Isaiah Updated

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IN THE TIME OF ISAIAH, some eight hundred years before the coming of Christ, there was, of course, no Old Testament as we know it today. The five books of the Torah (the Law) were not assembled until about 400 B.C., and it was not until A.D. 90 that most of the final canon of the Hebrew Bible — the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings — was decided by a council of teachers at Jamnia, thirty miles from the ruins of Jerusalem. With the inclusion of the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes in A.D. 135, the Hebrew Bible was complete.[1] In Isaiah's time, there was no indication that this Jewish prophet's writings would become part of a collection of Hebrew scriptures, let alone apply to events far in the future. This paper examines Isaiah's prophecies in their historical context and compares their meaning as a message for his time with the expanded meaning that Christians — and specifically Mormons — have since applied to them thousands of years later.

Early Christianity grew out of Judaism due largely to the missionary efforts of Paul, who carried the Christian gospel to the Graeco-Roman world. After A.D. 70, when the Romans overran the Jerusalem church of Christians, Christianity became less Jewish. It abandoned dietary laws and the practice of circumcision, and took on a unique identity of its own. No longer a sect within Judaism, Christianity rode the wave of Roman expansion to wide recognition, popularity, and, eventually, power.

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[1] When Jesus attended synagogue school in Nazareth, what we would today call the Bible was then known as the Law and the Prophets, a reference he often used. The Law (Torah) was canonized about 400 B.C.; the Prophets (including Isaiah) was added to the canon in about 200 B.C. See Alice Parmelee, *A Guidebook to the Bible* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1948), ch. 19.

By the time the Christian Bible was canonized about 393 A.D. at Hippo, a Roman city in North Africa, Christians had come to regard the Old Testament as both a chronicle of religious events before Christ and a prophecy of the advent of Christ. New Testament writers were seen as completing the work of Old Testament writers; the events they reported in the New Testament fulfilled the prophecies in the Old Testament. To Christians, Isaiah seemed to foretell the coming of a personal savior whose suffering would atone for man's sins and bring everlasting life. To Jews, Isaiah seemed to predict the salvation of Judah from oppression and suffering, if it would keep its covenant with Yahweh, Judah's savior and redeemer. Isaiah described the coming of a great king who would lead Judah to victory over its enemies.

When King Solomon died in 922 B.C., Israel split into two kingdoms: Israel in the north, Judah in the south. Isaiah was called to his prophetic mission in about 740 B.C. when the powerful nations of Assyria and Egypt threatened each other from opposite sides of Judah. His career spanned the last forty years of the eighth century through the reigns of four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The Babylonian and Palestinian Talmudim — an official collection of Jewish law and tradition — indicate that Isaiah was killed by Manasseh, Hezekiah's son and successor to the throne.[2]

The sixty-six chapters of the book of Isaiah cover three time periods: (1) the period when Judah was an independent kingdom in the eighth century B.C.; (2) the exilic period after Babylonia conquered Judah in 586 B.C. when the Jews had no country of their own; and (3) the postexilic period (after the Persians conquered Babylonia in 539 B.C. when a few of the exiles returned from Babylon to reestablish the Jewish community at Jerusalem). Although the whole work was traditionally ascribed to one author, most biblical scholars now find the evidence persuasive that the book is a composite of two or more authors living at quite different times. It is only in the first part of the book, chapters 1–39, that material from Isaiah's eighth century is found; from chapters 40–66, the historical setting is the sixth century B.C. The people are no longer residents of Jerusalem but exiles in Babylon (43:14; 48:20). Jerusalem has been destroyed and awaits rebuilding (44:26–28; 49:14–23). Babylon is no longer a friendly ally (2 Kgs 20:12–13) for she has destroyed

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[2] *Soncino Books of the Bible: Isaiah* (with Hebrew text and English translation), ed. A. Cohen (London: The Soncino Press, 1967), Introduction, pp. ix–xiv.

The first edition of the complete Hebrew Bible was printed at Soncino, Italy, in 1488. (See Parmelee, *Guidebook*, p. 152.) Prior to that, the sacred Hebrew texts had been copied and recopied by the Masoretes, carefully counting the letters in each book and noting the middle letter to insure accurate reproduction. No manuscript actually written by the author or editor of any Old Testament book is extant. The Soncino edition is in Hebrew and English (1917 translation by the Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia), with rabbinical annotation, old and new. Its authors claim this commentary to be "loyally true to the Jewish tradition with an eye to the latest researches of Biblical scholarship, criticism, and exegesis." Reference is made to important archeological discoveries, such as the cuneiform inscriptions in 1846, etc. Scholars have concluded that the Dead Sea Scrolls "confirm beyond all doubt the general accuracy of the Masoretic text." *The Cambridge Bible Commentary, The Making of the Old Testament*, ed. Enid B. Mellor (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 144–45.

