

359: Feb 23; Mar 1: Loss and Restoration (Come, Follow Me Book of Mormon Weeks 8-9)

Feb 17-23: 2 Ne 11-25

*Feb 24-March 1 2 Ne 26-30

Outline

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5. Preview: end of Nephi, beginning of Jacob (such good stuff about spiritual development!)
6. Conclusion: Coming to Christ and being restored

Framing

Once we get past our panic about “the Isaiah” chapters, panic that too quickly turns into glazed looks, we realize that these chapters in 2 Nephi deal with big questions (plot twist: The Isaiah chapters are not the most challenging chapters in this reading). The first big question is general and as big as history: How does God save their children? (This is called “Salvation History”) The second question is also big, but more difficult and poignant: How do we deal with loss? How do we hold to hope, even when it seems like all promises and expectations have shattered?

Isaiah chapters: loss and restoration

We don’t know what to make of the Isaiah chapters, but they address a heart-wrenching process we all go through.

How can we move forward when the promises and hopes we have felt seem shattered? How can we face the destruction of our foundation?

Isaiah chapters are about loss and consequence, redemption and restoration.

Invite discussion about loss and restoration in our own lives

2 Nephi 20: Our dreams and plans often burn and scatter. What do we do with what remains? We can't change what happened. But we can spend the currency of pain and consequence. Shift from "why me?" to "What can I learn from and do with this?"

My summaries:

12 (Is. 2): In the ideal future the people of the whole world will come to Jerusalem and its temple for knowledge about God. The pride and accomplishments of humans will be destroyed; only God will be respected.

13 (Is. 3): God condemns the leaders and elite of Judah for persecuting the people, especially the poor. God will replace the comforts of the rich and powerful with war and suffering.

14 (Is. 4): The destruction will be redemptive. After the suffering, those who remain in Judah will be holy. God will again watch over his people as he did in the wilderness.

15 (Is. 5): God did everything he could to care for his people (the vineyard). When the harvest was oppression rather than righteousness, God vows to destroy the vineyard. The wickedness of his people justifies God's anger.

16 (Is. 6): Isaiah is called and consecrated in the Heavenly Temple. He is purified, but his mission is a depressing one: the chosen people will reject God, but a few will return.

17 (Is. 7): During the crisis of the war between Israel and Syria against Judah, God encourages the Judean King to rely on God rather than human alliances.

18 (Is. 8): Isaiah's children are symbolic prophecies that God will use the Assyrians as tools to punish Judah, because the king and people of Judah did not have adequate faith.

19 (Is. 9): Isaiah prophecies an ideal Davidic King. After God uses Israel and Assyria to punish Judah, they too will fall and there will be chaos.

20 (Is. 10): God is in charge; the Assyrians will conquer, then collapse, and finally God will establish universal peace.

21 (Is. 11): "Once vain human striving for empire ends, a perfect Davidic king will reign in Jerusalem, and all the world will enjoy peace and equity" (Jewish Study Bible) "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb... and a little child shall lead them" (11:6).

22 (Is. 12): When the world is healed we will be grateful for God's anger, which has turned to redemptive comfort.

23 (Is. 13): God will punish the enemies of the chosen people, symbolized by Babylon.

24 (Is. 14): A mocking lament of prideful Babylon, which God has now brought low.

27 (Is. 29): Jerusalem will be attacked and suffer, but God will bring about unexpected salvation. The people are deaf and blind, but God will bring understanding.

Salvation history

Joke I've heard: Utah is the only place where Jews are Gentiles (funny joke, but gets at very real and complex questions of identity, appropriation, and supercessionism)

How does God save their children? We have a few threads in these chapters. First, we have the powerful overview in 2 Nephi 29:

7 Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?

11 For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written.

12 For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.

26:13 “he manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people”

26:33 For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile.

This resonates with me. I especially love the idea of all world scripture (and I would expand the idea to all inspired art)

**STATEMENT OF THE FIRST PRESIDENCY OF
THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
REGARDING
GOD'S LOVE FOR ALL MANKIND**

February 15, 1978

Based upon ancient and modern revelation. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gladly teaches and declares the Christian doctrine that all men and women are brothers and sisters, not only by blood relationship from common mortal progenitors but as literal spirit children of an Eternal Father.

The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals.

