Apocalypse," *American Literature* 86, no. 3 (2014): 429–61.

[15] Throughout this essay, I use the critical text produced by Royal Skousen for citations from the Book of Mormon. But because Joseph Smith, in dictating the Book of Mormon to a scribe, dictated no punctuation, I provide my own punctuation of the text, at times consonant and at times not with Skousen's suggested punctuation. For references, I use the standard versification used in editions published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For the full text, see Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

one approaches questions of Isaianic authorship conservatively (the whole book can be dated to the eighth century) or liberally (major portions of the Isaiah had their origins in and after the exile), more or less all interpreters agree that Isa 52 and the texts surrounding it focus on the period of Judah's sixth-century exile in Babylon.[16] It is immediately prior to this exile that the Book of Mormon's story begins. The first year of Zedekiah's reign marked the first major deportation of Jerusalem's inhabitants, anticipatory of the destruction of the temple and a fuller deportation a decade later; between these two events of deportation, according to the Book of Mormon, a small group of Jerusalemites left the city to journey to the New World.[17] According to the Book of Mormon, these escapees were in no way unaware of the exile they were escaping. Their patriarchal leader, Lehi, is a prophet who himself anticipates the exile. His family and the remainder of the company leave Jerusalem precisely because Lehi's prophecies concerning destruction and exile create opposition among the city's elites. And after the group has arrived and settled in the New World, Lehi announces having "seen a vision, in which I know that Jerusalem is destroyed—and had we remained in Jerusalem we should also have perished" (2 Nephi 1:4). From the very beginning of the Book of Mormon, the text presents its main characters as aware of having just barely missed a definitive event in Jewish history. They, as much as their fellow Israelites who remained in the Old World, seek to

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[16] Mormon scholars have generally preferred conservative Isaiah scholarship for relatively obvious reasons. If much of Isaiah 40–55 originated only during or after the exile, it should not have been available in any form to the peoples of the Book of Mormon, who, according to the volume, took their leave from Jerusalem before the exile began in earnest. Thus, consensus liberal scholarship on Isaiah raises serious questions about the historicity of the Book of Mormon, which is taken to be a cornerstone of Mormon faith. For the most recent Latter-day Saint defense of conservative Isaiah scholarship, see Kent P. Jackson, "Isaiah in the Book of Mormon," in *A Reason for Faith: Navigating LDS Doctrine and Church History*, ed. Laura Hales (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2016), 69–78. For an exploration by a believing Latter-day Saint of possible ways of reconciling liberal Isaiah scholarship with the Book of Mormon, see Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 69, 291–92. It should be noted that Mormons generally do not hold to a doctrine of biblical inerrancy, such that the basic motivations for their defense of the Book of Isaiah's single authorship are substantially distinct from those of conservative evangelical scholars.

[17] Throughout this essay, I attempt to provide enough context to make clear relevant portions of the Book of Mormon without reviewing unnecessary details. For a good overview of the book, see Terryl L. Givens, *The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3–59.

make sense of Jerusalem's destruction and Judah's exile.[18] And it should be no surprise that they also turn to prophecies in the Book of Isaiah to do so.

The theological perspective worked out in the Book of Isaiah makes of the exile a crucial moment in the unfolding of a larger historical project undertaken by Israel's God.[19] The exile, according to Isaiah, is only "for a small moment" (Isa 54:7), and on the other side of the exile lies restoration for a holy remnant of the covenant people.[20] This passage through exile and return—through abandonment and reconciliation—serves the divine purpose because it draws the attention of the whole world to the faithfulness and kindness of YHWH, Israel's unique God. The purpose of the exile, in short, is supposed to have been both to bring ancient Jews into closer cultural contact with non-covenantal peoples and to place them in a compromised situation. Together, these two aspects of Judah's situation would allow its redemption and restoration to have a determinate effect on non-Israelites. The Book of Isaiah anticipates mass gentile conversion, although the exact status of converted gentiles vis-à-vis the covenant people remains ambiguous in the book.[21]

All of these themes interest the Book of Mormon at a fundamental level, but especially in the first major portion of the book (that is, especially in the First and Second Books of Nephi).[22] Those who make up the story's

[18] A second-generation prophet and Lehi's direct spiritual heir later claims that he and his people experienced their own longing for Jerusalem after its loss, as if their escape were a kind of parallel to the exile experienced by their Old-World contemporaries. "The time passed away with us—and also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream—we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation in a wild wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions. Wherefore, we did mourn out our days" (Jacob 7:26).

[19] For an astute and detailed assessment of the theological commitments of Isaiah 40–55, see John Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40–55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005).

[20] I use here and throughout this article the King James renderings of Isaianic texts, since the Book of Mormon, when it quotes from Isaiah, uses the King James rendering.

[21] For a nice exploration of some historical consequences of the ambiguity of the Book of Isaiah's position on the status of converted gentiles, see Delio DelRio, *Paul and the Synagogue: Romans and the Isaiah Targum* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013).

[22] The first major portion of the Book of Mormon is presented as the work of a series of writers over the course of four centuries, recorded on what the volume calls the "small plates" of Nephi (Jacob 1:1). The tone and style of this first part of the book (stretching from the First Book of Nephi to the Book of Omni) differ substantially from those of the remainder of the book, which is presented as the work of two editors, father (Mormon) and son (Moroni), who write their abridgment of Lehite history from the perspective of their own time, some ten

first generation worry about Israel's covenantal standing, and they wonder about the relationship between gentiles and the covenant people. Early in the book, Lehi prophesies of the coming of "a messiah" (1 Nephi 10:4) who, after being killed and rising from the dead, "should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the gentiles" (1 Nephi 10:11). This would occur in the course of a history involving "the dwindling of the Jews in unbelief" (1 Nephi 10:11), a consequent scattering for Jews while gentiles receive "the fullness of the gospel" (1 Nephi 10:14), and an eschatological gathering of "the remnants of the house of Israel" (1 Nephi 10:14).[23] In an attempt to explain these prophecies to the family, Lehi's son Nephi draws on his own (and his father's) visions, but also on a biblical resource: "I spake unto them concerning the restoration of the Jews in the latter days, and I did rehearse unto them the words of Isaiah, which spake concerning the restoration of the Jews (or of the house of Israel)" (1 Nephi 15:19–20). It is specifically in Isaiah that Lehi's family finds scriptural resources for making sense of Israel's history and destiny. And it is there, too, that they find an outline of the complex place occupied by gentiles in that history.

The specific texts presumably referred to in the just-quoted passage are not difficult to determine. Although the Book of Mormon quotes from and draws on various Isaianic texts, in an important scene Nephi instructs Lehi's family regarding covenantal history by quoting specifically from Isaiah 48–49 (see 1 Nephi 20–21). It is clear that the Isaianic source the Book of Mormon regards in its first major sequence as particularly relevant to understanding Israel's history begins with Isaiah 48, at the heart of the portion of Isaiah meant to address the return of Judah from Babylonian exile. In the remainder of his contribution to the Book of Mormon, Nephi goes on to quote (in bits and

centuries after Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, when one half of Lehi's descendants are wiped out by the other half. Importantly, for various reasons, Joseph Smith dictated the contents of the Book of Mormon out of their published order, beginning with the third-person historical accounts gathered under the names of Mormon and Moroni and only then coming to the first-person records that now open the volume. For a brief account of the events surrounding Smith's dictation and his reasons for dictating things out of final order, see Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling: A Cultural Biography of Mormonism's Founder* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 57–83. For a systematic argument that the first major portion of the Book of Mormon was dictated last, see Brent Lee Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 395–444.