Jerusalem. Unlike the time of Isaiah, the Davidic dynasty is rarely mentioned. The literary form is distinct: the tone has changed from threat and condemnation to consolation and hope; the style has changed from being brief and pointed to being expansive and lyrical. The later writings discuss exile and return to Jerusalem under Cyrus the Persian from a contemporary, not prophetic, viewpoint. Isaiah is generally considered to have written the first thirty-nine chapters (740–700 B.C.); an unknown prophet, named Deutero-(second) Isaiah by Bible scholars, wrote chapters forty to fifty-five during the Babylonian captivity (586–539 B.C.); and a Palestinian prophet called Trito-(third) Isaiah wrote chapters fifty-six to sixty-six after the return to Jerusalem (539–500 B.C.).[3]

Isaiah spoke frequently of the distinctive relationship between God and Judah. During political turmoil and threatened invasion from the alliance of Ephraim (i.e., Israel) and Syria, Isaiah prophesied that God would protect Judah and that Assyria would destroy both Ephraim and Syria. In fact, Assyria did capture Damascus (732 B.C.) and Samaria, the capital of Ephraim (722 B.C.). An account of these events is given in chapter seven of Isaiah and in 2 Kings 16:5–9.

When King Ahaz doubts that the Lord will protect Judah from the two attacking nations, Isaiah assures him: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a young woman shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14).

The name "Immanuel" is Hebrew for "God is with us," an appropriate name for a child whose birth would convince King Ahaz that God would protect Judah.[4] Isaiah further tells Ahaz that Assyria will destroy Judah's enemies even before the child is able to speak: "For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, my father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria" (Isa. 8:4).

Christians interpret these passages of Isaiah as a prophecy of the birth of Christ. Matthew, after recounting Jesus' birth, quotes Isaiah to indicate that the birth "fulfilled [that] which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet" (Matt. 1:22–23). In many editions of the King James Bible the headnote for Isaiah 7:14 reads "Christ promised for a sign." The 1979 LDS cross-referenced King James Version uses the note: "Christ shall be born of a virgin."

The difference between the meaning of the Hebrew word 'almāh and the Greek word parthenos, used in the Septuagint translation, is crucial to the different interpretations given to Isaiah by Jewish and traditional Christian

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[3] Peter R. Ackroyd, "The Book of Isaiah," *The Interpreter's Commentary on the Bible,* ed. Charles M. Laymon (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1971), pp. 329–71. See also *Soncino: Isaiah,* introduction; and Carroll Stuhlmueller, "Deutero-Isaiah," *Jerome Biblical Commentary,* eds. Raymond E. Brown, *et al.* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1968), ch. 22.

Harry M. Orlinski comments that "the personality of 'Trito-Isaiah' is even more elusive than that of his master . . . Our only means of knowing him . . . is as the editor of Deutero-Isaiah, and then through his own editor." Harry M. Orlinski, *Studies on the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah,* vol. 14 in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden, Holland: E. J. Brill, 1977), p. 15.

[4] *Soncino: Isaiah,* pp. 34–35 (commentary).

scholars. *'Almāh* means "young woman," and can refer to either maiden or newly married woman.[5] The Septuagint version, a Greek translation made by seventy-two Jewish scholars in the third century B.C., incorrectly uses *parthenos* which means exclusively *virgin*, not having had sexual intercourse.[6] Christians adopted the Septuagint misdefinition, and the term is found in early English translations such as the Rheims-Douay of 1582 and the King James Version of 1611. Reflecting recent Bible scholarship, the Oxford Revised Standard Version uses "young woman." [7]

The seventy-two Jewish scholars who translated the Hebrew "young woman" into the Greek *virgin* may have wanted to make the birth of Immanuel more extraordinary. But the Christians, who believed that Immanuel was Jesus, gave great significance to the idea of virgin birth. Reflecting the spirit-matter dualism of such popular religions from Persia as Mithraism, Manicheism, and Gnosticism — all offshoots of Zoroastrianism — early Christians, especially Paul, regarded sexual gratification as the work of Satan. Since they believed that the world of physical desire was evil, they emphasized that Christ must have been born of a virgin mother.[8]

Reputable biblical scholarship has wrestled with the problems presented by these passages. In 1973, Claus Schedl, professor of biblical studies at Redemptorist College in Mautern, Austria, argued that the name Immanuel, which expresses Isaiah's belief that God will not forsake Judah, is itself a sufficient explanation of the Immanuel prophecy. He noted that *'almāh* appears in the Old Testament nine times, two in a musical reference, and seven in the sense of a "young marriageable maiden." He explains, "It was presupposed that such

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[5] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 761; J. D. Douglas, ed. *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1982), pp. 1237–38, s.v. *virgin*.

[6] The Septuagint meaning "seventy" (known as the "LXX") is the oldest and most important Greek translation of the Old Testament. In 285–247 B.C., King Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt commissioned about seventy Jewish scholars, theoretically six from each of the Twelve Tribes, to translate "The Law" into Greek; it was then called the Pentateuch. The term, Septuagint, was later applied to the whole Greek Old Testament. The first version of the Bible in a language other than Hebrew became the Bible of the Christian Church, quoted by Paul and the evangelists. Also, through reading the Septuagint, many gentiles converted to Judaism. Many Septuagint translations arose and two hundred years later, the Jews revised the Greek translations to conform more closely to Hebrew, later abandoning the LXX. Jerome discarded Latin versions of the LXX which had been amplified by the Church Fathers when he translated his Latin Vulgate version in the fifth century A.D.

