

ISAIAH BACKGROUND

Isaiah opens in 2Kings and 2 Chronicles / about 705 BC / just before the destruction and dispersal of the 10 tribes of Israel (Northern Kingdom.)

Judah and Israel are prospering, but not cooperating, Egypt is in decline, and Assyria is on the rise. Regional political shifts leave kingdoms scrambling to reform alliances. An upper class is developing, but there is great disparity because of rising taxes. Some families are losing their inheritances- land which was given them when they entered the land under Joshua. Social inequality develops under poor governmental / ecclesiastical leadership. First temple culture has the royal couple leading feast days at the temple... they covenant with God to lead the people righteously and the people covenant to follow the King and Queen. But Israel doesn't have the Temple at all anymore and Judah's leadership appears to be changing the Temple rites and religious observances and their focus on Christ. Isaiah condemns this. Isaiah, Micah, Amos and Hosea are all prophesying. Isaiah and Micah seem to quote each other or be receiving identical revelation from God.

Come let us reason together

The overriding message of Isaiah is to come unto Christ. Yes, Israel is a nation will be destroyed if she does not return unto the Lord... Yes, you need to come back... But when you do, the Lord Jesus Christ will become the Sacrifice that you now represent with animals, and he will cleanse you that you become white as snow / wool in contrast to the crimson or scarlet of your sins. Individually, as a nation, as a world, there is hope and love and redemption if we choose Christ.

Isaiah records his own calling as a prophet in Isaiah 6.

The language is interesting in that he is called to prophesy about very important things, but to speak so that "seeing, they see not and hearing, they hear not." That was his commission. There is a lot of scholarship and commentary suggesting that Isaiah often speaking in veiled terms to address changes to sacred things- Temple rites, covenants, the roles of priests and priestesses serving there, the coming of the Messiah and other things that displeased God. There is evidence that the kings of this era allowed or perhaps even directed these changes. Some scholars (LDS and non-) opine that these kings and a group of reformers/editors they call the Deuteronomists removed the idea of Heavenly Parents, a Son who was to come to earth as a sacrifice, and other ideas central to our understanding of Christ from the Temple and its instructive purposes. By the time the Savior came, there was little remaining that talked of Him. Could the Lord's directive to 'make the heart of this people fat' have commissioned Isaiah to speak in code- and this preserved his beautiful Servant songs, and Messianic witness from being edited out with other things? Maybe that's why there's a special commandment from the Savior to the Nephites to STUDY Isaiah... To show the Christ that had hiding in plain sight for centuries? What do you think?

-Isaiah talks to his contemporaries, using language and referencing cultural practices that they would understand from the first Temple era. He speaks of Israel's current iniquities and injustice among themselves, calling for 'judgement' ('fairness') for their widows and orphans. He calls out the 'daughters of Zion' for following after temporal rather than spiritual things and implies that all Israel is guilty, with penalties to follow.

A lot going on here...

Isaiah prophesies that Assyria would not conquer Judah, but addresses future conquests by Syria and Babylon. He talks about the dispersal and gathering of Israel, the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ, the last days, and Christ's triumphal return using deep imagery.

Trees, precious metals, and clean animals can all represent people or leaders. Mountains can represent Holy places and kingdoms. The names of people can foreshadow events to come. At times he uses past, future, or present tense or combinations thereof in the same sentence as if events were on ongoing before his eyes. And there's no chronology outline for when these events take place... (Nephi reminds us that what Isaiah saw both 'is and will be.') For instance, the Child "Emmanuel" can apply both to Christ and/or Hezekiah – 700 years apart. He also prophesies to both Israel and Judah. No wonder Isaiah can be difficult to understand or interpret.

Still, Nephi says that when he wanted his people to understand the Savior, he taught them Isaiah. He tells us the same thing. He lived only about 100 years after Isaiah. It would have been like President Oakes quoting President Joseph Fielding Smith.

When you reach a conclusion and are taught by the Spirit or the words of other prophets concerning Isaiah, remember he is still multivalent and there can be other valid interpretations.

Important events this week

- The Kingdoms of Israel and Assyria form an alliance and want Judah to join to prepare against the Assyrians. Judah refuses and the other two try to take out Judah's king and replace him with their own puppet. Isaiah tells Judah's king not to join the alliance, that God will protect them.

Questions to ponder or look up...

-Isaiah uses some of the loftiest and most beautiful language ever written. What must he have SEEN to inspire him to that level of expression? The ancient Apostles were with him personally for 3 years, but even John's language doesn't surpass what Isaiah wrote 700 years before the Savior's birth. Was Isaiah that much more gifted, or was the Spirit's instruction to him so profound and impressive that it elicited such beautiful words?

-So what do we do about this? Chapters 40 through 66 seem to take place in the Babylonian period which is after Isaiah's lifetime... It is sometimes called Second Isaiah...

-There is a lot of scholarship suggesting that some of the changes in worship instituted by Hezekiah (remember the book of the law they found in the temple and resulting reforms?) were departures from the original practice, not returns to the original versions. He took the tree or menorah out of the Holy of Holies and made Jerusalem the only place one could offer sacrifice. Isaiah told Judah that they had strayed from the ordinances and broken the everlasting covenant. That doesn't sound like a return to the basics...

Jewish life centered around the Temple, the King and their common covenants. They sought to kill Lehi because he, like Isaiah, told them they were off-track. What had they done that broke the covenant and changed the ordinances? Weren't they following the Law of Moses? Hadn't they sought to get back to the Law from Deuteronomy? Nephi said they had taken many plain and precious things out of their worship. (Go look that up.) What could be more precious than the Doctrine of Christ? We don't find the Redeemer in the Old Testament except in Isaiah's veiled language and a few lines from other prophets. Why?

-Nephi said that Isaiah would be important (perhaps clearer too?) in the last days. Could that be due to the restored gospel and / or prophesies that will be coming to pass in our day that confirm and clarify him? I propose that Isaiah ties together the teachings of Adam, Enoch, the Patriarchs, Moses and the clear messages of the New Testament, Book of Mormon and modern revelation (all of which we can reference instantly) to confirm Christ to us. Nephi seems to 'see' the words of Isaiah. I do too. His imagery is profound. Nephi also says to 'liken his words' to us. Lastly, Nephi knew 'concerning the regions round about.' Diving a little deeper to become familiar with unfamiliar terms will help. Look up new things. Joseph Smith said Isaiah was one of

the plainest books ever written. The keys appear to be using the broad gospel knowledge base contained in the scriptures since Isaiah and in the words of modern Prophets. Lots of dots to help us form a clearer picture.