[23] Hardy has outlined the basic nature of this history in *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 61–62.

pieces) the whole of Isaiah 48:1–52:2, in addition to drawing on earlier portions of Isaiah.[24] To explain Jewish history, the Book of Mormon's opening voices thus turn again and again to key prophecies of Second Isaiah.[25]

What makes the Book of Mormon's approach to these prophecies unique is that it sees them as a resource for thinking about a history somewhat broader than that of the Jews, narrowly defined (that is, as direct descendants of Judah). In the very first story told in the Book of Mormon, Lehi and Nephi discover from a genealogical record that they are *not* in fact Jews, strictly speaking, because they hail from Judah's brother Joseph, rather than from Judah himself (see 1 Nephi 5:14–16). The Book of Mormon thus tells the story of a Josephite, rather than a strictly Jewish, transplant from Jerusalem to the New World during the era of Judah's exile in Babylon. The result is that, while the Book of Mormon's first voices find in Isaiah's words a direct analysis of specifically Judahite history, they find themselves inspired to extrapolate from that history an indirect analysis of the covenant God's ways of dealing with *all* of Israel—and therefore with Joseph's descendants as well as with Judah's. Nephi and his priestly brother Jacob even give to this interpretive approach to Isaiah a name, used consistently in the text: "likening."[26] Throughout the first portion of the Book of Mormon, to liken

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[24] These quotations are found in 1 Nephi 20–21 and 2 Nephi 7–8.

[25] There is some ambiguity in the first portion of the Book of Mormon about whether Isaiah's prophecies are limited in their original historical scope just to the events of the eighth through the sixth centuries, or whether they are instead focused also on the events of specifically Jewish history from the time of the exile to the time of the eschaton. At times or on one reading, the Book of Mormon seems committed to the idea that the prophecies of Second Isaiah focus solely on the events surrounding the exile, and thus that one must do some work of extrapolation in order to apply them, somewhat inventively or certainly prophetically, to the whole of Jewish history. At other times or on another reading, however, the Book of Mormon seems committed to the idea that the prophecies of Second Isaiah themselves focus on the whole of Jewish history. As the book presents the data, interestingly, the latter of these two readings would seem to be associated more closely (or at least initially) with Nephi's brother Jacob, as if it were his innovation. For some discussion of this, see chapters 11 and 12 of Joseph M. Spencer, *The Vision of All: Twenty-Five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi's Record* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016). It might be noted that the longer-historical interpretation of Isaiah that is certainly operative in certain places in the Book of Mormon shares much with the intertestamental interpretation of Isaiah (and the prophets more generally) as interpreted by E. P. Sanders and N. T. Wright (what the latter calls the "continuing exile"). See especially N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 114–63.

[26] See, for instance, 1 Nephi 19:23–24; 22:8; 2 Nephi 6:5; 11:2, 8. Perhaps the most illuminating of these passages is 2 Nephi 6:5: "And now the words which I shall read are

is both to recognize the specifically Jewish determinations of the historical text of Isaiah and to see in Isaiah's prophecies resources for understanding non-Jewish-but-still-Israelite patterns of history.

This point is essential. A too-casual reader might come away from a reading of the first portion of the Book of Mormon believing that it understands Isaiah to have prophesied of Israel's whole story—from the time of the exile to the end of history, focused as much on Joseph's descendants as on Judah's.[27] Such a reading, however, is inaccurate because the text explicitly recognizes the historically limited scope of Second Isaiah's prophecies (they are about exile and restoration in the sixth century, or perhaps, more expansively, about the history of Judah more generally). At the same time, the Book of Mormon pursues a deliberate extrapolation from the Isaianic text to apply its basic patterns to a history of wider scope (a history the Book of Mormon's inaugural prophets claim to have witnessed in apocalyptic visionary experiences).[28] In effect, the first major sequence of the Book of Mormon finds in Isaiah a basic pattern for God's historical dealings with covenant Israel, illustrated primarily through events happening to Judah between the eighth and sixth centuries before Christ; and then it extrapolates that basic pattern or schema to apply it to the history of the Josephites, whom the book identifies with certain inhabitants of ancient America.[29] In short, Isaiah's prophecies,

they which Isaiah spake concerning all the house of Israel," Jacob says to the people of Nephi. "Wherefore they may be likened unto you, for ye are of the house of Israel. And there are many things which have been spoken by Isaiah which may be likened unto you because that ye are of the house of Israel."

[27] Incidentally, this is how even Latter-day Saints traditionally understand the Book of Mormon's uses of Isaiah. And in parallel, Latter-day Saints generally understand the book's talk of likening to recommend a general practice of life application, rather than a specific hermeneutic approach to Isaianic prophecy. For a good example of both of these approaches, formulated in full, see Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. I, *First and Second Nephi* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987).

[28] For the fullest of these apocalyptic visions, of central importance to making sense of everything the Book of Mormon has to say about Isaiah, see 1 Nephi 11–14.

[29] For many years, Latter-day Saints assumed that the Book of Mormon recounted the ancient history of all native peoples of the American continent, but numerous circumstances have led many more recently to believe only that a relatively small proportion of indigenous Americans is related to the Book of Mormon's narrative. Relatively recently, the institutional church itself altered the editorial introduction to official editions of the book to indicate that the descendants of Lehi "are among the ancestors of the American Indians." See the useful discussion in Armand L. Mauss, "Rethinking Retrenchment: Course Corrections in the Ongoing Campaign for Respectability," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 4 (2011): 5–6.

despite their limited historical scope, can be "likened" to the longer history of Israel, which is only known by an independent revelatory source.

For this reason, the events discussed in Isaiah 48:1–52:2 can be lined up, point by point, with the Josephite events anticipated prophetically by the Book of Mormon's first characters: (1) the exile of Jerusalem's population to Babylon Nephi likens to the departure of the Book of Mormon's Jerusalemites for the New World six centuries before Jesus; (2) Jews' suffering in Babylon he likens to the subjugation of the Book of Mormon's New-World Israelites when European Christians come to the Americas two thousand years later, devastating native populations; (3) the restoration of the Jewish remnant from Babylon Nephi likens to the latter-day restoration, of the New-World remnant of Joseph, to the knowledge of its Abrahamic heritage; and, finally, (4) the rise of gentile interest in the Jewish God Nephi likens to growing awareness among gentile Christians of the covenantal status of Native American peoples, which in turn is supposed to reorient modern Christianity to its Abrahamic roots (like the Persians with barely-post-exilic Jews, European Christians are to assist New-World Israelites in building up a New Jerusalem, but the latter in the New World).[30] The Book of Mormon thus works out a point-by-point quasi-allegorical reading of Second Isaiah, and this reading is explicitly acknowledged to be a quasi-allegorical reading (a "likening").

Whether understood historically in terms of sixth-century Jewish history, or whether understood quasi-allegorically in terms of New-World history, this four-part schema is sketched most economically in Isa 52, specifically in verses 7–10.[31] In no way coincidentally, these same four verses comprise the most frequently quoted Isaiah text in the whole of the Book of Mormon.[32]

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[30] A good summary of this schema and its use in the Book of Mormon can be found in Garold N. Davis, "Pattern and Purpose of the Isaiah Commentaries in the Book of Mormon," in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research & Mormon Studies, 1998), 277–303.