[7] The English versions of the Bible are based upon fragments from the seventh century A.D. The Catholic Douay version of 1582 was translated from the Latin Vulgate but gave much attention to the Septuagint translations; the 1611 King James Version (KJV) came from the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek text of the New Testament. It was used to revise the existing English Bibles which had also influenced the KJV. The several Revised Standard Versions have incorporated the benefits of discovered texts and recent scholarship. The Oxford Annotated Revised Standard Version is used in this paper.

[8] Edward McNall Burns, *Western Civilizations*, 4th ed. (New York: Norton, 1955), pp. 86–89, 221–224; Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribners, 1976), pp. 249–53. Williston W. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribners, 1959), pp. 51–53. The Apostle Paul contrasts the flesh and spirit in Romans 8:22–25 and I Corinthians 15:50.

a maiden would soon marry and share the expected blessing of childbirth. Any contemporary historian who heard the prophet's oracle: 'Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son,' would hardly think in terms of a miraculous conception and birth." [9]

Professor of Old Testament Studies A. S. Herbert, writing in *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible* in 1973, elaborates upon the meaning of "young woman" in Isaiah 7:14: "The Hebrew word, like the English, does not preclude the meaning of 'virgin' that appears in the [King James] Authorized Version, but usage would hardly suggest it." Herbert finds confirmation for this interpretation: "Almost the same words occur in the Ras Shamra text (found at the ancient Ugarit on the Syrian coast) 'A young woman shall bear a son'; the noun is the same as in Hebrew. The point of the oracle is clear. A pregnant woman, probably one of Ahaz' wives, will bear a son with a name which will give assurance of divine protection, yet, since this sign has been rejected, within a few years this same divine presence will bring the disastrous subservience to Assyria." [10]

Frederick Moriarty, Jesuit scholar writing in the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, concludes that the birth of a son, "God is with us," is vital for Judah for another reason. The overthrow of the Davidic dynasty by an enemy would indicate the cancellation of God's promise to guide and protect the house of David forever (2 Sam. 7:12–16). Moriarty feels that the young child may be the future King Hezekiah, whose birth would signify the continuing presence of God among the people of Judah and a renewal of the promise made to David. He suggests that Isaiah unknowingly prophesied the birth of Christ as a fulfillment of the Davidic promise: "This does not mean, of course, that Isaiah foresaw the fulfillment of this prophecy in Christ, but he expressed the hope that Christ perfectly realized." Thus, a "fuller meaning" (*sensus plenior*) emanates from the scripture, intended by God, but not by the human author. [11]

In a variation on the "dual revelation" notion, Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve asserts that Isaiah hid his meaning because of the wickedness of the people. The ancient prophet, McConkie writes, "spoke in figures, using types and shadows" to hide messages in parables. In the 1980 Gospel Doctrine teacher's manual, McConkie declares that the virgin birth prophecy was "dropped into the midst of a recitation of local historical occurrences so that to the spiritually untutored it could be interpreted as some ancient and unknown happening that had no relationship to the birth of the Lord Jehovah into mortality some 700 years later." [12]

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[9] Claus Schedl, "The Age of the Prophets," *History of the Old Testament*, 5 vols. (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba, 1972), 4: 215–16.

[10] A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, a volume of *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible* (England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 63–65.

[11] Stuhlmueller, *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, pp. 270–71. *Sensus plenior* is examined by Raymond E. Brown in the same volume, p. 617.

[12] Bruce R. McConkie, "Ten Keys to Understanding Isaiah," *Ensign* 3 (Oct. 1973): 80–83, quoted in *Old Testament Part Two*, Gospel Doctrine teacher's supplement (Salt Lake

Schedl argues that the child prophesied by Isaiah was not Jesus but could have been Hezekiah. "The whole point of the Immanuel prophecy," Schedl insists, "is centered on the promise that the house of David will never be annihilated." When Ahaz acceded to the throne in 735 B.C., he was at the marriageable age of twenty (2 Kgs. 16:2). The Hebrew *'almāh* is simply the young bride-consort of King Ahaz, Schedl reasons. Since Hezekiah was only five years old when he succeeded to the throne in 728 B.C., his birth would fall in the year 734/733, about a year after the Immanuel prophecy in 735/734. Since the prophecy fits the events of that time, "it follows that Isaiah did not understand the word *'almāh* in its New Testament sense." Schedl concludes that the New Testament authors do not quote the Old Testament in keeping with the canons of historical criticism. "In their interpretation of Scripture, they are the children of their time." [13]

There seems to be sufficient evidence to indicate that Christian writers have revised the meaning of the Hebrew term for "young woman" and have expanded the significance of Isaiah's "Immanuel prophecy." Although contextual changes have been justified by rationales of hidden writing and double meanings, many Jewish and contemporary Christian scholars acknowledge the primacy of the meaning Isaiah applied in his own time.

