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Abstract Review of *Isaiah Made Easier* (1991), by David J. Ridges.

David J. Ridges, *Isaiah Made Easier*. Springville, UT: By the Author, 1991. i + 76 pp., \$9.95.

Reviewed by Terrence L. Szink

The author's declared purposes in this volume are (1) to help students make notes in their own scriptures as they study Isaiah, and (2) to demonstrate that Isaiah can be understood and even enjoyed. To achieve these goals Mr. Ridges reprints the text of the King James Version of Isaiah and the passages of Isaiah that appear in the Book of Mormon and parenthetically inserts in each verse explanations and comments taken from a number of sources. The sources for these notes include the footnotes in the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Bible, the Joseph Smith Translation, passages from the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Victor Ludlow's *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer and Poet*, Monte Nyman's *Great Are the Words of Isaiah*, various unspecified Bible dictionaries, the Old Testament student manual published by the Church Educational System, and the Martin Luther edition of the German Bible. The choice of these sources is good; they all provide solid background and important commentary without delving too much into speculation. I assume that the inclusion of the latter of these sources is related to Joseph Smith's declaration that he preferred the German version to the King James Version in many instances.¹ One does wonder about the value of including information from the footnotes of the Latter-day Saint version of the Bible, since most readers will be using that as their primary text anyway.

Many of the notes are useful, particularly those that clarify to whom pronouns refer, and those that provide historical or cultural data. Unfortunately, other notes attempt to clarify terms and ideas that do not seem to need clarification. For example, after the phrase "ye shall eat the good of the land" (Isaiah 1:19), the comment is "(you will prosper)"; after "For they shall be ashamed of" (Isaiah 1:29), the explanation is "(shamed because of)." Such comments are redundant and tend to disrupt the flow of the text.

Another minor complaint is that (with the exception of scriptural passages and the alternate translations provided by the German Bible) there is no documentation of where the notes

¹ *TPJS*, 349, 360-64.

come from. I realize that this would burden and even further interfere with the flow of the text, but perhaps a system of abbreviations could have been devised.

In several chapters Mr. Ridges rightly points out the chiasmic structure of the text. In addition, a short explanation of Hebrew poetry in general would have been useful for the beginning student, since much of Isaiah is in a poetic style.

Despite these few shortcomings, I feel that with *Isaiah Made Easier* Mr. Ridges has reached his goals for the beginning student of Isaiah. He shows that with a little work, Isaiah can be understood by most members of the Church. It should be emphasized that this volume is not a commentary per se, but rather a compendium of commentaries. I certainly hope, along with the author, that after gaining the basic understanding of Isaiah's writings provided by *Isaiah Made Easier* students "with the help of more in-depth and scholarly books on Isaiah . . . might continue to pursue their studies of the words of this great Prophet of God" (p. i). I also agree with him that the "explanations and interpretations [found in his book] are not intended to be the final word on Isaiah" (p. i). I hope that students will begin to see many other possibilities for interpretation and application of Isaiah, for his symbolism and messages do indeed lend themselves to multiple interpretations in various settings. I would hasten to repeat that Mr. Ridges has made excellent choices for the sources of the explanatory notes; they all provide a firm foundation on which to build.