[31] Commentators often note that these four verses, taken together, provide a succinct statement of the whole of Second Isaiah's prophecy. See, for instance, the comments of Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 406. For a brief summary of the towering influence of this passage in the biblical tradition, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 344; see also John Goldingay and David Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, 2 vols. (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 2:261–64.

[32] Pike also notes the frequency of allusions to or borrowings from this passage elsewhere in early Mormon sources ("Imagery of Isaiah 52:7–10," 251–54).

In their King James rendering, they read as follows:

> How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Here the entire four-part schema appears: (1) removal into exile is implied, since good tidings have to be brought from afar, just as (2) suffering in exile is also implied, since good tidings are so appreciatively received; and then (3) the announcement is one of restoration and return, with waste places themselves finding reason to rejoice, all this (4) leading to the demonstration of God's power to deliver before all the gentile nations. In a profound way, this passage serves as a synopsis of everything about Isaiah that interests the Book of Mormon.

And yet, curiously, even as Isa 52:7–10 is the most frequently quoted passage of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon more generally, it appears only in passing and rather formulaic allusions in the first part of the book, where otherwise Nephi is presented as having given such detailed interpretive attention to Isaiah.[33] The careful reader cannot help feeling that this particular passage

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[33] The first of these two allusions appears in 1 Nephi 13:37, in which Nephi quotes an angelic messenger's word to him regarding those who "seek to bring for [the Lord's] Zion at that [the last] day": "Whoso shall publish peace—that shall publish tidings of great joy—how beautiful upon the mountains shall they be!" The second appears in 1 Nephi 22:10–11, where Nephi attempts an explanation of Isaiah 48–49 by tying it to Gen 12:3 ("In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed," that verse is rendered in 1 Nephi 22:9): "And I would, my brethren, that ye should know that all the kindreds of the earth cannot be blessed unless he [God] shall make bare his arm in the eyes of the nations. Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to make bare his arm in the eyes of all the nations in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto they which are of the house of Israel." These allusions together make clear that Nephi is supposed to be read as having been perfectly familiar with Isa 52:7–10, but neither amounts to a particularly probing investigation of the text. The latter of the two does suggest something of an interesting interpretive gesture—at the very least by connecting the text explicitly to Genesis 12:3 and by providing some kind of explanation of exactly what

inspired Nephi, and yet Isa 52:7–10 never becomes the clear or explicit focus of the Book of Mormon in any sustained way until long after Nephi's death. Thus, despite Isa 52:7–10 serving as a particularly beautiful encapsulation of the whole of Second Isaiah's prophetic output, and despite the first portion of the Book of Mormon serving as the volume's most sustained engagement with Second Isaiah quite generally, this particular passage never becomes a major focus there. All that gets quoted of Isa 52 in the first sequence of the Book of Mormon is its first two verses, and even these are quoted somewhat perfunctorily.[34]

But despite the relative lack of direct interest in Isa 52:7–10 in the first part of the book, one can easily make the case that more or less all attention given to Isaiah in the Book of Mormon after Nephi's death focuses *solely* on interpreting this one passage. If the volume were missing its first sequence,[35] the whole of the book could be justifiably read as an investigation just of Isa 52:7–10. But because the writings attributed to Nephi open the book, saturated with a variety of close and inventive readings of Isaianic texts, it is impossible to say that the whole book amounts to an investigation of Isa 52:7–10. Nephi's sustained interactions with Isaiah focus instead primarily on Isaiah 11, 29, and 49—never on Isa 52. Yet Isa 52:7–10 *is* there in the first major portion of the book. Although the light there shines squarely on different texts from Isaiah, Isa 52:7–10 seems in crucial ways to be hovering just outside the circle of light, as already noted. And the remainder of the Book of Mormon, focused intensely on Isa 52:7–10, asks that the reader look to the edge of the circle in connection with Nephi's writings to see what they have to say about the meaning of the passage.

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is supposed to be meant by God making his arm bare. But these gestures are quite remarkably less intense, interpretively, than those Nephi makes with respect to other Isaiah passages, and than those that other Book of Mormon voices make with respect to Isa 52:7–10.

[34] Isa 52:1–2 is quoted not in its own right but as a kind of conclusion to Isa 50–51, two chapters that are in turn quoted as a continuation and partial explanation of Isa 49:22–26. (All these are quoted in the course of 2 Nephi 6–8.) The use of Isa 52:1–2 to conclude the quotation of Isa 50–51 seems to be motivated—this is what makes its quotation somewhat perfunctory—by the repetition of "Awake! Awake!" from Isa 51:9, 17 in Isa 52:1. It also makes the full quotation of Isa 50–51 end on a more clearly positive note than it would if the quotation ended with the conclusion of Isa 51.

[35] That is, were Smith to have concluded his dictation of the text when he came to what is now the end of the book, instead of then proceeding to dictate the lengthy portion of text that serves now as the volume's opening sequence, i.e., from the First Book of Nephi through the Book of Omni (see note 22 above).

Of course, as I have shown, what Nephi's writings have to say about Isa 52:7–10 is largely implicit. The first part of the Book of Mormon just seems to assume that the passage outlines the events of exile and restoration in the sixth century, along with the effects of these events on gentiles, before it then assumes that the passage can also be "likened" to the parallel (and prophetically anticipated) history of New-World Israelites (Josephites). Nephi's two passing allusions to Isa 52:7–10, mentioned above, make perfectly clear that he is meant to be understood as applying the passage to the subjugation of New-World Israelites by gentiles in the early modern era, and to the subsequent possibility of a reorientation of European Christianity to its Jewish roots.[36] Significantly, this largely implicit interpretation of Isa 52:7–10 finds itself effectively at odds with several other interpretations—all of them explicit—offered over the course of the remainder of the book. These deserve separate treatment.

Isa 52:7–10 for Abinadi and His Opponents

The first significant treatment of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon after Nephi's death comes in a situation of overt conflict—a situation of conflict, moreover, between rival conceptions of true religion. Although this conflict is presented as occurring some four centuries after Nephi's time, the intervening history is narrated in such abbreviated form that the conflict comes more or less as the very next story in the book. And crucially, the conflict seems, on close reading, to be intentionally presented as growing out of Nephi's attempt to make sense of Isaiah.[37] Further, once the conflict is resolved, the

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[36] In 1 Nephi 13:37, those publishing peace are pretty clearly to be understood as gentile Christians who, by taking the Book of Mormon to native American peoples, make the identity of Josephites known. In 1 Nephi 22:10–11, the making bare of the Lord's arm in the eyes of all nations is accomplished in that ancient Israel's covenants and ancient Christianity's gospel are both made known, in full view of gentile Christians, to native American peoples.

[37] The Book of Mormon, after Nephi's record (and several minor contributors to it), presents itself as largely the work of Mormon, from whom the book takes its name. Beginning with the Book of Mosiah and running through the Book of Mormon, the narrative unfolds as a third-person story told by Mormon, who is positioned historically at the end of the story. Mormon has relatively clear agendas, nicely traced by Hardy in a recent book (*Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 87–213). Importantly, those agendas are presented as having taken their orientation in an important way from a close reading of Nephi's record (see the brief Words of Mormon that intervene, in the Book of Mormon, between Nephi's record and Mormon's record). Because Nephi's record is so unmistakably taken up with the question of interpreting Isaiah's writings, it seems significant that Mormon's history is orga-

reader naturally feels as if the whole question of Isaiah's meaning has been fully decided, since references to Isaiah almost entirely disappear from the Book of Mormon for three hundred pages of text. More than a century and a half of the book's chronology passes with just a few fleeting allusions to Isaiah.[38] Eventually, questions concerning the interpretation of Isaiah return to the foreground, significantly doing so at the climax of the book, when the resurrected Jesus Christ makes a New-World appearance.[39] But until that point, the much-earlier conflict concerning Isa 52:7–10, along with its apparent resolution, determines the status of Isaiah's meaning for the Book of Mormon.