The debate between Judaism and traditional Christianity over the meaning of the Jewish scriptures relates to passages through Isaiah. One of the choruses in Handel's *Messiah* is adapted from Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

The King James Version relates this verse to the birth of Christ, but Jewish scriptures indicate a different meaning. The *Soncino* commentary on the traditional Hebrew scriptures adds these notes to the crucial verse:

> *A Child.* The verse has been given a Christological interpretation by the Church, but modern non-Jewish exegetes agree that a contemporary person is intended. The Talmud and later Jewish commentators understood the allusion [as] to the son of Ahaz, viz. Hezekiah.
> Hezekiah as a lad had already given promise of his future greatness as a religious and political leader. . . .
> As the son of Ahaz he was "Crown Prince" during his father's lifetime. . . .
> The meaning of the Hebrew words [in the KJV, "Wonderful, . . ."] is "Wonderful in counsel is God the Mighty, the Everlasting Father, the Ruler of Peace." The child will bear these significant names in order to recall to the people the message which they embodied. (*Soncino Isaiah*, notes to 9:6) [14]

Redeemer has also been given various interpretations. After the Babylonian conquest of Judah, Deutero-Isaiah (chs. 40–55) speaks to the Jews in exile

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City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980), p. 83. The possibility of "dual prophecy" is raised in Monte S. Nyman, *Great Are the Words of Isaiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), pp. 55–59.

13 Schedl, *History of the Old Testament*, 4:217–20.

14 *Soncino: Isaiah*, pp. 44–45 (commentary).

of the "Lord and thy Redeemer," who is defined here by Jewish commentary as an avenger: "*Redeemer.* The Hebrew 'goel' is a technical term applied to the nearest relative whose duties included the redemption or buying back of the kinsman who sold himself or his sold property or, if killed, the avenging of his blood by slaying the murderer. It is possibly in this sense applied to God, the Redeemer and Avenger of His people Israel." (*Soncino Isaiah,* notes to Isa. 41:14)[15]

This avenging role of the Lord is explained in the next chapter: "The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. . . . I will destroy and devour at once." (Isa. 42:13, 14)

In Isaiah 43, God is further defined as redeemer and savior: "Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour. . . . Thus saith the Lord, your redeemer, the holy one of Israel." (Isa. 43:10, 11, 14)

The God of Israel is defined as the only God, and the force that shall save Israel from its enemies:

> I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me . . . .
> I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.
> . . . Men of stature, shall come over unto thee . . . they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God.
> Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.
> . . . Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end. (Isa. 45:6, 7, 14, 15, 17)

In the context of defeat and exile, Deutero-Isaiah uses *savior* and *redeemer* to denote the God of Israel who will avenge the suffering of his people, Judah, and make them mighty and respected among all nations. The New Testament writers, Paul and John, interpreted these passages as Isaiah's prediction that Christ's death would make individual salvation from death possible, that Christ exchanged his death for man's sins.[16]

From the earliest days of Christianity, Christians have believed that the "servant of the Lord" depicted in Isaiah 40–55 portrays Christ.[17] Handel's *Messiah* incorporates the "servant" passages of Isaiah 53: "He was despised and rejected by men; Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

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[15] Ibid., p. 195.

[16] See Heb. 9:12, 26–28; 1 John 1:7; John 11:25.

In "The Mormon Christianizing of the Old Testament," Melodie Moench Charles observes that in the Old Testament view, people are not regarded as inherently sinful and have no need for a redeemer to take away the effect of Adam's sin (never referred to after its first telling or their own. "If they were obedient, they were in God's favor." The messiah sought after in the Old Testament was a just king who would bring peace and prosperity, a righteous man who served God, not a deity himself. "A Messiah who suffers and dies as a substitute for all men as in the New Testament was unknown in Judaism." *Sunstone* (Nov.–Dec. 1980): 35–39.

[17] Matthew seems to rewrite Isaiah. Compare Matt. 12:17–21 with Isa. 42:1–3 and Matt. 8:17 with Isa. 53:4.

And with his stripes we are healed." The Covenanters of the Dead Sea community at Qumran preserved fairly complete texts of Isaiah, which are essentially the same as the traditional Hebrew texts, and which clarify the Jewish background of the New Testament.[18] Scholars have found that the Dead Sea Scrolls agree with the rabbinical annotations that the Lord's servant is "the righteous people of God." The *Soncino* notes identify the servant as symbolic of Israel in exile, martyred and humiliated by the Babylonians because of their transgressions, but destined to survive.[19] Bible scholar Christopher North contends that the "suffering servant" passages reflect Deutero-Isaiah's great disappointment in Cyrus's failure to recognize Yahweh as world king, as well as the prophet's new insight into the meaning of Israel's suffering both for the present and for the messianic future.[20]

The *Soncino* notes to Isaiah acknowledge that Jewish commentators disagree whether the servant is Israel, the king-messiah, or Isaiah.[21] But the servant is clearly Israel in passages such as Isaiah 49:6-26: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel. I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" and Isaiah 41:8: "But thou, Israel, My servant Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, My friend."

