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### Avraham Gileadi, *The Literary Message of Isaiah*

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**Title**

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**Abstract** Review of *The Literary Message of Isaiah* (1994), by Avraham Gileadi.

**Avraham Gileadi. *The Literary Message of Isaiah*. New York, NY: Hebraeus, 1994. ix + 610 pp., with "Index to the Literary Analysis of Isaiah." \$25.00, cloth.**

Reviewed by David Rolph Seely

Avraham Gileadi is a scholar who has already published two significant books on Isaiah for a Latter-day Saint audience: *The Apocalyptic Book of Isaiah* and *The Book of Isaiah: A New Translation with Interpretive Keys from the Book of Mormon*.<sup>1</sup> *The Literary Message of Isaiah* is written to a larger non-LDS audience, and in fact has recently been advertised in a catalog for a Christian book club as a work "respected by both liberal and conservative scholars."<sup>2</sup> Gileadi does, on at least one occasion, refer to the Book of Mormon in the footnotes (p. 2 n. 3), but this book is written to a wider audience. It will be interesting to see how this work is regarded by "both liberal and conservative" secular scholars. One of the arguments made in this book is for the literary unity of the book of Isaiah, and this has important implications for Book of Mormon and biblical studies.

### **The Book of Mormon and Isaiah**

Biblical scholars for the last two hundred years have put forth arguments for the composite authorship of the 66 chapters in the prophetic book of Isaiah. The current scholarly consensus is that chapters 1–39 of Isaiah were written by a preexilic author from

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<sup>1</sup> *The Apocalyptic Book of Isaiah* (Provo, UT: Hebraeus Press, 1982), and *The Book of Isaiah: A New Translation with Interpretive Keys from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> *CBD Academic Catalog* Fall/Winter 1995, p. 6. Christian Book Distributors is a good place to buy scholarly and nonscholarly books on the Bible at a discount. For example, Gileadi's *Literary Message of Isaiah* can be purchased through Christian Book Distributors for \$16.95 rather than the \$25.00 price listed on the inside of the dustjacket. The address is Christian Book Distributors, P.O. Box 7000, Peabody, MA 01961–7000.

the seventh century, chapters 40–55 by a postexilic author many scholars call Second Isaiah, and chapters 56–66 by a so-called Third Isaiah who lived even later. The argument for multiple authorship is based on what scholars perceive to be differences in style, vocabulary, and theology between the various units. In addition, many scholars cannot accept the idea of prophecy: that Isaiah could actually have seen into the future and predicted with such accuracy and such detail the conditions that would follow the exile. For example, in chapters 40–55 large portions of text appear to be written to an Israelite audience in captivity in Babylon more than a hundred years into the future from the time of Isaiah. In addition, twice in this section Isaiah mentions the name *Cyrus* (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1)—the Persian king who would conquer Babylon in 539 B.C. Thus scholars deduce that Isaiah 40–55 must have been written by someone after the exile who was familiar with the Babylonian captivity and the rise of Cyrus.

In contrast to this theory, the Book of Mormon claims to have access to the book of Isaiah through the brass plates at a date no later than 600 B.C. and contains quotations both from the chapters scholars consider to be First Isaiah, 1–39, as well as from chapters 40–55, which scholars consider to be Second Isaiah.<sup>3</sup> The authors of the Book of Mormon are also capable, as was Isaiah, of prophesying events in the future with great detail and precision, and Nephi clearly addresses a latter-day audience in his writings. Thus Latter-day Saints are committed to the idea of the unity of Isaiah, in that passages thought to be late by scholars are attested already by 600 B.C. in the Book of Mormon. In addition, Latter-day Saints are committed to the possibility and reality of a prophet's seeing into the future and addressing a future audience. Gileadi, in *Literary Message*, presents a sophisticated and cogent argument for the literary unity of Isaiah, which he uses to support his beliefs that Isaiah could indeed see into the future and that the central message of Isaiah is directed to an audience in our day.