As noted, the conflict arises four centuries after the days of Nephi (though only a few pages after Nephi's story). Naturally, major changes have occurred by that point. During Nephi's time, the children of Lehi divide into rival nations—the Nephites and the Lamanites (the latter named after Nephi's oldest brother)—and the intervening centuries are characterized by continual warfare. A generation before the opening of the Book of Mosiah, the Lamanites gain the upper hand, sacking the Land of Nephi. Only a few Nephites escape, resettling in the Land of Zarahemla (an already inhabited territory nearby). Thereafter, a small group of zealots, hoping to reclaim lands lost to the Lamanites, establish a treaty with the Lamanite king and begin recolonizing the Land of Nephi. Under their first king, Zeniff, the colonists win several battles against their Lamanite neighbors, with the result that a false sense of security settles over the colony at about the time the second king, Noah, comes to the throne. Adding to this false sense of security is a period of economic prosperity. Noah lives in Solomonic splendor while his debauched priests justify the regime's oppressions through ideological preaching; the text speaks not only of the priests "spend[ing] their time

nized around two particularly important events where the interpretation of Isaiah's writings become a central question anew. For a general interpretation of the Book of Mormon along such lines, see Spencer, *An Other Testament*.

[38] In the first (1830) edition of the Book of Mormon, nothing concerning the Book of Isaiah or its interpretation appears between pages 190 and 486—that is, in current chaptering, between Mosiah 17 and 3 Nephi 15. The events recounted in Mosiah 11–16, moreover, are presented as having occurred at some point substantially earlier than 120 BCE, while the events recounted in 3 Nephi 15–26 are presented as having occurred in 34 CE.

[39] Average Latter-day Saint readers of the Book of Mormon tend to downplay the Isaianic focus of the book's account of Jesus Christ's ancient visit to the New World. For a good survey of what usually interests most readers, see the summary treatment in Andrew C. Skinner, *Third Nephi: The Fifth Gospel* (Springville: CFI, 2012).

with harlots" (Mosiah 11:14), but also of the "lying and vain words" they use while addressing the people (Mosiah 11:11).

What emerges as the story unfolds is that the priests use Isa 52:7–10 as a kind of scriptural touchstone for justifying Noah's regime. When a classic Hebrew prophet figure named Abinadi appears among Noah's people—predicting first that Noah's wickedness will bring the people "into bondage" (Mosiah 11:21) and then, when repentance is not forthcoming, that the people "shall be slain" and Noah's life "shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace" (Mosiah 12:2–3)—the priests find themselves confronting the prophet in a show trial.[40] To clinch their case, they propose a hermeneutic contest, asking Abinadi to defend himself with a viable interpretation of Isa 52:7–10. They introduce the passage as "the words which are written, and which have been taught by our fathers" (Mosiah 12:20). Readers are clearly meant to assume that the passage has developed a relatively standard interpretation among the Nephite colonists (apparently already established before Zeniff's death and Noah's ascendancy), an interpretation the priests believe Abinadi would both know and espouse. The twist of the story comes when Abinadi produces an entirely novel interpretation of the Isaiah passage, shifting the gravitational center of the Book of Mormon's approach to Isaiah substantially.

The priests' interpretation is left largely implicit in the text, but it proves easy to reconstruct.[41] Loosely following Nephi's program of "likening," the Nephite colonists see in Isa 52:7–10 an outline of their own then-recent colonizing experience, as if their adventures in Lamanite territory have fulfilled the prophecy: Isaiah anticipated that the Lord would "bring again Zion," and the colonists have seen their own lost lands of inheritance restored to them; the "waste places" of their "Jerusalem" can "sing together" because it has been "redeemed"; undoubtedly, they feel that God has "made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations"—at least of those nations that matter to them: the

[40] In an essential study, John Welch has investigated the Abinadi story carefully from the perspective of biblical legal practices. In the course of his study, moreover, he produces some of the best available exegesis of the Abinadi story as well. See John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2008).

[41] See Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. II, *Jacob through Mosiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 208; Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Transcripts of Lectures Presented to an Honors Book of Mormon Class at Brigham Young University, 1988–1990*, 4 vols. (Foundation for Ancient Research & Mormon Studies, 1993), 2:71; Pike, "Imagery of Isaiah 52:7–10," 264; Welch, *Legal Cases*, 176; Spencer, *An Other Testament*, 142–45.

Lamanites—given their belief that their military victories amount to divinely granted "salvation." It seems readers of the Book of Mormon are intended to understand that the colonists under Zeniff and Noah have come to see Isa 52:8–10 as applicable not only to exiled Judah's return to Jerusalem, but also to the restoration of certain Nephites to the lands of their inheritance.[42] And so readers are intended also to understand that the priests, and perhaps the colonists more generally, understand the basic meaning of Isa 52:7, with its talk of beautiful feet and "good tidings of good," to be that prophets will now only speak of restoration and deliverance. Abinadi's dour prophetic message contradicts the spirit of this interpretation.

The uneasy proximity between this priestly interpretation in the Book of Mosiah and the implicit interpretation attributed to Nephi earlier in the Book of Mormon deserves careful notice. Both extract from Isaiah certain historical patterns that are then reapplied to events more relevant to Book of Mormon peoples. But while Nephi's interpretation reapplies Isaianic patterns to events he sees in visions, events thousands of years in the future, the priests reapply Isaianic patterns to events in their own time—events they themselves live through. This difference is surely important, but it does not make irrelevant the more general proximity between the two interpretations. Readers of the Book of Mormon who come to the story of Abinadi after dutifully imbibing the spirit of Nephi's approach to Isaiah should feel as if Noah's priests represent just a slightly corrupted version of Nephi's interpretive strategy. The priests' question regarding the meaning of Isa 52:7–10 seems intended to suggest that something has gone awry in Nephi's long-standing Isaianic program, revealing it as potentially dangerous. Unless subtle differences between Nephi's original approach to Isaiah and that of Noah's

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[42] It is interesting that the Book of Mormon leaves the colonists' interpretation of Isa 52:7–10 unstated, even if it is relatively obvious what it is supposed to be. At this point, the Book of Mormon invites speculation and reconstruction of the text's assumed historical background, where one might instead expect—given the volume's unquestionably didactic style—a kind of point-by-point summary of the colonists' point of view. Although the Book of Mormon makes the interpretation of Isa 52:7–10 a central question beginning with the story of Abinadi, it never strains itself in presenting the whole panoply of interpretive options; instead it leaves to the reader to do the detective work necessary to reconstruct certain interpretations that the authorial voices in the text clearly mean to reject as viable options. This is in itself a noteworthy bit of literary artistry. As Hardy (borrowing from Mark Twain's description of Wagnerian opera) says of the Book of Mormon more generally, it is "better than it sounds" (*Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 273).

priests can be teased out, the weaknesses of Nephi's approach might outweigh its strengths.[43]