The Jerome Biblical Commentary states, "The Servant is Israel, alive in all her leaders and intercessors: Abraham (49:6); Moses (42:6); Jeremiah (49:1); wise men (50:4ff); David (53:1); and the suffering exiles (52:13–53:12)" [22]

Harry M. Orlinski, originator of the just-completed Hebrew-to-English translation of the Jewish Bible (Jewish Publication Society of America), suggests that in each of the so-called "suffering servant" songs of Isaiah 52–53, the servant is the prophet, rather than Israel. Arguing against a vicarious atonement in which first Israel, then Christ, suffers for the sins of the unworthy, Orlinski contends that *servant* has no special meaning in the exegesis of Second Isaiah but rather developed in Christian circles after the significance of Jesus' life and death came to be reinterpreted. The concept of "suffering servant" is "postbiblical in origin (probably from a pagan Hellenistic, not a Judaic source) . . . It was only after suffering — vicarious suffering — came to be associated with Jesus that these concepts were read back into the passage of the Hebrew Bible most favorable for such interpretation, chapter 53 of Isaiah," he concludes. The concept of vicarious suffering and atonement is found neither

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18 Millar Burroughs, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking, 1955), pp. 326–45, 348. See pp. 186, 267 for W. H. Brownlee's collective interpretation of the "Lord's servant" in the Jerusalem Habakkuk Scroll, dated about 63 B.C.

19 *Soncino: Isaiah*, pp. 261–64 (commentary).

20 Christopher R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah*, 2nd ed. (London, Oxford University Press, 1964), quoted in Stuhlmueller, *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 367.

21 *Soncino: Isaiah*, p. 199 (commentary).

22 Stuhlmueller, *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 367.

in Deutero-Isaiah nor anywhere else in the Bible: "It is a concept that arose in Jewish and especially Christian circles of post-biblical times." [23]

Strongly scripturalist from its foundation, Mormonism has also manifested an intense interest in Isaiah. In 1830, Joseph Smith, founder and first prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, presented the Book of Mormon as a translation of ancient Israelite records, religious writings of a remnant of Ephraim and Manasseh who sailed to the New World to become the ancestors of the American Indian. Considered a "new witness for Christ" on the American continent, the Book of Mormon not only records Christ's appearance in the Americas, but also quotes Isaiah at length and gives a unique Mormon interpretation to several passages. Joseph Smith also reported miraculous experiences which involved key passages in Isaiah.

Isaiah 29 is significant for Mormonism. In this chapter, Isaiah describes the inability and unwillingness of the people and their leaders, "drunken without wine," to understand the word of Yahweh. The leaders read, but do not understand; although they should know better, they are willfully perverse and refuse to abide in the Lord. The masses, on the other hand, cannot even read the law, for they do not know how.

Finally, a marvelous work and a wonder occurs when a faithful remnant rescues all of Israel. The eyes of the blind are opened and the deaf can hear. Thus, Israel returns to the word of Yahweh. Several groups have seen themselves as that faithful remnant, among them the Qumran community, the early Christians, and the Mormons.

Three consecutive passages from Isaiah 29 have been given unique Mormon interpretation. The first involves a sealed book. Isaiah laments the inability of the people to recognize the importance of the Lord's messages which

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[23] Harry M. Orlinski, *Studies on the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah*, vol. 14 in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden, Holland: E. J. Brill, 1977), 118. Orlinski refers to Morna D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: S.P.C.K., 1959), which concludes that the early church did not attach any great significance to the servant passages or regard them as the key to understanding the atonement (p. 133). Hooker states, "The account of the beliefs of the early Christians which is given in the Acts of the Apostles does not suggest that the primitive community ever thought of Jesus as 'the Servant' of Deutero-Isaiah. . . . Paul apparently makes no use of the 'Servant figure,' although he quotes twice from the fourth Song. . . . Certainly if Paul himself had thought of Jesus as the 'Servant' he would have made it plain" (pp. 147–63). "Neither the Old Testament — including especially Second Isaiah and its chapter 53 — nor the Judaism of the intertestamental period knew anything of the concepts of Servant of the Lord, Suffering Servant, and Vicarious Suffering and Atonement as they came to be developed by the followers of Jesus sometime after his death," although later Christian congregations have been generally taught that Jesus found the clue to his ministry in the fulfillment of the Suffering Servant prophecies of the Books of Isaiah (pp. 71–73).

Relating the atonement issue to the identity of the "Servant," Orlinski comments that neither in Isaiah 53 nor elsewhere in the Bible do the sinful get off scot-free at the expense of the prophets, or anyone else. All Second Isaiah says is that "the individual person, whoever he was, suffered on account of Israel's transgression. . . . the spokesmen of God suffered because of the nature of their calling. . . . The prophets had come and suffered to bring [the transgressors] God's message of rebuke and repentance." Deutero-Isaiah says that the prophet "bore the grief and carried the sorrows of the people, having been wounded for their transgressions and bruised for their iniquities." (pp. 56–59)

the prophet has communicated to them. He compares his words to a sealed book which the learned and unlearned, for different reasons, are unable to read:

> They are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink.
>
> For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered.
>
> And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot for it is sealed.
>
> And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned. (Isa. 29:9–12)

In the Pearl of Great Price Joseph Smith reported that in February 1828 Martin Harris brought back the words of the learned professor Charles Anthon: "I cannot read a sealed book." "Sealed books" refer to apocalyptic writings about the end of the world which are to be sealed or closed up until that event occurs. Mormons interpret Anthon's comment as a fulfillment of the passages from Isaiah quoted above.[24] The Book of Mormon itself quotes the "sealed book" passages of Isaiah 29 and prophesies the experiences Martin Harris would have with Professor Anthon: "Their learned shall not read them, for they have rejected them" (2 Ne. 27:20).[25]

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[24] Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1963), 1:19–20. Joseph Smith recorded the experience of making a transcript of "reformed Egyptian" characters from the Book of Mormon plates, which Martin Harris took to Professor Charles Anthon (Columbia) and Dr. Samuel Mitchell (Rutgers). Harris related that Anthon was reported to have said that the translation presented with some of the characters was "correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian." He also reportedly certified that some untranslated characters were "true" Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac and Arabic, but tore up the certificate when told they came from gold plates revealed by an angel.