The Hebrew prophets prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, who should provide salvation for all mankind who believe in the gospel.

Consistent with these truths, we believe that God has given and will give to all peoples sufficient knowledge to help them on their way to eternal salvation, either in this life or in the life to come.

In other places in this reading we have a traditional model that Jews were God's original covenant people, then the gospel went to the Christians (the Gentiles), and eventually the Jews will all be converted to Christianity. The Book of Mormon adds that the descendents of Lehi are also Jewish and are therefore brought into these promises.

"Day of the Lord" Prophetic literature developed into full-blown Apocalypticism (which we know because it is the worldview of most of the New Testament)

Jewish thought divides time into This world (Ha olam ha ze) and "the world to come" (Ha olam ha ba) God's radical breaking into history is what transforms this world to the world to come.

That is what Isaiah is talking about: In this world there is suffering and injustice and oppression and disaster and war. God will come crashing in and put everything in its proper order. The "Day of the Lord" refers to this moment when God will make everything right. It is also called "the great reversal" because the high are made low and the low are made high. Isaiah teaches an earlier form, where all the proud will be humbled and only God will be revered (Isaiah 2:11, 17).

This world and the world to come (Messiah and our work in a broken world) Thinking of the Messianic passages in this reading (his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace...) We crave a righteous leader, and we also need to do the good we can within the systems of which we are a part.

The Book of Mormon as a witness for Christ

These chapters get right at the heart of the purpose of the Book of Mormon. They map everything out clearly. A bit too clearly, turns out, so I hope to provide some context.

What is the relationship between reality, revelation, and perception?

1. Reality is what it is. God is what God is.
2. Our *perception of* and *relationship to* God is what impacts our spirituality. As a rule, we don't experience God as God is. We experience God as we are. (Since God is greater than we are, we can never fully understand God)
3. This is why one of the greatest quests in life is to increase our understanding of and relationship to God
4. The best way to understand and draw closer to God is to live the principles of the gospel, to do God's work, to align our actions and character with God.

And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.

What is Christ? Careful listeners will notice that "Savior" is my preferred title.

I think Christ is a spirit that all of us are called to and share. We are called and anointed (Messiah) to repair and heal the world, repair ourselves, our relationships. Jesus Christ is the focal point for this process for billions of people. My studies have led me to think the reality is more complex.

We preach of Christ... we need to go down the rabbit hole a bit here to find a firm foundation. The way Jesus is talked about in the Book of Mormon is both powerfully effective and historically untenable. Let me unpack that.

- 1) Powerfully effective: Millions have come to Christ through the Book of Mormon,
- 2) Historically untenable: A close reading of the Book of Mormon in English highlights details that don't add up. For example, 2 Ne. 25:19 doesn't make sense in a language other than English, since "Christ" is simply the Greek translation, *Xristos*, for the Hebrew Messiah, *Mashiakh*.

For according to the words of the prophets, the Messiah cometh in six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem; and according to the words of the prophets, and also the word of the angel of God, his name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This gets at a tension within human nature... we crave simple familiar narratives.

What is a constructive approach? Name the fact that the way Jews are talked about in the Book of Mormon is influenced by 19th century context. This rabbit hole goes deep. A potential solution: The Nephites received revelation about the Savior in the way that made most sense to them, and then that revelation was communicated in the way that made most sense to the 19th century. From my comment in the Facebook group:

In brief, we humans best engage with simplicity and familiarity. It doesn't take much to overwhelm us. So simple, straightforward, familiar-feeling narratives have the strongest impact on us, which means those simple narratives and approaches impact us the most powerfully, both positively and negatively.

So to reference the discussion in the other post, the idea that the Book of Mormon clearly testifies of Christ can improve relationships with Christ, even though that framing doesn't line up with what we understand of history.

GRACE (2 Ne. 25:23) I think this passage is misunderstood and misapplied. "It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" I love the idea that "we are sentenced to a life of grace". If we honestly and courageously engage with how much we have been given, how little we give back, our mistakes and the trouble we cause, how dependent and interconnected we are... we realize we truly do only live by grace. I think we are "redeemed" when we align ourselves with a proper relationship to grace, humility, and dependence.

GROWTH (29) "We need not more; we have enough" We have to develop a taste for growth. But that's uncomfortable. This is one of the most fundamental shifts, from a comfort and avoidance to a growth and engagement soul-orientation.