Strikingly, Abinadi's response to the priests' question concerning Isaiah is not to draw out the subtle differences between Nephi's and their approaches to the prophet.[44] Instead, he offers a drastically distinct—and entirely non-Nephi-like—interpretation of the Isaianic text, one that develops over the course of several pages. Abinadi entirely abandons the idea of "likening" the text, assuming instead that Isaiah's prophecies are straightforward prophecies of very specific events, events quite distinct from those surrounding Judah's sixth-century exile in Babylon. More, the events of which Abinadi sees Isaiah prophesying transcend the whole larger history of covenant Israel. Where Nephi and Noah's priests interpret Isaiah as speaking forcefully and directly to the historical experience of covenant peoples (Judah, the New-World remnant, and even the Nephites of Zeniff's generation), Abinadi takes Isaiah's prophecies as describing events that, from his perspective, supersede covenantal history. In a word, Abinadi develops an emphatically Christological interpretation of Isa 52:7–10.[45]

Abinadi's interpretation is in no way presented as straightforward, however. In a remarkably sophisticated interpretation, Abinadi uses Isa 53 as

[43] Perhaps the Book of Mormon wishes its readers to understand that Nephi himself was aware of this potential difficulty. After all of his careful interpretive work on Isaiah, he concludes his record in mourning "because of the unbelief, and the wickedness, and the ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men—for they will not search knowledge, nor understand great knowledge, when it is given unto them in plainness, even as plain as word can be" (2 Nephi 32:7).

[44] It seems to be significant that Noah's priests never identify Isaiah by name, though they quote four full verses from Isaiah 52. It is only Abinadi who goes on to identify the author of the passage (see Mosiah 14:1), almost as if the priests knew the words only as an authoritative saying, rather than as a specifically Isaianic word.

[45] Of course, messianism—and therefore every Christology—unquestionably has as its original context Jewish thought and history. In saying that Abinadi's Christological interpretation of Isaiah focuses on events superseding covenantal and non-covenantal history, I mean just to indicate that the sort of Christianity Abinadi represents is so deeply universalist that it never raises the question of its universalism. That is, Abinadi's sort of Christianity never points out that the universal implications of Christian atonement undermine the difference between covenantal and non-covenantal peoples; it simply is universal. In Abinadi's teachings and those presented in the Book of Mormon as having been influenced by him, there simply is no talk whatsoever either of Jews/Israelites or of gentiles. Christianity is a message presented simply and solely to human beings, the children of God. It is in this sense that Abinadi clearly shifts the basic nature of Nephite interpretation of Isaiah.

a hermeneutic key for Isa 52:7–10, apparently motivated by two linguistic or thematic connections between Isa 52:7–10 and Isa 53:1. Both passages focus on preaching or reporting (compare Isa 52:7 and 53:1),[46] and both contain references to "the arm of the Lord" (compare Isa 52:10 and 53:1). What Isa 53:1 has to say about preaching—that many fail to "believe" the prophet's "report"—indicates that the priests' optimistic interpretation of Isa 52:7 ("good tidings of good") moves far too quickly. Similarly, what Isa 53:1 has to say about the Lord's arm—that it remains a question "to whom" exactly it is "revealed"—in turn indicates that the colonists' interpretation of Isa 52:10 ("in the eyes of all the nations") assumes too much. According to Abinadi, the Book of Isaiah itself directly complicates the meaning of Isa 52:7–10. And the fact that Isa 53:1 introduces what Abinadi understands—in classically Christian fashion—to be a clear prophecy of Jesus's suffering is supposed to indicate that the meaning of Isa 52:7–10 has more to do with Jesus and with Christian atonement than with anything else.[47]

[46] It should be noted that Saint Paul explicitly draws a connection between these two passages in Rom 10:13–17, in connection with his theology of preaching. As it reads in the King James Version, here is the passage: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preach? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Abinadi's (somewhat implicit) linking of these same two texts suggests some kind of intertextual connection with Romans 10, but not enough to draw out the full weight of Paul's argument, which concerns quite precisely the relationship between Jews and gentiles. On questions of the relationship between the Book of Mormon and New Testament language and ideas, see Nicholas J. Frederick, "Evaluating the Interaction between the New Testament and the Book of Mormon: A Proposed Methodology," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24 (2015): 1–30.

[47] It seems significant that the Book of Mormon nowhere contests or complicates Abinadi's Christological interpretation of Isa 53—though it must be said that no one apart from Abinadi ever really says a word about Isa 53. It is not clear whether this is supposed to suggest that all prophetic voices represented in the Book of Mormon would have agreed on the Christological meaning of Isa 53, or whether readers are to assume that Nephi (for instance) would have had a non-Christological interpretation of Isa 53. This remains an open question—and a deeply interesting one, given the long history of debate concerning the meaning of the song of the suffering servant. To get a good sense of the current status of the discussion, see Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, eds., *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). For a careful but largely traditional approach to Isa 53 in the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch, "Isaiah 53, Mosiah 14, and the Book of Mormon," in Parry and Welch, *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 293–312.

Abinadi's use of Isa 53 as a hermeneutic lens for Isa 52:7–10 is more complicated still, however. After quoting the whole of Isa 53 as evidence that "all the prophets which have prophesied ever since the world began" have "said that God himself should come down among the children of men" (Mosiah 13:33–34), Abinadi presents a fascinating interpretation of the song of the suffering servant, an interpretation focused most intensely on just two aspects of the text: its talk of "generation" ("And who shall declare his generation?") and its talk of "seed" ("When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed").[48] The former detail Abinadi appears to interpret in a patristic fashion, understanding the prophet's question about the servant's generation to express awe at the mystery of divine incarnation (see Mosiah 15:1–10).[49] The reference to seed, however, proves more essential to Abinadi's interpretation of Isa 52:7–10. Making up Christ's seed, according to Abinadi, is "whosoever hath heard the words of the prophets… and believed [before the event] that the Lord would redeem his people" (Mosiah 15:11), along with "all the holy prophets" themselves, those who prophesied of the redemptive event (Mosiah 15:13).

What makes the prophets and their disciples Christ's seed is, according to Abinadi, the fact that they are to rise with him at his resurrection. Abinadi explains:

> The Son reigneth and hath power over the dead; therefore he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead. And there cometh a resurrection—even a first resurrection—yea, even a resurrection of those that have been and which are and which shall be,

[48] Some Mormon interpreters have noted the similarity between the Hebrew term translated "arm" in Isa 53:1 and the Hebrew term translated "seed" in Isa 53:10, reading some significance into the possible connection. See, for instance, George Reynolds and Jane M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Philip C. Reynolds, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 2:155.

[49] The passage in which Abinadi offers his interpretation of the servant's "generation" is among the most difficult in the Book of Mormon, one that often frustrates lay Latter-day Saint readers because it seems to espouse a theological conception of God eventually rejected by Joseph Smith and officially rejected by the Latter-day Saint Church today. Nonetheless, it does seem that the passage can be consistently read as consonant with current Latter-day Saint theological commitments. For a standard such interpretation, see McConkie and Millet, *Jacob through Mosiah*, 225–34. For examples of the patristic interpretation, see Mark W. Elliott, ed., *Isaiah 40–66*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007), 167–68; Robert Louis Wilken, Angela Russell Christman, and Michael J. Hollerich, eds. and trans., *Isaiah Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 419, 427, 429.