More than a year before Martin Harris's visit to Charles Anthon, in January 1827, when Joseph Smith went to Colesville to be married, according to Emily M. Colburn Austin, "he declared an angel . . . told him of golden plates . . . containing a history . . . which Isaiah the prophet had spoken of; a vision which should become as the words of a book that is sealed." *Mormonism: or Life Among the Mormons* (Madison: M. J. Cantrel Book and Job Printer, 1882), pp. 33–35, quoted in Robert M. Hullinger, *Mormon Answer to Skepticism* (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1980), p. 96, n. 45.

[25] "Sealed books" typically refer to apocalyptic writings about the end of the world which are to be sealed or closed up until that event occurs. (See Dan. 12:4 and Rev. 22:10.) 2 Nephi 27:4–23 admixes Isaiah 29:9–12 with the description of a book (the Book of Mormon) that would be delivered to another (Martin Harris) who would show it to "the learned" (Professor Anthon) who would say he could not read the book. The chapter of Nephi is dated "between B.C. 559 and 545." In *History of the Church*, 1:20, B. H. Roberts footnotes in a letter to E. D. Howe of Painsville, Ohio, that Professor Anthon acknowledged the visit of Martin Harris, "a plain, apparently simple-minded farmer." Anthon went on to declare, "The whole story about having pronounced the Mormonite inscription to be 'reformed Egyptian hieroglypics' is perfectly false." He described the paper brought by Martin Harris as consisting of "all kinds of crooked characters disposed in columns, and had evidently been prepared by some person who had before him at the time a book containing various alphabets. Greek and Hebrew letters, crosses and flourishes, Roman perpendicular columns, and the whole ended in a rude delineation of a circle divided into various compartments, decked with various strange marks, and evidently copied in such a way as not to betray

The second passage describes a people who will not listen to or respect Yahweh: "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men. . . ." (Isa. 29:13)

This passage has special meaning for the Mormon faith since nearly the same words were uttered by a glorious "personage" Joseph Smith identified as Jesus Christ in the spring of 1820, after he prayed to inquire which of the churches he should join: "The Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: 'they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.' " (Joseph Smith — History 1)[26]

From the LDS point of view, it might make sense for Jesus to quote Isaiah to Joseph Smith, even out of initial context, since Mormons consider Isaiah's words to have been inspired by Jesus in the first place. Unlike the rest of Christianity, Mormon theology regards Yahweh of the Old Testament, creator of the world, as the same Jesus who was later born in Nazareth. Mormon scriptures present Jesus as using the same words, "their lips draw near, but their hearts are far from me," to describe different situations thousands of years apart.

In the third passage, Isaiah relates a marvelous work by which Yahweh will bring the people of Judah to understand: "Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder (Isa. 29:14). "They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine" (Isa. 29:24).

These passages, which Isaiah applies to the spiritual transformation of the people of Judah in the eighth century B.C., were given a new interpretation twenty-five hundred years later. The restoration of the church of Jesus Christ in the latter days, including the publication of the Book of Mormon, has been identified as Isaiah's "marvelous work." Isaiah 29:14 is quoted in 2 Nephi 27:26 in the Book of Mormon, and the entire twenty-seventh chapter of Nephi identifies the Book of Mormon with this "marvelous work."

The use made of these three consecutive sections of Isaiah 29 indicates the important place that this Old Testament prophet occupies within the Mormon faith. As Latter-day Saint students of the scriptures know, the Book of Mormon quotes nearly verbatim, according to the King James Version, nineteen

the source whence it was derived." Roberts quotes from Samuel M. Smucker, *The Religious, Social and Political History of the Mormons, or Latter Day Saints From Their Origin To The Present Time* (New York: Miller, Upton & Mulligan, 1856), pp. 37–39, and notes that Professor Anthon's letter is published in its entirety in Howe's *Mormonism Unvailed*, 1834, pp. 270–72. Since the Egyptian language was not understood in 1828, Anthon would not have been able to attest to the correctness of a transcript containing Egyptian characters.

[26] 2 Nephi 27:25 in the Book of Mormon accurately quotes the King James Version of Isaiah 29:13 ("lips near . . . hearts far from me").

entire chapters of Isaiah and parts of several others.[27] While the Book of Mormon draws heavily from Isaiah, most contemporary scholars would not believe all of the chapters quoted were available to the Nephite writers.

