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ISAIAH'S BURDEN PROPHECIES AS SPIRITUAL FORMULAS

by

Justin Top

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Religious Education

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Justin Top

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

Date

Terry B. Ball, Chair

Date

Donald W. Parry

Date

Clyde J. Williams

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Justin Top in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

Date

Terry B. Ball
Chair, Graduate Committee

Accepted for the Department

Date

Clyde J. Williams
Graduate Coordinator

Accepted for the College

Date

Terry B. Ball
Dean, Religious Education

ABSTRACT

ISAIAH'S BURDEN PROPHECIES AS SPIRITUAL FORMULAS

Justin Top

Religious Education

Master of Art

The Book of Mormon makes it clear that Isaiah's message is of great importance to the modern reader. In order to facilitate modern and personal spiritual application of Isaiah's writings, spiritual "formulas" or principles may be discovered or formulated. These formulas are statements of truth based on the prophet's writings that may be applied in multiple situations and time periods. Such formulas of truth offer valuable insight across time. These formulas may be understood by analyzing the historical setting of the chapter(s) under review, and through critical examination of the text itself. These formulas provide a solid foundation upon which can be built the framework of personal application.

The burden chapters of Isaiah (chapters 13-23) each offer an important formula that can have powerful spiritual application. This work explores each burden prophecy, using historical research and critical analysis of the text to postulate a formula. Each burden chapter has its own message that can lead to spiritual insight.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Among the most difficult writings of Isaiah to understand and apply to modern living are chapters 13-23, commonly referred to as the “burden prophecies.” In these chapters Isaiah records prophecies relating to several kingdoms or groups of people who interacted with the remnants of the kingdom of Israel in his day. Though to many readers these prophecies seem to deal largely with people, places, and events of antiquity, Isaiah’s writings are also important to the modern reader. Because scriptural prophecy is often dualistic¹ and because patterns of good and evil continually repeat themselves among God’s children, inspired writings of antiquity have modern application as well. Indeed, Isaiah can be one of the most spiritually relevant books of scripture for the modern reader.

Perhaps the most important studies that can be conducted of Isaiah’s “burdens,” or of any other scripture, are those that reveal important principles that facilitate personal application in our day. This thesis seeks to add a new perspective to the pool of scholarly research about the burden prophecies by examining Isaiah’s use of each nation or group of people to which he directs a “burden” as a symbol or type for the different attitudes held by ancient and modern peoples toward God and his work. By applying historical research and Isaiah’s use of imagery to patterns of human behavior and thinking that persist today, I will

¹ When a prophecy has more than one fulfillment, application, or interpretation, it is said to be “dualistic.”

try to identify important spiritual insights or formulas that bridge the gap between antiquity and the latter days.

WHY STUDY ISAIAH?

During one of His visits to the Nephites, after teaching extensively concerning the destiny of the house of Israel, the Savior declared of Isaiah, “And now, behold I say unto you that ye ought to search these things. Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah” (3 Nephi 23:1). Not only did the Savior personally commend the writings of Isaiah to the people, He commanded the people to “search” the words of Isaiah. It is no wonder then that Isaiah is quoted more by other prophets and even Christ himself throughout all the standard works than any other prophet. Indeed, the prophets of old seem to treat Isaiah’s writings with a special sacredness and seem to echo Nephi’s shout: “For my soul delighteth in his words” (2 Nephi 11:2).

So what is it that makes the writings of Isaiah so impressive and important? The Lord offered one insight as He explained, “And all things that [Isaiah] spake have been and shall be, even according to the words which he spake” (3 Nephi 23:3). This statement tells us that the principles, doctrine, and poetic verse found in Isaiah span the ages in application and relevance.

Nephi shared similar feelings about Isaiah’s prophecies. To his murmuring brothers Nephi quoted Isaiah and likened his writings to their situation. Later, immediately before including a large portion of Isaiah on the small plates Nephi informed the Book of Mormon reader, “And now I write some of the words of Isaiah, that whoso of my people shall see these words may lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men. Now these are the words, and ye *may liken them unto you and unto all men*” (2 Nephi 11:8, emphasis added). Thus, Nephi

echoed the Savior's endorsement of Isaiah, admonishing all men to seek direction for their lives within the pages of Isaiah's record.