> even until the resurrection of Christ (for so shall he be called).
> And now, the resurrection of all the prophets, and all those that
> have believed in their words—or all those that have kept the
> commandments of God—these shall come forth in the first res-
> urrection. (Mosiah 15:20–22)

Abinadi here imagines that pre-Christian prophets (whom he understands as
prophesying directly of Jesus) and their believing disciples will rise together
at Christ's resurrection, such that he will "see" them ("he shall see his seed").
And these prophets he then praises in explicitly Isaianic terms: "These are
they which hath published peace, that hath brought good tidings of good,
that hath published salvation, that saith unto Zion, 'Thy God reigneth!' And
O! How beautiful upon the mountains were their feet!" (Mosiah 15:14–15).
For Abinadi, the key to understanding Isa 52:7, with its talk of publishing
peace and beautiful swift feet on the mountains, is Isa 53:10, understood as a
prophecy of a "first resurrection" at the time of Christ's rising from the dead.

    As he continues, Abinadi turns next to the scandal of particularity. That
is, he recognizes that the Christian story of salvation seems to leave whole
swaths of the human family entirely out of account.[50] His first response to
this worry simply insists (like other voices in the Book of Mormon) that all
who "have died, before Christ came, in their ignorance, not having salvation
declared unto them," will nonetheless "have part in the first resurrection"
along with the prophets and their disciples (Mosiah 15:24).[51] But then Abi-
nadi goes on to claim that particularity will be swallowed up in universality
after Christ's resurrection: "I say unto you that the time shall come that the
salvation of the Lord shall be declared to every nation, kindred, tongue, and
people" (Mosiah 15:28). And significantly, Abinadi links this idea directly
to Isa 52:8–10—especially (it seems) to verse 10: "The Lord hath made bare
his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall
see the salvation of our God" (Mosiah 15:31). For Abinadi, when Isaiah
speaks of people seeing "eye to eye," he has reference to an eventually uni-
versal Christianity, the result of "the watchmen… lift[ing] up their voice"

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[50] The scandal of particularity was a constant concern for Mormonism's founder, Joseph
Smith. See Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early
Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 203–47.

[51] For similar passages in the Book of Mormon, see 2 Nephi 9:20–27; Mosiah 3:9–12; and
Moroni 8:20–23.

to announce that "the Lord hath comforted his people" in redemption from death (Mosiah 15:29–30).[52]

Through the story of Abinadi, the Book of Mormon thus develops a rich and complex Christological interpretation of Isa 52:7–10, placing it alongside and in tension with the entirely non-Christological interpretations of Noah's priests and of Nephi. Viewed through the lens of Isa 53 (also interpreted Christologically), Isa 52:7–10 first praises pre-Christian prophets who explicitly anticipate the coming of the Messiah. It then goes on to describe how that same prophetic message, after the Christic event, will spread through the world, until all human beings see "eye to eye" and recognize that "the Lord hath comforted his people." The eventual spread of the Christian message then amounts to the making bare of the Lord's arm before all nations. For Abinadi, apparently none of this has to do with ancient Judah's exile in Babylon or even with any likening of that exile to other moments in Israel's history.[53]

And, as already noted, once the Abinadi narrative comes to a close, the reader naturally feels as if the whole question of Isaiah's meaning has been decided. Not only do references to and discussions about Isaiah largely disappear from the Book of Mormon until the resurrected Christ makes his appearance,[54] but the narrative reports the creation of a kind of Abinadite church—a pre-Christian "church of anticipation"[55]—that solidifies and in-

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[52] It is tempting to suggest that Abinadi is supposed to understand Isaiah's talk of seeing "eye to eye" as a description also of the first resurrection, of the prophets and their disciples seeing each other eye to eye as they rise together with Christ, or of the prophets and their disciples together seeing eye to eye with Christ, who sees them as his seed when he rises from the dead. It seems more straightforwardly to be the case, however, given the placement of the final quotation of Isa 52:8–10 within Abinadi's defense, that he is supposed to understand Isaiah's talk of seeing "eye to eye" to refer specifically to the eventual development of universal Christianity.

[53] Occasional references in Abinadi's defense to God redeeming "his people" perhaps suggest that he is to be understood as having an eye to Judah's or Israel's historical redemption, rather than to the redemption of human beings (collectively understood as God's children and therefore as God's people). This remains unclear, however.

[54] Significantly, there are two passing references to Isa 52:7 in Mosiah 18:30 and Mosiah 27:37, in each case describing as instances of publishing peace the successes of Nephite Christians in preaching and missionizing. These references only suggest all the more straightforwardly that Abinadi's interpretation of Isaiah is supposed to be read as generally accepted after his prophetic intervention.

[55] I take this term from Hugh Nibley's analysis of the Nephite church. See Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 130–33.

stitutionalizes his message and, presumably, his approach to Isaiah.[56] Eventually, however, questions about the interpretation of Isaiah are raised anew, and thereafter Isaiah remains a relatively consistent focus in the Book of Mormon. Significantly, the chief focus of the reemergence of Isaianic interpretation continues to be Isa 52:7–10.

Isa 52:7–10 for and after Christ

As already mentioned, the Book of Mormon comes to an unmistakable climax when Jesus Christ, resurrected from the dead, appears among the children of Lehi. The account of that appearance focuses on the events of just two days, when Christ instructs New-World Israelites. Early in the first day, Christ quotes Isa 52:8–10 and offers a preliminary interpretation by clarifying the circumstances of the prophecy's fulfilment. Echoing Nephi's prophecies, he describes a history of Jewish diaspora after Jerusalem's destruction, and then of Josephite devastation when Europeans arrive in the Americas in the early modern period. Christ then speaks of "that day when the gentiles shall sin against my gospel and shall reject the fullness of my gospel," when he will "remember my covenant" to Israel (3 Nephi 16:10–11). Then, he claims, gentiles in the New World will face destruction unless they "repent" and are "numbered among… [the] house of Israel" (3 Nephi 16:13). Describing this destruction of non-Israelite Christians, the Book of Mormon's Christ draws on Micah 5:8: "I will suffer my people, O house of Israel, that they shall go through among [New-World gentiles] and shall tread them down" (3 Nephi 16:15). And then, when unfaithful gentiles are eliminated and faithful Israel restored, "the words of the prophet Isaiah shall be fulfilled" (3 Nephi 16:17). Christ identifies the words he has in mind by quoting, specifically, Isa 52:8–10 (see 3 Nephi 16:18–20).[57]

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[56] The Nephite Christian church explicitly uses "the words of Abinadi" as their core text according to Mosiah 18:1.

[57] There is some difficulty in the text of the Book of Mormon at this point. Recent and current editions of the text have Christ state that it is "then" (that is, at the time of gentile destruction) that "the words of the prophet Isaiah shall be fulfilled." All earlier editions and the only available pre-printing manuscript of the text, however, have the word "when" in the place of "then." See the discussion in Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research & Mormon Studies, 2004–2009), 5:3409–11. If one follows the earlier version (which seems clearly to be what Joseph Smith himself dictated originally), then it seems that the fulfillment of Isa 52:8–10 is something the visiting Christ introduces as something occurring only *after* the destruction of the gentiles—rather than as effectively equivalent to or at least concurrent with the destruction of the gentiles.