In the Book of Mormon, Lehi and his family leave Jerusalem around 600 B.C., taking with them some "brass plates" containing the writings of Hebrew prophets up to that time. It is natural that Isaiah, who wrote prior to 700 B.C., would be included. However, in his writings Nephi quotes chapters of Isaiah which scholars generally conclude were written after 586 B.C., during the Babylonian exile and after Nephi had left for America. Isaiah 48–49 and parts of 50–52, and 55 are quoted with some changes in 1 Nephi 20–22 and 2 Nephi 6–9, and Isaiah 53–54 is partially quoted in Mosiah 14 and 3 Nephi 22.

The difficulties of authorship implied by such out-of-chronology quotation might be resolved by assuming that the Isaiah of the eighth century B.C. prophetically foresaw and authored the later exilic and postexilic writings in advance. Latter-day Saint writers turn the Isaiah chronological problem around and use it to support the single-author theory of all Isaiah writing, even that dealing with the rebuilding of Jerusalem two hundred years after Isaiah lived.

For example, in 1909, Mormon historian and General Authority B. H. Roberts argued that the Book of Mormon's use of transcripts from the later part of Isaiah's writing, after Nephi left Jerusalem, is "new evidence for the Isaiah authorship of the whole book of Isaiah." Other LDS writers such as Sidney Sperry, Hugh Nibley, and more recently, Victor Ludlow, Monte Nyman, LaMar Adams, and Elder Mark E. Petersen advocate similar positions.[28]

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[27] William L. Riley, "A Comparison of Passages from Isaiah and Other Old Testament Prophets in Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1971), calculates that the Book of Mormon uses 407 of the 1292 verses in Isaiah, about one-third of the total. Robert N. Hullinger estimates that in numbers of words "the Book of Mormon uses Isaiah for one-tenth of its content" (*Mormon Answer To Skepticism*, p. 72).

[28] Perhaps the first Mormon scholar to deal with the "Isaiah problem" — that Nephi quotes from exilic Isaiah scriptures which would have been unavailable to him — was B. H. Roberts. In his *New Witnesses for God*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909) 3:449–60, Roberts lists the arguments for independent authorship of chapters 40–46 of Isaiah: (1) The events are later; Jerusalem is ruined, those whom the prophet addresses are not contemporaries of Ahaz and Hezekiah, but exiles in Babylon; the prophet would never abandon his own historical position, but speak from it; (2) Isaiah 1–39 uses a unique literary style, but these images and allusions are not continued in 40–66; (3) the theology of 40–66 shows an advance which emphasizes Jehovah's infinitude as the creator, the sustainer of the universe, the author of history, the first and the last, the incomparable one, etc. Roberts questions that several authors wrote Isaiah on the grounds that (1) there is no identity given for other authors, (2) the Jews convinced Cyrus by the prophecies of Isaiah to let them return to Jerusalem thus proving that Isaiah was capable of prophecy, (3) surely, Jesus would not mistake Isaiah (61:1, 2) in quoting him (Luke 4:16–22), and (4) given the "overwhelming evidence for the truth of the Book of Mormon," transcripts from the later part of Isaiah's writings is "new evidence for the Isaiah authorship of the whole book of Isaiah" (pp. 459–60).

Sidney B. Sperry, professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature at Brigham Young University, asserts that Isaiah wrote the whole book that goes under his name, a work other scholars insist covered 250 years. 3 Nephi 23:1 quotes Christ as saying, "Great are the words of Isaiah." In this, Sperry finds evidence of the single author theory: "The Savior himself

The 1980 *Gospel Doctrine* Teacher's Supplement states: "The Book of Mormon is also clear evidence that Isaiah is responsible for the entire sixty-six chapters. Whole chapters from all parts of Isaiah are quoted from the brass plates which Lehi took from Jerusalem about 600 B.C." [29] A singular exception, Mormon Old Testament scholar Heber C. Snell, in 1948 advocated the composite authorship of Isaiah.[20] Nephi also quotes Malachi, who wrote around 460 B.C., about 140 years after Nephi left Jerusalem with the brass plates (see 1 Ne. 22:15, 2 Ne. 25:13, 26:4, 9; Mal. 4:1–2).[31]

A further and perhaps more serious complication is that it is the quotations from an as-yet-unwritten Isaiah which have been given a different context in the Book of Mormon than they have in the Bible. In Isaiah 48 and 49, for example, the prophet offers hope to his exiled people in Babylon, that they will be restored to their homeland, and even be a light of the Lord's covenant to the gentiles:

> Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob (Isa. 48:20).

points out that Isaiah 54 came from the mouth of the great eighth century prophet." DIALOGUE 2 (Spring 1967): 75. See also Sperry's *Problems of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964) and *Answers to Book of Mormon Questions* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967).

L. LaMar Adams and Alvin C. Rencher, "A Computer Analysis of the Isaiah Authorship Problem," *BYU Studies* 14 (Autumn 1974) 15:1, assert that "the book of Isaiah has a literary unity characteristic of a single author." It should be noted that a subsequent wordprint study by Rencher along with Wayne Larsen and Tim Layton, *BYU Studies* 20 (Spring 1980): 225–51, encountered serious professional criticism over their methodology and conclusions — that there were twenty-four distinct authors of the Book of Mormon. D. James Croft, "Book of Mormon 'Wordprints' Reexamined," *Sunstone* 6 (March–April 1981): 2.