APPROACH

The Book of Mormon records an interesting exchange between Nephi and his brothers in 1 Nephi 19-22. As part of his exhortation to his brothers Nephi quotes Isaiah 48-49 (recorded in 1 Nephi 20-21). After quoting the prophet, Nephi informs us that his brothers wanted to know whether the prophecies were to be understood spiritually or temporally. In response Nephi writes, "Behold they were manifest unto the prophet by the voice of the Spirit; for by the Spirit are all things made know unto the prophets, which shall come upon the children of men according to the flesh. Wherefore, things of which I have read are things pertaining to things *both temporal and spiritual*" (1 Nephi 22:2-3, emphasis added).

Accordingly, this work will analyze some of the temporal meanings in an attempt to discover the spiritual application. It will combine historical research and scriptural exegesis with spiritual principles for personal application. As each group or nation to whom a burden was given is examined, relevant historical facts concerning the people's religion, politics, and social system will be explained. That information will then be correlated with the actual prophecy of Isaiah and with other scriptural writings as needed to explore the symbolism associated with that nation and to derive spiritual formulas.

THE "ALGEBRA" OF ISAIAH

A person's concept of the nature of prophecy can influence his or her understanding of the prophecies themselves. Thus it is important, before proceeding with this work, to explain the view that shapes the ideas here and how that view compares to those of others who have published commentaries on Isaiah.

Consider the simple question, “Can prophets really prophesy?” Can these holy men, through the Spirit of the Lord, predict events before they happen? The two possible answers to this question provide the foundation for two different schools of interpretation of Isaiah. One group would answer that prophets can prophesy, and that the very fulfillment of such predictions is evidence that they came through the power of God. Students of Isaiah who hold this view are more likely to see Isaiah as inspired text.

Another school of thought concerning prophecy revolves around the belief that prophecy does not exist. Clearly such a belief would have a profound effect on the way Isaiah’s writings are understood. Victor L. Ludlow wrote in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* article about Isaiah’s authorship concerning the emergence of a group that challenged the validity of Isaiah’s prophetic abilities. “Traditionally, the book of Isaiah has been ascribed to a prophet living in the kingdom of Judah between 740 and 690 B.C. In Germany during the late 1700s, several scholars challenged this view, claiming that chapters 40-66 were written by one or more other individuals as late as 400 B.C. because of the specific references to events that occurred after Isaiah's death. This outlook now permeates many Bible commentaries and has led to the postulation of a second prophetic writer who is commonly called in scholarly literature ‘Deutero-Isaiah.’ Indeed, a wide variety of theories regarding the date and authorship of Isaiah now exist.”²

Because The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes in revelation through living prophets and apostles, its members should have no problem believing that prophets can and do prophesy. The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* explains concerning Isaiah’s authorship:

²Victor L. Ludlow, “Isaiah: Authorship” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1-4 vols., edited by Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 699.

LDS belief in revelation and the seership of prophets, along with the quotations from Isaiah in the Book of Mormon and its admonitions to study his writings, have reinforced Latter-day Saints in the traditional view concerning the date and authorship of Isaiah, in the following ways.

First, while some scholars argue that prophets could not see the future and that, therefore, the later chapters of Isaiah must have been written after Isaiah's time (e.g., Isa. 45 concerning Cyrus), Latter-day Saints recognize that prophets can see and prophesy about the future. In chapters 40-66, Isaiah prophesies of the future, just as the apostle John does in Revelation 4-22, and the prophet Nephi 1 in 2 Nephi 25-30.

Second, the Book of Mormon prophet Lehi and his family left Jerusalem about 600 B.C. and took with them scriptural writings on plates of brass that contained much of the Old Testament, including Isaiah (1 Ne. 5:13; 19:22-23). Book of Mormon prophets taught from the brass plate records, not only from chapters 1-39, which are usually assigned by scholars to the prophet Isaiah of the eighth century B.C., but also from the later chapters, the so-called Deutero-Isaiah. For example, Isaiah chapters 48-54 are all quoted in the Book of Mormon, with some passages mentioned a number of times (1 Ne. 20-21; 2 Ne. 6:16-8:25; Mosiah 12:21-24; 14; 15:29-31; 3 Ne. 16:18-20; 20:32-45; 22). Hence, the existence of a virtually complete Isaiah text in the late seventh century B.C., as witnessed by the Book of Mormon, negates arguments for later multiple authorship, whether those arguments be historical, theological, or literary.