*Literary Message* consists of an introduction in which Gileadi carefully explains the methodology of his interpretation of Isaiah (pp. 1–43), a detailed interpretation and discussion of each of the

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<sup>3</sup> For example, 2 Nephi 12–24 = Isaiah 2–12; 1 Nephi 20–21 = Isaiah 48–49; 2 Nephi 6:16–8:25 = Isaiah 49:24–52:2; 2 Nephi 9:50–51 = Isaiah 55:1–2; 2 Nephi 27 = Isaiah 29; Mosiah 14 = Isaiah 53; etc.

seven parallel units of Isaiah identified in the Bifid Structure (pp. 45–275), Gileadi's "new" translation of the book of Isaiah (271–404), a list of selected reference works (p. 405), a comprehensive concordance of Isaiah based on his translation (pp. 406–565), an index to the literary analysis of Isaiah containing the main terms and expressions Gileadi finds in his translation and interprets in his discussion (pp. 566–603), and finally a short bibliography (pp. 604–10).

## Introduction

As explained in his introduction (pp. 33–39), Gileadi, in his graduate work, studied Isaiah under the direction of the late R. K. Harrison, a biblical scholar at the Toronto School of Theology who believed in the unity of Isaiah. Harrison introduced Gileadi to the work of another scholar, William Brownlee, who argued that the literary structure of Isaiah was to be found in a two-part division of the book, each division containing seven categories of parallel subject matter.<sup>4</sup> Brownlee claimed the same structure could also be found in the biblical books of Joshua, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Gileadi analyzed and significantly developed and revised Brownlee's basic thesis and formally presented his findings in his doctoral dissertation, "A Holistic Structure of the Book of Isaiah."<sup>5</sup> Gileadi sees the structure of Isaiah as two parallel sections of 33 chapters each, which he calls the "Bifid Structure." The Bifid Structure is mentioned in the two previously published volumes and provides the basis for some of Gileadi's interpretations there. However, in *Literary Message* the Bifid Structure is much more developed and provides the framework for Gileadi's discussion and interpretation. Although the organization of the book is different and the presentation of Gileadi's interpretation in *Literary Message* is expanded and presented with more detail, much of the contents of this book will be familiar to a reader who has read either of Gileadi's previous books on Isaiah.

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<sup>4</sup> William H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible* (New York: Oxford University, 1964).

<sup>5</sup> Avraham Gileadi, "A Holistic Structure of the Book of Isaiah" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1981).

## **Methodology of the Holistic Approach**

Gileadi defines his approach to Isaiah as the “holistic approach,” meaning the book of Isaiah should be read as a whole, and that it can only be properly interpreted as a complete work, rather than as two or three separate units. In addition, at the beginning of his work Gileadi clearly affirms his belief that Isaiah had the power to look into the future and to see “the end from the beginning.” This assumption is consistently maintained throughout his book. Gileadi first introduces the “interpretive keys . . . to a sealed book” (p. 2). He identifies these keys as the spirit of prophecy, understanding the manner of prophecy of the Jews, searching the words of Isaiah, and an understanding of types. These keys will be familiar to readers of the Book of Mormon since the “spirit of prophecy” comes from 2 Nephi 25:4; “manner of prophesying” from 2 Nephi 25:1; and “searching” Isaiah from 3 Nephi 23:1. The idea of types is also a common idea in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 17:41; 2 Nephi 11:4; 25:20, etc.).

Gileadi identifies the tools of his “holistic approach” as a combination of three well-known scholarly tools: “first, structural analysis, which examines prophetic meanings embedded in the manner of organizing the material; second, rhetorical analysis, which examines the meanings of individual terms and expressions, particularly as they connect different parts of the text; and third, typological analysis, which examines events out of the past that may foreshadow the future” (p. 10). He effectively explains each of these approaches in terms that can be understood by a layperson. Under structural analysis he discusses several different governing structures of the book of Isaiah, such as apostasy (Isaiah 1–9), judgment (Isaiah 10–34), restoration (Isaiah 35–59), and salvation (Isaiah 60–66); the organizing principle of covenantal curses (Isaiah 1–39) and blessings (Isaiah 40–66); and the so-called Bifid Structure. This is the structure first identified by Brownlee that Gileadi uses as the framework for his interpretation of the text of Isaiah; it consists of “seven different categories of parallel subject matter whose themes are arranged chiasmically” (p. 15). The seven themes are as follows:



1	Ruin and Rebirth	chaps 1-5 // 34-35
2	Rebellion and Compliance	chaps 6-8 // 36-40
3	Punishment and Deliverance	chaps 9-12 // 41:1-46:13b
4	Humiliation and Exaltation	chaps 13-23 // 46:13c-47:15
5	Suffering and Salvation	chaps 24-27 // 48-54
6	Disloyalty and Loyalty	chaps 28-31 // 55-59
7	Disinheritance and Inheritance	chaps 32-33 // 60-66

Also in conjunction with literary analysis, Gileadi briefly discusses lawsuit, messenger speech, woe oracle, prophetic lament, priestly sermon, parable, song of salvation, and parallelism.

In his discussion of rhetorical analysis Gileadi presents "rhetorical connections"—the connections between words and concepts that provide much of the data for his interpretation, metaphors, and "reading between the lines."

The discussion of typology is particularly important to Gileadi's work. In summarizing his understanding of prophecy in Isaiah, he says:

Isaiah consistently uses episodes out of Israel's past as types upon which to frame prophecies of the future. Having seen the end from the beginning in a great cosmic vision, he was able to view both Israel's ancient history (particularly his own day) and also the last days, the time of the end. He thus carefully frames his words in such a way as to capture both time periods in a single prophecy. (p. 27)

Gileadi cites a series of examples in Isaiah of historical precedents for latter-day events: the Creation of the temporal world prefigures the millennial or heavenly world, the calling of Abraham out of the land of Babylon is a type of the calling of a covenant people from the world, and the exoduses from Egypt and again from Babylon in 539 B.C. prefigure a latter-day exodus from Babylon. Likewise, Gileadi sees ancient biblical figures such as Abraham, Moses, David, Hezekiah, and Cyrus as types of future servants of the Lord.

Gileadi's presentation of this material is clear and concise. He makes complex scholarly tools accessible to the layperson. Most, if not all, the tools mentioned in this section are standard methods

used by biblical scholars in the analysis of the Bible. Scholars have long recognized the working of types and typologies in the book of Isaiah, but they do not always agree on their interpretation. Gileadi's contribution to Isaiah studies is the unique way he interprets the types within the Bifid Structure and the way he reads all the prophecies of Isaiah as being addressed and relevant to a latter-day audience.

### **Gileadi's Interpretation of Isaiah**

This section represents Gileadi's interpretation of and commentary on Isaiah. Here Gileadi applies the tools of his holistic methodology to the text of Isaiah. He reads and interprets each of the seven units of the Bifid Structure, discussing the structure, the rhetoric and the types found in each pair of parallel passages; he develops his various types; and he interprets all the prophecies of Isaiah as referring to a future series of events that lead to the Second Coming and the Millennium.

Through the "holistic" approach Gileadi is able to see many unifying connections throughout the book of Isaiah. By reading the text of Isaiah according to the Bifid Structure, the author and the reader begin to see many connections in the Isaiah text that are not easily noted in a straight reading. For example, when reading Isaiah 6–8 along with 36–40, a distinct contrast is noted between Ahaz and Hezekiah and their peoples (pp. 59–65); when reading chapters 24–27 along with 48–54 one can see comparisons with the universal distress and salvation described in the apocalyptic chapters 24–27 and the suffering servant described in chapters 52–53 (pp. 173–213). Gileadi also recognizes important themes found in sections of Isaiah not part of the Bifid Structure. For example, he discusses how the theme of the Tyrant in Isaiah 14, from Unit 4: Humiliation and Exaltation, can be juxtaposed with the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, from Unit 5: Suffering and Salvation (pp. 164–70).

Throughout this portion of the book, Gileadi develops various types: Zion, Babylon, the king of Babylon/Assyria and a series of servants he calls the Davidic king, the Righteous Warrior figure, the Servant figure, and the Cyrus figure—each based on various combinations of the characteristics of Abraham, Moses, David,



Cyrus, and others. Each of these types, for Gileadi, refers to specific future entities who will be involved in latter-day events. His interpretation of Babylon as the archenemy of Zion and the king of Babylon/Assyria as the tool in the hand of the Lord to punish the wicked will be familiar to many readers.