But as soon as Christ quotes this passage from Isaiah, his sermonizing breaks off. He gazes on his audience and sees that they "cannot understand" his meaning (3 Nephi 17:2). Consequently, he dedicates the remainder of his first day with them to preparations for a second day of sermonizing. And after proper preliminaries on the second day, he returns to the Isaiah text: "Behold, now I finish the commandment which the Father hath commanded me concerning this people.... Ye remember that I spake unto you and said that when the words of Isaiah should be fulfilled—behold, they are written, ye have them before you, therefore search them—and verily, verily I say unto you, that when they shall be fulfilled, then is the fulfilling of the covenant which the Father hath made unto his people" (3 Nephi 20:10–12).[58] In this connection, the Book of Mormon's Christ again quotes from the prophet Micah, but now more fully and more disconcertingly: "If the gentiles do not repent…, then shall ye which are a remnant of the house of Jacob go forth among them, and ye shall be in the midst of them as a lion among the beasts of the forest, and as a young lion among the flocks of sheep who, if he goeth through, both treadeth down and teareth in pieces—and none can deliver" (3 Nephi 20:15–16). Christ's first interpretation of Isa 52:8–10 is thus consistent. The passage, for the Book of Mormon's Christ, finds initial fulfilment when the Lord's favor shifts from gentiles (European Christians) to scattered Israel (in particular the New-World Josephites), with the latter rising up apocalyptically against the former.[59]

Further along in the second day of instruction, Christ again returns to Isa 52:8–10, but now apparently by outlining a *second* fulfilment of the prophecy. Describing the time when, after gentile destruction and Josephite restoration in the New World, "the fullness of [the] gospel shall be preached" to Jews returning to Jerusalem (3 Nephi 20:30),[60] Christ says the following:

> And they shall believe in me—that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God—and shall pray unto the Father in my name. Then shall

[58] Other passages from Micah appear in the course of Christ's sermonizing in the Book of Mormon, though relatively little has been written on this subject by interpreters of the text. Significantly, attention is paid particularly to passages from Micah focused on the theme of the remnant, suggesting a deliberate hermeneutic running in clear parallel to that associated in the Book of Mormon with Isaiah.

[59] For a brilliant analysis of the Book of Mormon's discussions of this eventual shift away from European religious hegemony, see Hickman, "Book of Mormon."

[60] The Book of Mormon, with relative consistency, anticipates the conversion of Jews to at least some form of Christianity. For discussion of the relevant texts, as well as of the political and ethical difficulties, see Steven Epperson, *Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 19–41.

their watchmen lift up their voice, and with the voice together
shall they sing, for they shall see eye to eye. Then will the Father
gather them together again and give unto them Jerusalem for
the land of their inheritance. Then shall they break forth into
joy. Sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem! For the Father
hath comforted his people! He hath redeemed Jerusalem! The
Father hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of the Father!
(3 Nephi 20:31–35)

Here Christ in the Book of Mormon takes Isa 52:8–10 to be fulfilled a sec-
ond time by events specifically centered around Jews, rather than (as at first)
around other Israelites experiencing restoration. Interestingly, where the first
fulfilment of the prophecy identified by Christ arguably understands Isa-
ianic references to Jerusalem as metaphorical, the second fulfilment seems
to take the text literally because it occurs along with an actual return of Jews
to Jerusalem.[61] At the same time, where the first fulfilment is identified with
a straightforward quotation of Isa 52:8–10 as it stands in the King James
Bible, the second fulfilment is identified in connection with an altered text
of Isa 52:8–10 (references to "the Lord" being replaced by reference to "the
Father," for instance).[62] There are, then, differences between the actual texts
of the prophecy fulfilled in each instance, as well as between the way cer-
tain common words in both texts are referentially understood. The second
fulfilment of Isa 52:8–10 is immediately followed by quotations of most of
the remainder of Isa 52, including verse 7 with its talk of beautiful feet and
published peace.

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[61] Presumably, the references to Jerusalem in Isa 52:8–10 in its first fulfilment are to be
understood as references to what Christ in the Book of Mormon calls "the new Jerusalem,"
to be built in the New World for gathered Josephites (see 3 Nephi 20:22; 21:23, 24; as well
as the discussion later in the Book of Mormon in Ether 13:2–10). This theme is one Joseph
Smith developed later in more detail in his own revelations and writings.

[62] The references in the variant text to "the Father" play into a much larger theme in Christ's
two days of instruction. From the beginning of the first day, Christ identifies a Nephite debate
regarding the respective natures of the Father and the Son, attempting to clarify things (see 3
Nephi 11:21–39). From there, the relationship between Father and Son is a constant theme
in Christ's sermonizing. Note that the quotation of Isa 52:8–10 is followed, in connection
with the second fulfillment, with "And the Father and I are one" (3 Nephi 20:35), an apparent
allusion to John 10:30 (one of many allusions to Johannine texts in this portion of the Book
of Mormon; see the following note).

At its climax, then, the Book of Mormon adds yet another approach to Isa 52:7–10 to the interpretations offered earlier in the volume. Significantly, this fourth interpretation shares some elements with Nephi's approach but other elements with Abinadi's approach, as if it complexly fused the two. Unlike Nephi but like Abinadi, Christ does not understand Isaiah's prophecies to require a program of likening; rather, he seems to regard Isa 52:7–10 to be a straightforward prophecy of readily specifiable events. But unlike Abinadi and like Nephi, Christ understands the events in question to be not the founding events of Christianity, but those surrounding the restoration of Israelites to situations of peace (Jews *and* Josephites). In another, essential way, however, Christ goes beyond both Nephi and Abinadi in his interpretation, since, as the fully divine Christ,[63] he is free to articulate the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy by both quoting it as it stands in the Bible and deliberately manipulating the text to make it say what he wishes it to say. Christ exhibits a certain textual freedom with Isaiah that neither Abinadi nor Nephi exhibits in exactly the same way.[64]

Simultaneously, Christ in the Book of Mormon stages a hermeneutical defense of his interpretation of Isa 52:7–10. To secure the meaning of Isaiah's prophecy, he connects it to Isa 54 (see 3 Nephi 22), exhibiting a hermeneutic distinct from Abinadi's, who (as discussed above) connects it to Isa 53. The Christ of the Book of Mormon thus appears to see a continuous story that begins in Isa 52, leaps right over Isa 53, and proceeds in Isa 54—a story exclusively (and consistently) about Israel's redemption, whether Old-World

[63] In a crucial study, Krister Stendahl has argued that the Christ of the Book of Mormon is emphatically the Christ of the Johannine literature—divine through and through. He makes this case through a careful analysis of the Book of Mormon's presentation of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount, noting the ways in which slight variants in the Book of Mormon's version of the text suggest a kind of Johannine redaction. See Krister Stendahl, "The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi," in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), 139–54. On Johannine themes in the Book of Mormon (and Mormon scripture) more generally, see Nicholas J. Frederick, *The Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016).

[64] Nephi too exhibits some freedom with certain Isaiah texts, especially with Isa 29. See, for instance, the helpful discussion in Grant Hardy and Heather Hardy, "How Nephi Shapes His Readers' Perceptions of Isaiah," in *Reading Nephi Reading Isaiah: 2 Nephi 26–27*, ed. Joseph M. Spencer and Jenny Webb (Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, Brigham Young University, 2016), 37–62. At the same time, there is a different feel about Christ's manipulation of Isa 52:8–10 compared to Nephi's handling of Isa 29. A defense of this point in full would, however, require too much space to justify including it here.