Finally, other significant witnesses exist for the single authorship of Isaiah, including Jesus Christ in particular (cf. Matt. 13:14-15; 15:7-9; Luke 4:17-19; 3 Ne. 16, 20-22). Indeed, after quoting much from Isaiah 52 (3 Ne. 16:18-20; 20:32-45) and repeating Isaiah 54 in its entirety (3 Ne. 22), the resurrected Jesus Christ admonished his Book of Mormon disciples to study Isaiah's words and then said, "A commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah. For surely he spake as touching all things concerning my people which are of the house of Israel" (3 Ne. 23:1-2).

Jewish and Christian traditions from the earliest times have supported the single authorship of Isaiah. The Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and other ancient texts also give no hint of multiple authorship. Latter-day Saints accept the words of the risen Jesus that Isaiah was a seer and revelator whose prophecies, as recorded throughout his book, will eventually all be fulfilled (3 Ne. 23:1-3). Particularly from Jesus' attribution of Isaiah 52 and 54 to the ancient prophet have Latter-day Saints concluded that the book of Isaiah is the inspired work of the eighth-century prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz.³

³ Ibid.

Another important question is *how* prophets prophesy. Was Isaiah able to foretell events because he had seen them in vision and thus understood them perfectly himself, or is it possible that he himself did not fully understand how they would play out, and was just recording what the Spirit dictated to him with little or no understanding?

Though there are many examples from the scriptures and Church history of prophetic utterances issued as a result of visions of future events, there are also accounts of persons receiving the “spirit of prophecy” and predicting events that they did not understand. In his biography of Heber C. Kimball, Orson F. Whitney recounts a story about a prophecy spoken by Elder Kimball in Salt Lake that explains this principle:

It was during this time of famine, when the half starved, half-clad settlers scarcely knew where to look for the next crust of bread or for rags to hide their nakedness-for clothing had become almost as scarce with them as bread-stuffs-that Heber C. Kimball, filled with the spirit of prophecy, in a public meeting declared to the astonished congregation that, within a short time, "States goods" would be sold in the streets of Great Salt Lake City cheaper than in New York and that the people should be abundantly supplied with food and clothing.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Charles C. Rich; and he but voiced the sentiment of nine-tenths of those who had heard the astounding declaration.

Heber himself was startled at his own words, as soon as the Spirit's force had abated and the "natural man" had reasserted itself. On resuming his seat, he remarked to the brethren that he was afraid he "had missed it this time." *But they were not his own words, and He who had inspired them knew how to fulfill.*

The occasion for the fulfillment of this remarkable prediction was the unexpected advent of the gold-hunters, on their way to California. The discovery of gold in that land had set on fire, as it were, the civilized world, and hundreds of richly laden trains now began pouring across the continent on their way to the new El Dorado. Salt Lake Valley became the resting place, or "half-way house" of the nation, and before the Saints had had time to recover from their surprise at Heber's temerity in making such a prophecy, the still more wonderful fulfillment was brought to their very doors. The gold-hunters were actuated by but one desire, to reach the Pacific Coast, the thirst for mammon having absorbed for the time all other sentiments and desires. Impatient at their slow progress, in order to lighten their loads, they threw away or "sold for a song" the valuable merchandise with which they had

stored their wagons to cross the Plains. Their choice, blooded, though now jaded stock, they eagerly exchanged for the fresh mules and horses of the pioneers, and bartered off, at almost any sacrifice, dry goods, groceries, provisions, tools, clothing, etc., for the most primitive outfits, with barely enough provisions to enable them to reach their journey's end. Thus, as the Prophet Heber had predicted, "States goods" were actually sold in the streets of Great Salt Lake City cheaper than they could have been purchased in the City of New York.

Referring to this incident, in a sermon, a few years later, Heber says:

"The Spirit of prophecy foresees future events. God does not bring to pass a thing because you say it shall be so, but because He designed it should be so, and it is the future purposes of the Almighty that the Prophet foresees. *That is the way I prophesy, but I have predicted things I did not foresee, and did not believe anybody else did, but I have said it, and it came to pass even more abundantly than I predicted;* and that was with regard to the future situation of the people who first came into this valley. . . .