Gileadi's interpretation and heavy emphasis on a latter-day servant he calls the Davidic king, however, have proven somewhat controversial among Latter-day Saint scholars. Throughout Isaiah are prophecies of an agent of God, an anointed one or Messiah, who will bring spiritual and temporal salvation to his children. For example, Isaiah 9:6–7 relates: “unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder. . . . Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end”; Isaiah 53:5 speaks of one who was “wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities”; and Isaiah 61:1–2 prophesies of the anointed one who will come to “preach good tidings to the meek” and “proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God.” Christian and Latter-day Saint scholars usually interpret these passages as referring to one servant, Jesus Christ, who will at his first coming bring spiritual salvation through the atonement, and who will then bring temporal salvation at his second coming when he appears in his glory. Gileadi, on the other hand, argues for two different agents to dispense these salvations—a servant figure, Jesus Christ, who will bring spiritual salvation, and a latter-day Davidic king who will bring temporal salvation. For example, Gileadi reads Isaiah 9:6–7 and Isaiah 61:1–2 as a reference to the Davidic king. He interprets Isaiah 53:1–10 as a prophecy of the atonement of Christ dispensing spiritual salvation, but Isaiah 53:11–12 as the Davidic king, dispensing temporal salvation. These interpretations create obvious scriptural problems: Jesus read Isaiah 61:1–2 in the synagogue in Nazareth as finding its fulfillment through him (Luke 4:16–21), and Abinadi, in the Book of Mormon, interprets all of Isaiah 53 as a prophecy of Jesus Christ (Mosiah 14–15). Gileadi, of course, is aware of these passages and offers a detailed defense of his interpretation. Bruce D. Porter has discussed the issue of the Davidic king at length in his review of Gileadi's previous work,

*The Book of Isaiah*, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*.<sup>6</sup> This particular point demonstrates the idiosyncratic nature of some of Gileadi's interpretations.

From the themes identified in the Bifid Structure and the types developed throughout Isaiah, Gileadi develops a detailed interpretation of the prophecies of Isaiah that outlines the sequence of events leading up to the end of time. He summarizes these events in his "Conclusion" to this section (pp. 249–70). In *Literary Message* Gileadi's discussion of these eschatological events is couched in more general terms than in his two previous books, in which he discusses the events in specific Latter-day Saint terminology. Briefly, Gileadi argues that in the latter days the world will divide itself between Zion and Babylon; the Lord will test his people, and some will align themselves with Babylon and some with Zion; Zion will be redeemed and participate in a "new exodus" out of Babylon; the Lord's servant, the Davidic king, will come and dispense temporal salvation to the people. The climax is, of course, the return of the Lord, the king of Zion, who has delivered his people from death through the atonement.

### **The "New Translation"; Concordance and Index to Literary Analysis**

Gileadi properly began his study of Isaiah with his own translation of the text of Isaiah from Hebrew to English. A copy of his translation also appeared in each of his two previous books. Gileadi's translation is divided into poetic lines, which makes the reading of the poetic sections of Isaiah much easier. Reading Isaiah in poetic lines can be very useful to a Latter-day Saint reader of the scriptures who is familiar only with the King James Version, which does not divide the poetic lines in the Bible. In addition, Gileadi has incorporated readings from the Dead Sea Scrolls and from the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint (LXX), which he believes help to clarify problematic words or phrases in the Masoretic Text (the Hebrew text behind the translation of the King James Version).

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce D. Porter, review of *The Book of Isaiah: A New Translation with Interpretive Keys from the Book of Mormon*, by Avraham Gileadi, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 40–51.

Each of these readings is briefly explained with a footnote. Gileadi's argument for the literary unity of the book of Isaiah is based on the complex relationship between various portions of Isaiah as reflected in vocabulary and concepts. In order to help understand this relationship he has provided cross-references to other relevant passages in Isaiah throughout his translation.

At the end of the volume Gileadi has added "A Comprehensive Concordance of the Book of Isaiah," which lists the reference of every important word in Isaiah as found in Gileadi's translation. This is a useful tool in case one wishes to check the occurrences of a term in Isaiah: "anointed," "Assyria," "David," or "Zion," etc. He has also included an "Index to the Literary Analysis of Isaiah" including the important terms and expressions appearing in the literary analysis of Isaiah throughout his book.

