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Title

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Abstract *Review of Isaiah and the Book of Mormon: A Study Guide for Understanding the Writings of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (1990), by Philip J. Schlesinger.

Philip J. Schlesinger, *Isaiah and the Book of Mormon A Study Guide for Understanding the Writings of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon.* Published by the author, 1990. 100 pp. \$9.95.

Reviewed by Victor L. Ludlow

Isaiah and the Book of Mormon, by Philip J. Schlesinger, is a passage-by-passage commentary of the Isaiah chapters in the Book of Mormon. The book's subtitle, "A Study Guide for Understanding the Writings of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon," raises expectations which this short book of 100 pages does not fulfill. Instead of "study guide," a more appropriate subtitle for the book would be "some study notes." The primary value of this letter-page sized paperback for students of the Book of Mormon is that it quickly shows where the whole chapters of Isaiah are found in the Book of Mormon. It also gives a few selected quotes from various Latter-day Saint authors about some of the passages. Unfortunately, this book has a number of problems and weaknesses that render it inferior to the other commentaries on Isaiah currently available to Latter-day Saint readers.

There are a number of grammatical errors, misspelled words, and other minor mistakes throughout the book. The writing style is choppy, and it lacks a standard and consistent footnote format.

It becomes quickly obvious that the author lacks familiarity with the world of the Old Testament, as indicated by mistakes and other problems in the lists of definitions given at the beginning of each chapter. These lists are convenient and helpful, but too often they lack clarity and accuracy.

Multiple examples of errors in just one list of definitions are found on page 70, where the terms for Isaiah 11 (2 Nephi 21) are explained. First of all, the list itself is incomplete and inconsistent. Three key terms found in Isaiah 11 are explained in the Doctrine and Covenants: Stem of Jesse, Rod, and Root of Jesse. The *Stem of Jesse* is included in Schlesinger's definition list along with its meaning and the D&C reference. The *Rod* (of the Stem of Jesse) is not even mentioned in the list although it is referred to in the following page of commentary. The *Root of Jesse* is listed with the D&C description, but no reference is included to where this material is found in the D&C.

In the same list, *Ephraim* is defined as (1) the son of Joseph and (2) a New Testament city. The second definition is irrelevant for this context, and two other important definitions should have been included, (1) the tribe of Ephraim's descendants, and (2) the central district of the Samaritan hill country. In addition, the term *Shinar* is misspelled as "Shinor" and *Orontes* as "Drontes" (also on p. 65).

As a last example, the definition of *Philistines* (also repeated verbatim on pages 24 and 61) describes them as a "tribe" from Crete or Egypt that "occupied before the days of Abraham the rich lowland on the Mediterranean coast." Here the author has passed on inaccurate information from the Latter-day Saint Bible Dictionary. The Philistines are more properly a people, not a tribe, because "tribe" implies kinship associations and a common ancestry—things that cannot be proven for the Philistines. The idea that the Philistines were already in Palestine before the time of Abraham is erroneously derived from Genesis 21:32 and other passages in Genesis and Exodus, where the "land of the Philistines" is mentioned. But modern archaeology has proven that the Philistines, as one of the "sea peoples" that invaded the Near East at the end of the Bronze Age, did not enter Palestine until the twelfth century B.C.—long after the days of Abraham. The statement in Genesis 21:32 is thus anachronistic. It identifies the place where the Philistines dwelled to a Hebrew audience hundreds of years after the events of that verse occurred, using a designation that they would understand. It is the same as saying, "Columbus discovered America," even though America got its name after Columbus's voyage.

The definition goes on to say that "in the New Testament times [sic], they were considered a non-semite people [sic] occupying Southwest Palestine." ("Non-semite" should read "non-Semitic.") This statement is misleading because the Philistines cannot be considered a Semitic people in any time period. Also, by New Testament times the Philistines as a distinct people and culture had ceased to exist.

In the commentary on the Isaiah passages, the author relies almost exclusively upon previous Latter-day Saint commentaries on Isaiah and the Book of Mormon. The bulk of the citations are from the following works, in order of frequency: W. Cleon Skousen, *Isaiah Speaks to Modern Times*, Monte S. Nyman, "Great Are the Words of Isaiah," Sidney Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium*, and Victor Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet*,

Seer and Poet. Very little of an original nature is contributed, although the author does the reader a service in some instances by listing the various opinions of Latter-day Saint scholars and writers on the meaning of a particular passage. In this way the reader may see various possibilities for interpreting a particular passage. These selections would be more helpful if they were longer and if more selections dealing with the same Isaiah passage could be compared and contrasted to each other. Then the reader could identify the different styles and approaches of the Latter-day Saint writers.

The author uses the phrase "possible interpretation" and other uncertain language quite frequently, even in situations where more certainty is possible. This creates the impression that very little sure information is available and runs the risk of creating more confusion than offering aid.

The commentary does contain an admirable number of scriptural cross-references which help the reader find other references to specific words or ideas. However, these cross-references are almost entirely from the footnotes or Topical Guide listings readily available in the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version of the Bible.

Isaiah and the Book of Mormon is inferior to the sources from which it derives the bulk of its information. The reader would be better informed by studying the works of Ludlow, Nyman, Skousen, or Sperry listed above, or others, which are more professional, authoritative, and accurate. The contents of this book do not fulfill the reader's expectation that it will be another doctrinal commentary on Isaiah since it is not really a study guide, but more a collection of self-study notes. However, if this book can stimulate others to study Isaiah's writings and introduce them to better sources, then perhaps there is a place for it.