*"I have heard Joseph say many times, that he was much tempted about the revelations the Lord gave through him-it seemed to be so impossible for them to be fulfilled."*⁴

Thus, this illustrates that though a prophecy is given, the one who issues it may not fully understand all its fulfillment or application. This principle has important applications to the study of Isaiah. For example, in Isaiah 5:26-29, Isaiah prophesies, "And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and behold, they shall come with speed swiftly: None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken: whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind: There roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it." The traditional explanation of these verses is that Isaiah is predicting that the Assyrian army would come against Israel and Judah quickly and carry many away captive. This explanation seems to fit quite well in the context of Isaiah's

⁴ Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co, 2001) 390-392 (emphasis added).

political environment. However, a modern Apostle has suggested that this verse also foretells of the gathering of Israel by the Lord's missionaries, using the speed and convenience of modern transportation.⁵ So which interpretation aligns most closely with what Isaiah intended? The answer may be that it doesn't matter what Isaiah thought as much as many have claimed. It may be that Isaiah understood both, one or the other, or neither of these interpretations or something else entirely when he wrote it. If the words were given to Isaiah through the Spirit, there may be numerous applications of this prophecy that will be revealed only as needed. Though it is helpful to understand what Isaiah meant, the true source of the prophecy is God. Therefore, it is more important to discover what God intends the prophecy to mean for us.

The belief that God is the source of the prophecy logically leads to another conclusion. Because God is all-knowing, He can give prophecy that applies to many different people, time periods, and circumstances. Dualistic prophecy is abundant in the writings of Isaiah. This dualism is discussed by many scholars, especially Latter-day Saints, and is enhanced by the aid of modern prophetic commentary on Isaiah's record. Unfortunately, some who study Isaiah get overly obsessed with identifying a single specific event Isaiah is foretelling, and, as a result, may miss one of his purposes for prophesying in the first place. Each individual event in a prophecy fits into an overall message that Isaiah, or the Lord through Isaiah, wants the reader to understand. The events Isaiah describes are

⁵ Elder LeGrand Richards stated, "Since there were neither trains nor airplanes in that day, Isaiah could hardly have mentioned them by name. However, he seems to have described them in unmistakable words. How better could 'their horses' hoofs be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind than in the modern train? How better could 'their roaring . . . be like a lion' than in the roar of the airplane? Trains and airplanes do not stop for night. Therefore, was not Isaiah justified in saying: 'none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken'? With this manner of transportation the Lord can really 'hiss unto them from the end of the earth,' that 'they shall come with speed swiftly.'" (*Israel! Do You Know?* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1990) 182.

intended to help the reader understand and put the message in context. Though identifying specific events of which Isaiah prophesied can be exciting and faith-building, we must remember that the wider application of principles in the book has as much and perhaps more value.

To illustrate, compare Isaiah's writings to an algebraic equation with multiple variables, with the variables representing the different events Isaiah seems to be describing. At first glance the mathematician may want to solve the equation, or in other words, find definite values for each variable or event in the prophetic equation. Often in Isaiah's prophetic equations, however, the variables or events may have more than one "value" that would work in the equation. Thus, while there may be merit in assigning specific "values" or events to each of Isaiah's various prophecies, one should not overlook the overall message and purpose to the equation. It may be that at times Isaiah provides a formula that may lead the reader to powerful solutions with many different variables. The value of a formula is that it does not provide just one answer, but it has the ability to provide answers in many varying situations. Once one has the formula, it is easy to apply it according to need. Accordingly, the value in Isaiah's writings may not only be found in his descriptions of individual events, but in the prophetic formulas he provides. These formulas provide a blueprint for solving problems in many different times and circumstances.

For example, consider Isaiah 11, the "stem of Jesse" prophecy. "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." The Lord Himself assigned "values" to the variables in this prophecy when Joseph and others sought to know what each symbol represented. The Lord's explanation is a revelation now found in Doctrine and Covenants 113.

1 WHO is the Stem of Jesse spoken of in the 1st, 2d, 3d, 4th, and 5th verses of the 11th chapter of Isaiah?

2 Verily thus saith the Lord: It is Christ.

3 What is the rod spoken of in the first verse of the 11th chapter of Isaiah, that should come of the Stem of Jesse?

4 Behold, thus saith the Lord: It is a servant in the hands of Christ, who is partly a descendant of Jesse as well as of Ephraim, or of the house of Joseph, on whom there is laid much power.

5 What is the root of Jesse spoken of in the 10th verse of the 11th chapter?

6 Behold, thus saith the Lord, it is a descendant of Jesse, as well as of Joseph, unto whom rightly belongs the priesthood, and the keys of the kingdom, for an ensign, and for the gathering of my people in the last days.