The reader should always remember that any translation is an interpretation of the text. Thus Gileadi's translation is the basis for his interpretation, and at the same time Gileadi's interpretation has, no doubt, influenced his translation. The neatness of the concordance and the index suggests to the inexperienced reader that the relationship between the Hebrew and the English words is simple, clear, and indisputable. Gileadi has worked hard for accuracy and consistency, but English cannot replace the Hebrew text. The translation, concordance, and index should be used as tools to understand better how Gileadi reads Isaiah, but they should not be mistaken for an indisputable key to the Hebrew text of Isaiah. A reader not familiar with Hebrew should consult different translations besides Gileadi. Since many readers consult a commentary on Isaiah to look up a specific passage, this book would benefit greatly from a scripture index.

### **Literary Message as a Commentary on Isaiah**

Gileadi is a scholar who loves the writings of Isaiah and who has devoted much of his life to the study of this important book. *Literary Message* introduces the reader to many useful approaches for reading Isaiah as well as other biblical texts: structural analysis, rhetorical analysis, and the study of types. There are many different ways of writing a scholarly commentary on Isaiah. Some Isaiah commentaries present many different possible interpreta-



tions for each biblical passage. The reader is then left to choose for her- or himself which makes the most sense. One of the strengths of such commentaries is that they properly communicate to the reader the complexities involved in scriptural interpretation. One of the drawbacks of such a commentary is that the nonscholarly reader often does not have the critical abilities to decide which interpretation is correct, and often it is very difficult to get a clear view of bigger issues in a biblical book. The reader seeking for the single "correct" interpretation is left frustrated.

Another approach to writing a commentary on Isaiah is to develop a model that will explain all the passages of the book and then to approach each passage as it fits into the greater whole. The strength of such a commentary is that it is more readable, and a reader is able to grasp large central issues of the work and to understand smaller individual passages in light of bigger themes. The weakness of such an approach is that it often obscures contrary points of view, and the uncritical reader of such a commentary is left with the feeling that the particular interpretation of a passage given in the commentary is the only one possible, and is only able to understand each passage of Isaiah in light of the overall interpretation of the author.

By the very nature of Gileadi's approach—the holistic approach—*Literary Message* is an example of this latter method of commentary. It is a single sustained interpretation of Isaiah seeking to explain each passage in light of larger themes and units. At the beginning of his work Gileadi gives his basic assumptions, explains his methodology, and throughout his commentary he then vigorously argues his interpretations. The strength of the work is to provide a model, or models, by which the text of Isaiah can be explored, to point out many unified overarching themes, to make many new connections within the text, and to conclude with a unified interpretation of all the prophecies found in the text. At the same time an indiscriminating reader is left to believe that this is the only conceivable way to read Isaiah. But many different ways of interpreting various passages in Isaiah are still possible. In particular, many of the types which Gileadi develops, such as the Davidic king, and the sequence of events he reconstructs are open to various reconstructions and interpretations.

This is an important addition to scholarship on the literary unity of Isaiah both for scholars and nonscholars alike. It is written by a man who has dedicated many years of his life to the serious study of Isaiah, who knows much about Hebrew and the manner of prophesying of the Jews, and who believes that Isaiah truly did have a prophetic vision of the “end from the beginning” (p. 249). But readers must bring critical skills to the reading of commentaries. Just as Gileadi has critically read and interpreted Isaiah, so must the reader critically read and examine Gileadi’s interpretation of Isaiah.

We must always remember that the Lord has commanded us to read Isaiah (3 Nephi 23:1–3). That is our task. Commentaries such as *Literary Message* can be read and critically examined for possible insights but must be used to redirect our attention to the writings of Isaiah. A commentary should never be read as a substitute for Isaiah. The critical reader will find much of value in this book as well as much that is disputable. Students of Isaiah will do well to consult several different translations, and several different commentaries in their studies, especially by turning to the scriptural interpretations of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon and the other standard works, as well as in the writings of modern prophets.