Reading Review Highlights:

- 11:4 All things "are the typifying" of God (meaning is in relationship between us and the symbol)
- 11:5 What makes our soul "delight"? What about God "delights" us?
- 12:4 Swords to ploughshares. Commit to build up rather than destroy, learn and practice peace (one of my vows is never to tear down more than I have the opportunity to rebuild)
- 12:5-9: What idolatry are we guilty of? How can we relationship with what is real, rather than our flawed ideas of what is real? We must wake up to interconnection and interdependence **Love and worship and invest in what is real** (rather than idols)
- 13:10 "eat the fruit of their doings" Most often it is consequence that punishes us
- 13:14: Theme: God punishes the rich and powerful because they have oppressed the poor "Be the problem you see in the world" (recognize our complicity in oppressive systems)
- 13:18: God condemns superficiality and vanity
- 14:3 We can be refined and sanctified by our trials "God shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain" (2 Ne. 2:2)
- 14:6 Restoration of intimacy of divine presence, as in the days of Israel in the wilderness
- 15:4 What could have been done more? Lament of love (Similar to Moses 7)
- 15:7 return on investment (oppression instead of justice, outcry instead of righteousness)
- 15:20 Call good evil and evil good. Are we dishonest with ourselves and others to avoid consequence and get undeserved benefit? "Challenge and be challenged by" Do we call

the familiar good and the unfamiliar evil? One of the biggest risks of “feeling based epistemology” is that any discomfort can and often is interpreted as divine disfavor.

- 16: Isaiah’s vision in the heavenly temple. Isaiah has a very old view of God where God is the origin of “both weal and woe”. It is challenging to admit that in this passage, God is the one who tells Isaiah to mislead the people so they can’t repent.
- 19: Joy fills the cup sorrow carves
- 19:13 “The people turneth not unto him that smiteth them” (God as abuser)
- 20: Theme: unrighteous leaders. God is presented as using Judah’s enemies to serve divine judgment (tribal to ultimate god)
- 20:7 “he meaneth not so” Unintended consequences, we act out our parts in systems
- 20:11: The Israelite prophets challenged the theology of election. Many evidently believed that because the Israelites were God’s chosen people he would protect them, and the prophets emphasized that because the Israelites were God’s chosen people he would hold them accountable
- 20: Life lesson. Our dreams and plans often burn and scatter. What do we do with what remains?
- 21:2-4 How can we live these Messianic traits? Counsel, might, knowledge, reverence, quick understanding, righteousness
- 21: Isaiah draws on the traditions of the past to instill hope for the future
- 23:16 have to deal with the fact that murdering children and rape is presented as divine judgment...
- 24:3 “the Lord shall give thee rest, from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve” (I can bear testimony of this. I truly believe God can give us rest from sorrow and fear)
- 24:29 Dragons!! I looked in four resources and didn’t find clarification. This is poetic imagery to express the idea that the death of the Philistine’s enemy is only a temporary reprieve.
- 25:2 very troubling anti-Judaism
- 25:9 The idea that the Jews have been “destroyed from generation to generation” is deeply troubling, unethical, and dangerous.
- 25:16 again, very troubling. The Jews are punished and killed until they believe in Jesus?
- 25:20 “there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved” (Christianity was the first religion to claim that all humans need to be made right with God according to their beliefs)
- 25:21 “these things which I write shall be kept and preserved” Nephi is managing his grief caused by his vision of his people’s destruction
- 25:24: “we keep the law of MOses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law should be fulfilled...” spirit and letter of the law. Keep the letter while understanding the spirit.
- 26:15 Same idea of God punishing the Jews is now applied to the Native Americans. God is presented as being behind the Native American’s destruction. This is American exceptionalism, colonialism, Anti-Indigenous, anti-Judaism. Big challenge moment.