In this prophecy *rod*, *stem*, *branch* and *roots* are the “variables,” while the overall comparison makes up the “formula.” While one could just insert the interpretations of the “variables” from Doctrine and Covenants 113, broader interpretations and application can be derived by first understanding the “formula.” This prophecy employs the poetic style of parallelism. Thus the phrase “a rod out of the stem” is parallel to “a branch shall grow out of his roots.” In other words, there may not be four different “variables” but two since *rod*⁶ and *branch* can describe the same thing, while *stem* and *root* can be synonymous. Perhaps then Isaiah is describing a tree whose top has died or has been cut off leaving only the stump (stem and roots). Then Isaiah predicts that a new shoot (rod or branch) will begin to grow out of the remnant of the tree. Thus the overall intent (formula) of Isaiah’s imagery in this prophecy may be to illustrate the concept of restoration. Perhaps the prophecy is proclaiming that the tree that once grew out of good roots would die or be cut off, but eventually a new branch would grow out of the same roots to restore the tree to her former greatness. This is the “formula” Isaiah provides.

⁶ From the Hebrew *choter* meaning “branch, twig, or rod,” appears to be describing a “new shoot” trees often send out when they are dying or being pruned. See Robert Young, *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980) 823.

This “formula” of spiritual decay and restoration can have application to many time periods and circumstances. For example, during New Testament times, Christ as the branch grew out of the roots of decayed Israel (including both the priesthood authority and the royal Davidic bloodline). In the current dispensation this prophecy, while holding to the same theme, was fulfilled with slightly different variables. The true program set forth by Jesus Christ (priesthood, doctrine, ordinances, etc.) was cut off during the Apostasy, but out of that same organization (through the direct guidance of those who were a part of that organization, i.e., John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, and even Christ himself) a new branch began to grow under the leadership of Joseph Smith. Thus the Lord’s designation in Section 113 of the “stem” as Christ and the “rod” as a powerful servant (often understood as Joseph Smith)⁷ was the appropriate answer to those who asked because it was the interpretation that best applied to the time. Further, the Lord then states that the “root” which would stand as an ensign to the nations mentioned in Isaiah 11:10 is “ a descendant of Jesse, as well as of Joseph, unto whom rightly belongs the priesthood, and the keys of the kingdom, for an ensign, and for the gathering of my people in the last days” (D&C 113:6). It appears that the “root” definition could easily be applied to Joseph Smith as well, though this time he is the “root” rather than the “rod.” The Lord, however, connects the root with the priesthood, keys, and gathering of Israel. Isaiah’s formula remains the same, but the people or events seem to change. Here it seems that just as the Joseph Smith and the restored Church of Christ grew out of the roots of Christ’s authority, so also spiritual Israel and the kingdom of God on the

⁷ It important to note that the revelation itself does not specifically name Joseph Smith as the “branch.” That designation easily fits and has been applied to Joseph by inspired Church leaders. It is possible, however, that the Lord left it somewhat vague because it may be applied to various individuals, or even to the Church in general. Thus, the Lord’s own explanation of the “branch” is itself a “formula.”

earth would be re-established out of the same roots of Christ's authority as contained in the restored Church in the last days.⁸

In this work I will seek to identify not only the various events Isaiah seems to be foretelling in the historical context of his own day, but also the "formulas" set forth in each burden prophecy, thus facilitating the discovery of how Isaiah's inspired utterances may have relevance in the modern world.

OVERVIEW

Below is a brief overview of each group that will be discussed.

Babylon. Babylon can represent those who have become so blinded by their pride and need for glory that they refuse to acknowledge the Lord. It is the ultimate symbol of sin, pride, worldliness and material wealth, and the doctrines of Satan.

Moab. Moab attempts an alliance with Judah only after they are faced with destruction. It can represent those who are forced to repent because of circumstance, but never really change their hearts.

Damascus (Syria). Isaiah ties the fates of Syria and northern Israel together because of their alliance against Judah. Syria can symbolize the results of unholy alliances with worldliness and sin against the righteous.

The Land Shadowing With Wings. This people can be seen as a symbol of those who love the Lord and do His will and bring righteous offerings to Him. Thus, they can represent those who, though they may begin far from the Lord, come unto him and do His work.

⁸ There is obviously much more that could be said about this prophecy of Isaiah 11 and its application to various time periods. The goal of referring to it was simply to illustrate Isaiah's use of thematic prophecy.

Egypt/ Ethiopia. Egypt, like Babylon, can be a symbol of pride and worldliness.

Unlike Babylon, however, Isaiah prophesied that once Egypt is humbled and “stripped” of pride and ungodliness, its people would repent, worship the Lord, and be united with Israel.