Hugh W. Nibley, in his *Since Cumorah* (1976), pp. 137–52, confronts the charge against the Book of Mormon that it quotes from Deutero-Isaiah, "which did not exist at the time Lehi left Jerusalem" (p. 139). He lists three sources of dating Deutero-Isaiah: (1) the mention of Cyrus (44:28), who lived 200 years after Isaiah and long after Lehi, (2) the threats against Babylon (47:1, 48:14), which became the oppressor of Judah after the days of Isaiah, and (3) the general language and setting of the text which suggests a historical background commonly associated with a later period than that of Isaiah (p. 139). Nibley then answers these with a question: "If others than Isaiah wrote about half the words in his book, why do we not know their names?" (p. 143). The usual scholarly answer is because they are Isaiah's students, compiling Isaiah's words with later material in three successive transmissions. The names of Cyrus and Babylon were thus added later. The question remains: If these final words were added to Isaiah after Nephi left Jerusalem, how did he get them on the brass plates for Joseph Smith to translate almost exactly as they appeared in the King James Version of the Bible? See also Victor L. Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1982), pp. 541–48; Monte S. Nyman, *Great Are the Words of Isaiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), pp. 253–58; L. LaMar Adams, *The Living Message of Isaiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1981), pp. 17–19; Mark E. Petersen, *Isaiah for Today* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1981), pp. 140–2.

[29] *Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Supplement* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980), p. 105.

[30] Heber C. Snell, *Ancient Israel, Its Story and Meaning* (Salt Lake City: published by the author, 1948; 3d ed., Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1963), pp. 24, 187–88.

[31] Parmelee, *A Guidebook to the Bible*, p. 89; eds. P. R. Ackroyd, *et al.*, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary, The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 135–39.

> And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth (Isa. 49:6).

After quoting these statements in 1 Nephi 20 and 21, Nephi expounds upon the prophesies of Isaiah in 1 Nephi 22. Speaking between 588 and 570 B.C., he comments that the house of Israel "sooner or later" will be scattered (the Babylonian exile began in 586 B.C.) and relates his own interpretation of Isaiah:

> And it meaneth that the time cometh that after all the house of Israel have been scattered and confounded, that the Lord God will raise up a mighty nation among the Gentiles, yea, even upon the face of this land [presumably America];
> And after our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed. (1 Ne. 22:7–8)

This marvelous work is the gift of the gentiles — the Book of Mormon — to the scattered Jews, a message by which they shall be restored to the gospel of Jesus Christ and thus to their inheritance as the chosen people of God. This interpretation reverses the message of Deutero-Isaiah to the captive Jews in Babylon. Isaiah states that the Jews shall be a light to the gentiles: Nephi portrays the gentiles as bringing light to the Jews:

> And now, I would prophesy somewhat more concerning the Jews and Gentiles. For after the book of which I have spoken shall come forth, and be written unto the Gentiles, and sealed up again unto the Lord, there shall be many which shall believe the words which are written; and they shall carry them forth unto the remnant of our seed.
> And then shall the remnant of our seed know concerning us, how that we came out from Jerusalem, and that they are descendants of the Jews.
> And the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers. (2 Ne. 30:3–5)

Isaiah wrote during a time of Judah's impending military destruction in the last half of the eighth century B.C. A second author (and perhaps a third) wrote of the Babylonian captivity and the return to Jerusalem. Isaiah promised God's continued protection of the Jews by prophesying that a young woman would bear a son with the name, "God is with us" (Immanuel). The child's name would also mean, "Wonderful in counsel is God the Mighty, the Everlasting Father, ruler of Peace." And throughout the difficult Babylonian exile, Deutero-Isaiah continually refers to the God of Israel as "redeemer" and "savior," Yahweh's historical role in the salvation of Israel. The "suffering servant" symbolizes Israel in captivity.

Just as Jewish and early Christian writers adapted Isaiah to their own purposes, Mormon writers two thousand years later have also invoked new and contemporary meaning from three consecutive passages of Isaiah 29: A "sealed book," "lips . . . near, heart far from me," and "a marvelous work and a wonder." These passages, which originally described Isaiah's struggle to have his people listen to Yahweh's message, became words of prophetic ful-

fillment used by Charles Anthon in speaking about Book of Mormon charac-
ters, by Jesus in speaking to Joseph Smith, and as a characterization of the
Book of Mormon — multiple new meanings taken from a single Old Testa-
ment context. Further, Nephi quotes extensive passages from Isaiah, some of
which Deutero-Isaiah wrote after Nephi's departure for the New World, a cir-
cumstance which raises more questions about the unique use of Isaiah in
Nephite writings.

The great Isaiah scriptures can be legitimately applied to later circum-
stances for which they might have similar relevance, such as in voicing the
timeless hope for the day when nations "shall beat their swords into plow-
shares." But can the substitution of new meaning be justified as a dual message
hidden in Isaiah's original words? How should students of religion consider the
effect of Mormon writings to "update" Isaiah's words into a context foreign to
the man, his message, his country, and his time?