Judahites or New-World Josephites. In other words, rather than looking at Isa 52:7–10 through the lens of what Isa 53 might say about the singular messianic servant of God, Christ looks at the passage through the lens of what Isa 54 has to say about the plural covenant-bound servants of the Lord (see Isa 54:17; 3 Nephi 22:17).[65] And he concludes his recitation of Isa 54 with these words: "Ye had ought to search these things. Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently—for great is the words of Isaiah" (3 Nephi 23:1). Thus *the* text to which Christ points his New-World audience—and to which he points the Book of Mormon's modern readership—is Isa 54.

Significantly, something of an emphasis on the relationship between Isa 52 and Isa 54 continues to the end of the Book of Mormon, as if to indicate the influence and centrality of Christ's linking of these two texts. Most illustrative is an example from the final verses of the book. There Moroni, son of Mormon and the volume's final contributor, concludes the record by weaving language from Isa 52:1–2 and Isa 54:1–4. First, from the opening of Isa 52: "Awake and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem! Yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion!" (Moroni 10:31). But then, in place of the promise that follows in Isa 52, Moroni draws from the first verses of Isa 54: "And strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded!" (Moroni 10:31). This weaving reproduces Christ's hermeneutic earlier in the Book of Mormon, where Isa 52:7–10 is quoted alongside both Isa 52:1–2 and the whole of Isa 54.[66] From Christ's appearance to the end of the volume, Isa 54 serves as the hermeneutic key for making sense of the Isaiah passage with which the Book of Mormon most consistently concerns itself.[67] Similarly, direct echoes of Christ's rec-

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[65] It is often noted that Second Isaiah concludes with a pluralizing of the singular servant that is the focus of much of the text before the prophet's final words. In Isa 54:17, the one "servant of the Lord" gives way to "the servants of the Lord." See, for instance, Childs, *Isaiah*, 430–31. For some theologically-inflected discussion of the possible significance of this shift from servant to servants, see Edgar W. Conrad, *Reading Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 143–52.

[66] As mentioned before, Christ quotes much of Isa 52 in the wake of his second quotation of Isa 52:8–10, and the very first of what he quotes (in fact immediately after completing the second quotation of Isa 52:8–10) is Isa 52:1–2 (see 3 Nephi 20:36–37).

[67] For a representative Latter-day Saint study of Isa 54, see Cynthia L. Hallen, "The Lord's Covenant of Kindness: Isaiah 54 and 3 Nephi 22," in Parry and Welch, *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 313–49.

ommendation to study Isaiah diligently appear in later portions of the Book of Mormon alongside imitations of his hermeneutic.[68]

With this interpretation of Isa 52:7–10 attributed to the resurrected Christ himself, the Book of Mormon tallies up four distinct approaches to the passage, only one of which—that of Noah's priests—is ever explicitly rejected as in some way corrupt. Christ's approach in certain ways draws on its predecessors within the volume, but it also forges ahead in new directions as well. A few words of conclusion and synthesis might bring the whole picture into focus.

Synthesis and Conclusion

In her dated but still-popular biography of Joseph Smith, Fawn Brodie suggests that whenever, in producing the Book of Mormon, Smith's "literary reservoir… ran dry," he "simply arranged for his Nephite prophets to quote from the Bible."[69] The evidence reviewed here, however, suggests that it is precisely where the Book of Mormon directly interacts with biblical texts that it exhibits its most compelling literary artfulness.[70] But more than art, study of the uses of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon suggests interpretive care and theological novelty.

The Book of Mormon illustrates at least four distinct interpretive strategies for making sense of just one representative passage of Isaiah. One of these is introduced into the story only to be rejected as the work of corrupt priests, but the other three it presents as good and right ways of understanding Isaiah. Significantly, it presents each of the three "approved" approaches to Isaiah as arising in unique circumstances, always at some historical distance from the emergence of the others. The first (originating with Nephi) appears at the volume's outset, presented as taking shape six centuries before the Christian era and motivated by an apocalyptic vision of the future. The second (originating with Abinadi) appears four centuries later, in response to the corruption of Isaianic interpretation, but it then serves as the foundation for a new spiritual movement. The third (originating with Christ himself)

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[68] The most significant of these appears in Mormon 8:21–26, again in the voice of Moroni.

[69] Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1995), 58.

[70] See Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 26–33.

emerges only in the Christian era, refocusing biblical interpretation more generally and remaining normative to the end of the volume. Although this last approach is privileged above the others to the extent that its author is Christ, the Book of Mormon never directly asks readers to prefer one approach above another. Instead, the book invites reflection on the idea that prophets in different contexts—along with Jesus Christ himself—might exhibit different approaches to sacred texts. In a sense, then, the Book of Mormon itself presents a reception history, a history of varying interpretations of one passage of Isaiah over a thousand years.

These three (affirmed) approaches to Isa 52:7–10, moreover, cannot be easily reconciled with each other. Christ and Nephi regard Isaiah's prophecies as applicable to both Jewish and Josephite branches of Israel, but Christ understands that double applicability to be the prophet's intention while Nephi understands Isaiah as addressing himself intentionally only to Jewish history. Again, Abinadi and Christ see Isaiah's prophecies as literally fulfilled by events long after Judah's exile in Babylon, but Abinadi identifies those events with the resurrection of Jesus Christ while Christ identifies those events with Israel's eschatological redemption. Nephi regards Isa 52:7–10 as relevant but less central than certain other Isaianic texts (such as Isaiah 11, 29, or 49), while Abinadi and Christ regard Isa 52:7–10 as the most central of all Isaianic texts. Abinadi uses Isa 53 as a hermeneutic lens for understanding Isa 52:7–10 while Christ takes Isa 54 as his own hermeneutic lens. Only Christ among the three indicates that the text of Isaiah can be heavily manipulated for purposes of preaching. In short, although there are certain constants in the Book of Mormon's treatment of Isaiah, there is much that varies as well, and in significant ways.

The Book of Mormon explicitly and emphatically presents this whole complex history of Nephite Isaianic interpretation as relevant to the nineteenth-century context in which the book first appeared. Despite the fact that the volume presents its story as occurring anciently, it insists that its history of interpretation speaks directly to the modern world. The volume's final contributor, Moroni, strongly commands the book's latter-day readers to "search the prophecies of Isaiah" (Mormon 8:23) because he has seen such readers' era. "I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not—but behold, Jesus Christ hath shewn you unto me, and I know your doing" (Mormon 8:35). Much earlier in the Book of Mormon, Nephi similarly explains that he prophetically knows that people living at the time of the book's publication "shall know of a surety" that "the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled"

(2 Nephi 25:7). Nephi in fact claims that he includes Isaiah in his writings because he knows that it will be "of great worth unto them in the last days" (2 Nephi 25:8). Thus, from beginning to end, the Book of Mormon seems to aim—and perhaps explicitly—at arguing that Isaiah's prophecies are relevant to religious controversies in nineteenth-century Christianity. It seems to see why some might follow the long Christian tradition of interpreting the Book of Isaiah as containing prophecies of Christ. But it also seems to see why others might understand Isaiah as focusing more on ancient Jewish history, while seeing his words as applicable to other Israelite groups. Above all, it seems to urge its readers to imitate Jesus Christ in understanding Isaiah's prophecies as focusing on the eventual redemption of all Israel after European Christianity has overgrown its roots. The only approach to Isaiah it explicitly rejects is one that, like that of Noah's priests, uses the prophet to justify corruption.

But more work remains to be done. This paper provides only a sketch of what the Book of Mormon does with one relatively brief passage from Isaiah. Close analysis of its varied uses of other Isaiah passages—and perhaps of biblical texts more generally—should reveal a still-richer picture.