Tyre (Phoenicia). Tyre represents the merchants who are trying to get gain. They are never really enemies of Israel, but they are never really allies either. They did whatever would help them make money. Isaiah compares the Phoenician city of Tyre to a harlot, who rather than joining with one man, sells herself to many for money. Tyre, can represent those who sell themselves and want the best of both material and spiritual worlds.

Thus these nations can symbolize the attitudes and actions of groups of people as well as separate individuals. A latter-day covenant people can indeed liken these scriptures unto themselves and others. In these chapters they can find insights for dealing with their own personal struggles with sin and worldliness.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BURDEN OF THE GENTILES

In order to understand Isaiah's burden prophecies fully, it is helpful to first look at them in the context of the surrounding chapters and the overall message of the book. Isaiah may have arranged his prophecies specifically to attempt to clearly emphasize his teachings to ancient and modern Israel. He develops his message as he writes to highlight the spiritual challenges of the people and to offer a solution to bring Israel back into full spiritual glory. This chapter will examine the groundwork laid by the overall organization as well as the general themes of Isaiah in order to better illustrate how the burden prophecies and their symbolism of the various attitudes of the world fit into his overall message.

THE GREAT ARRAIGNMENT

Many Isaiah scholars compare the first chapter in Isaiah to an arraignment hearing in which charges are set forth against God's people by God Himself. One commentary explains, "This section presents God's charge against Israel. Isaiah's words remind us of a courtroom scene, in which God is both the plaintiff and the judge, the heavens and the earth are witnesses, and Israel is the defendant. The Lord calls his witnesses, presents his case and indictment, and pronounces judgment against Israel. Israel is charged with breaking the covenant and committing great sins."⁹ The children of Israel had breached their contract with God. They had not fulfilled their responsibilities to the Lord. Isaiah proclaims concerning the covenant people, "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of

⁹ Terry B. Ball, "Isaiah and the Great Arraignment" in *Voices of Old Testament Prophets*, Sperry Symposium, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co. 1997) 46-60. See also Donald W. Parry, Jay A. Parry, and Tina M. Peterson, *Understanding Isaiah*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 8.

evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward” (Isaiah 1:4).

Isaiah then describes more specifically how many of the Israelites have forsaken the Lord. Though they were still going through the motions of proper worship, their hearts were not in it (see verses 11-15). They had, like “an harlot,” forsaken their union with God and sought to join themselves with the idols of worldliness and sin (see v. 21). Many of the people loved the idols of the Gentile nations more than Jehovah. Isaiah condemns Israel for desiring “oaks” and choosing “gardens” (see v. 29). These words refer to places where the idols of Baal and Ashtoreth were worshipped.¹⁰ In other words, they had forsaken the Lord because they loved the idols worshipped by neighboring nations. Their attitudes toward God and righteousness were beginning to mirror the attitudes of their neighbors.

REPLENISHED FROM THE EAST

Isaiah further expounds on this accusation of idolatry in chapter two. The Book of Mormon version states that the people had “all gone astray, everyone to his wicked ways” (2 Nephi 12: 5).¹¹ They had gone away from the Lord and toward the gods of the world. “Therefore, O Lord, thou hast forsaken thy people, the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and hearken unto soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers” (2 Nephi 12:6). This verse summarizes one of Israel’s great sin. They had come to love the idols of man and the lifestyle associated with idol worship. They had filled their lives with worldliness to the point that there was no room

¹⁰ Terry Ball, *Understanding the Words of Isaiah* [Sound Recording] (American Fork, Ut: Covenant Communications, Inc., 2001).

¹¹ The Book of Mormon version differs slightly from the King James version. The KJV reads, “...replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines...”

left for God. Edward Young explained the phrase “they are filled (replenished) from the east:”

The picture is that of a vessel that is filled, and hence has no room to hold anything further. The nation is filled with what comes from the east which is always represented as the source from whence these superstitions have filled the nation. To state the case in a slightly different fashion, we may say that the nation is filled with the east. By means of caravans crossing the desert east and northeast of Palestine there had actually been an influx of soothsayer and an introduction to the eastern ways of life. The east is probably the Syrian desert and the lands beyond. What a contrast! In the latter days other nations will come to Zion to learn the ways of the God of truth. Now, other nations come to Zion and influence it to follow the superstitions of their gods. Zion is now satiated with these things from the east. Once, the nation was full of judgment and the knowledge of God. They are no longer filled with that knowledge but rather with what the east provides.¹²