- 26:21 “many churches built up which cause envyings, and strifes, and malice” We need to differentiate problems that are denominational, religious, and human.
- 26:22 the devil “leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever” We have several passages that teach us how sin works
- 26:31 labor for Zion vs. laboring for money... ministry and building the kingdom should be primary, money secondary (I say as someone paid to minister)
- 27:3 Wickedness does not satisfy.
- 26:6-23 I appreciate how the Maxwell edition calls this a “Midrash” or expansion and commentary on Isaiah 29:11-12. Isaiah 29 is rough, stating that God is directly preventing understanding
- 28:20-23 Personal note to Joseph Smith!
- 28: All religions are corrupt. We need to face that. By corrupt I mean flawed and human.
- 28:11-14 PRIDE is a major theme. The gospel is simple: Be honest. Be humble. Say you are sorry. Make it better. Do better.

Challenge and be challenged by

First, what do we make of the relationship between Isaiah in the Book of Mormon and Isaiah in the Bible?

What do we make of the Isaiah chapters?

Starting points:

- The Isaiah chapters are in English (which means they are not the same as what would be on the gold plates or brass plates or what have you).
- The Isaiah chapters are in King James English (which overwhelmingly suggests they are directly or indirectly dependent on the King James Bible version of these chapters. My vote is direct dependence, which means Joseph copied from his KJV when working on these chapters).
- The Isaiah chapters are in the Book of Mormon. (As Joseph Spencer points out, there is a point and purpose to how these chapters function in the Book of Mormon).
- What do we conclude about scripture and revelation taking all this seriously? That’s the fun for you to figure out!

Now the hard stuff: The picture of salvation history we have in the Book of Mormon has some very troubling aspects. Most seriously, it presents the atrocities committed toward the Jews and toward the Native Americans as prophesied and carried out by God. 2 Ne. 30 has supercessionism, and we need to understand that the claim that the Native Americans are the descendents of the Jews is quote offensive to both Native Americans and Jews. What is the relationship between revelation and reality here? I’ll just say the 19th century perspective is very loud in these chapters.

Now is a good time to look at Anti-Judaism again. Here's how it worked: The Israelite prophets, including Isaiah, condemned their people for abandoning God and the covenant. They prophesied that God would punish their people for abandoning the covenant, but that God would gather them again, restoring them to the promises of the Covenant.

The first Jewish Christians struggled to explain why more Jews didn't accept Jesus as the Messiah. So they took the prophetic narrative, but switched out "Jesus as Messiah" for "covenant". Instead of "you have abandoned the Jewish covenant" the Christians accused the Jews of rejecting Jesus as Messiah. The Book of Mormon very clearly shares this perspective.

Views are only positive if the target of those views experience them as positive. If a compliment is experienced as an insult, it is an insult. This is what we need to understand about salvation history. It is an important question to ask, can people be saved and made right with God on the terms of their own beliefs and religion? The official answer is no of course, but it is worth meditating on.

God depicted as abusive husband (have to name it, contextualize it, reject it)

God destroying the Jews and Native Americans: We have to look deeper than legitimizing narratives

It is urgently important than we pick up these pieces so we can read and apply the scriptures responsibly. This is a really big deal, since the whole purpose of the Book of Mormon is to convince Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ...

Conclusion:

Taking a step back, we can say that God's primary purpose is to redeem and sanctify us as humans, and that God uses everything we know and understand to get us there. God communicates to us according to our language, our culture, our expectations. I personally believe that God meets us where we are, and that as we seek greater knowledge, we will have more revealed to us. I also think the best way to engage with missionary work is to respect people where they are, and have a humble attitude of "I would like to share what has worked for me, and hear about what has worked for you." The tricky truth is that we all need different things, in large part because of our culture, which is why the gospel has to be so individualized. Then we with our individual relationships with God and the gospel meet together and edify each other in community.

<https://bookofmormoncentral.org/blog/review-new-book-explores-how-the-book-of-mormon-counters-anti-semitism>

(I find these arguments insufficient, but worthwhile)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Uzo9Y5B6OU>

(Joseph Spencer's authorcast)

https://deseretbook.com/p/the-vision-of-all?variant_id=147268

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/latter-day-saint-perspectives/id1156255694?i=1000461905450&fbclid=IwAR2xiaPvBp3pJiZZJaOSYoBu5atsCwJDFFoiNxWdRUZOBFrszAgInK1FOM8>

<https://rsc.byu.edu/vol-15-no-1-2014/finding-doctrine-meaning-book-mormon-isaiah?fbclid=IwAR2CiY57mo5hG3vk4DYPvZho22OrV5y3ZzTTEZOZq3HD0pd7g3SEe0HBrz0>