Not only was Israel influenced by the nations of the east, but by the Philistines also. The Lord had commanded the Israelites that soothsayers such as those popular among the Philistines should be driven out of their midst.¹³ Many of the people, however, had apparently ignored this commandment. In addition, they would “please themselves in the children of strangers” (v. 6). Scholars often translate “please” as “to shake hands” or “clasp hands” as is done in making covenants. Thus despite a specific prohibition by the Lord of alliances with gentile nations, the people were joining themselves with the people and practices of “strangers.”¹⁴

Isaiah laments the result of this unrighteous union in the following verses, “Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots. Their land is also full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made” (vv. 7-8).

¹² *The Book of Isaiah*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965) 116.

¹³ See Leviticus 19:26, Deut. 18:10.

¹⁴ Parry, *Understanding Isaiah*, 30.

The people had eagerly welcomed all the merchandise, philosophies, fashions, and gods of their neighbors despite the Lord's warning. They had no room for God because they had glutted themselves with the pleasures of the world

UNHOLY ALLIANCES

To further illustrate his point, Isaiah points to the political events of his time. As the Assyrian empire gained strength and power and continued to lay heavy taxes on the nations in the shadow of its rule, many of these captive nations, including Israel and Judah began to make alliances in order to gain power. Israel and Syria joined together against Assyria with the hope of defeating its powerful army and gaining freedom. They also sought to add Judah to their list of allies, first through negotiation, and finally, after King Ahaz refused to join them, through force. Isaiah 7 describes the preparations and emotions of the people of Judah as the Syrio-Ephraimite army threatens.¹⁵ The northern kingdom of Israel had allied themselves with a gentile nation and appeared to be quite a threat to Ahaz's people. In order to defend himself, Ahaz was considering making his own confederacy with another gentile nation.

The Lord then sent Isaiah the prophet to convince the king that worldly alliances are not the answer. "And say unto him, take heed and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah" (Isaiah 7:4). Isaiah even offered Ahaz the chance to ask the Lord for a sign that He would protect Judah, but Ahaz refused. He chose instead to put his trust in the strength of men. Rather than trusting the word of God, Ahaz chose to make an alliance with Assyria. Perhaps in an attempt to show loyalty to the newly formed alliance, Ahaz had an

¹⁵ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), Vol. 1, 144-145.

Assyrian altar built in the temple.¹⁶ Thus both the kingdoms that were born of the once great kingdom of Israel had chosen to rely on politics and military power by uniting with gentiles rather than put their faith in their God. Isaiah prophesied of the consequences that seemed to apply to both nations of Israel. “Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah’s son; now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: and he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land...” (Isaiah 8:6-8).

The crime for which both Judah and Israel stand condemned is that of binding themselves to the gentiles rather than to God. They chose to trust in the knowledge, strength, and gods of mortal men rather than in the simple but transcendent power the Lord. Of all of the things that the Israelites adopted from other nations their rebellious attitude toward Jehovah was possibly the most detrimental.

THE BURDEN CHAPTERS

Isaiah’s warning to Israel about the dangers of Judah and Israel’s alliance with and adoption of practices and beliefs of the Gentile nations outlined in the initial chapters (1-8) provides the context for the burden chapters and prepares the reader for the message they contain. Isaiah continues to make his point by turning his attention to the Gentile nations that exert the greatest influence on the people of Israel. He describes their weaknesses and prophesies of their demise. While Isaiah’s warnings are explicitly directed to the gentile nations, they may also apply implicitly to his covenant people who have joined themselves to

¹⁶ Ibid.

the strangers. His message seems to be, “If you unite with them, you will share their burdens.”¹⁷

Because chapters 13-23 describe the sins of the neighboring nations and prophecies of the negative consequences that await each of them, they are often referred to as the “burden prophecies.”¹⁸ Each section begins with the heading, “The burden of...” and includes the name of the nation or some description of the region that Isaiah intends to discuss. There is considerable debate over what the correct translation should be for the Hebrew term *massa*.¹⁹ Commonly the term translates as “burden.” The root refers most commonly to a heavy load that must be carried or lifted. It is also used to describe burdensome taxes or tribute, and to represent the duties or responsibilities carried by a person in authority. It is when *massa* is used to represent a prophecy or vision proclaimed by a prophet that scholars disagree on its translation. Otto Kaiser explained, “There is so far no agreement about the meaning of the Hebrew word *massa* which is so translated. Whereas some follow the Vulgate, Luther and the AV translate ‘burden,’ others seek an explanation in the phrase ‘raise the voice’ which frequently occurs in the Old Testament, and derive from it the word *massa* with the meaning ‘raising (of the voice), oracle.’”²⁰ In virtually every case that *massa* is used to represent a prophecy, however, it is one of coming doom or destruction.²¹ This certainly fits with Isaiah’s usage of the term, as each of his “oracles” warn of the fate of the gentile nations. It seems logical that in these chapters “burden” signifies the trials and difficulties that would, at a future time, be heaped upon the idolatrous nations. Thus, Isaiah may be comparing the

¹⁷ See for example Isaiah 46 where Isaiah uses the imagery of oxen carrying a huge heavy idol.

¹⁸ See *Old Testament Student Manual I Kings-Malachi*, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003) 159.

¹⁹ See Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 240.

²⁰ *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary*, (Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1974) 1.

²¹ Leupold, 240.

attitude of each nation toward God and the dire consequences each will suffer to a great yoke, or burden.

If such is the case, then Isaiah's message to Israel seems clear: "If you yoke yourself to strangers, you will share in their burden." Isaiah expounds on this idea in chapter 46. "Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your carriages were heavy loaden; they are a burden to the weary beast. They stoop, they bow down together, they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity" (v. 1-2). Here Isaiah uses the imagery of great idols to the Babylonian gods Bel and Nebo being tipped over and loaded onto carriages to be moved. These enormous statues of wood, stone, or metal (or a combination) would have been so heavy that the animals would have struggled under their weight. Isaiah's message here is that the idols, philosophies, politics, and desires of the world are really a terrible and spiritually deadly burden to God's people, not something for which they should strive.

In contrast to this relentless indictment of wicked peoples, redemption is also a major theme, especially in the latter part of Isaiah's writings. He continually declares that even though the covenant people have been stumbling under the weight of worldliness and sin, if they will come unto the Lord, he will lift their burden. After describing the burdened beasts carrying the great idols cited above, Isaiah contrasts the burden of the world with the burden of the Lord. "Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb: and even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and will bear; even I

will carry, and will deliver you.”²² This same theme of redemption is woven into the burden chapters as well.

This is a formula that applies to much of the book of Isaiah, and especially to the “burden” prophecies and their surrounding chapters. The formula that Isaiah seems to be clarifying is that those who choose to enslave themselves to the idols of the world will find themselves crushed under that weight, but those who choose to take up the cross and follow the Lord will find that their “burden” actually carries them.

²² Isaiah 46:3-4

CHAPTER THREE

THE BURDEN OF BABYLON

ISAIAH 13, 14, 21

The first gentile nation against which Isaiah lifts up his voice is what he portrays as the great empire of Babylon. Actually though, at the time Isaiah made this prophecy, Babylon was not the great empire it would later become, nor was it a direct political threat to Israel and Judah, but rather was in the shadow of the Assyrian empire. For this reason, and the fact that Isaiah gives a somewhat detailed description of the downfall of Babylonia and her king, many scholars assert that these chapters were added to Isaiah's writings by an editor who lived after the Babylonian captivity.²³ However, understanding what Babylon may have represented to Isaiah and the people of his day, and how the Lord uses it as a symbol throughout the scriptures can help us glean deep insights from the prophecy and support its eighth-century authorship.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From the tower of Babel to the height of its power, Babylon was a type for all that God opposes. There are at least three major factors that may have influenced Isaiah's use of Babylon as a symbol: 1) Babylon had a degrading influence on the region, 2) Babylon was associated with the tower of Babel, and 3) The symbol was given by divine direction.

²³ See discussion in Chapter 2 about prophecy and authorship of Isaiah.

Babylon's Degrading Influence

Though the political capital of the ancient Near East occasionally moved away from Babylon, such as during the rule of the Assyrians, the great city was often a center of power and influence. At its height, it was the very symbol of Mediterranean prosperity and decadence.²⁴ As one author explained, "The spirit of the world power is to be found in Babylon. In the first place Babylon is introduced as the center of world power, and secondly, as the center of idolatry."²⁵ Among the ways in which Babylon exerted a degrading influence in the region in the time of Isaiah, as well as when the Empire was at its zenith, were its focus on materialism and intellectualism, militarism, idolatry, and immorality. It seems likely that these defining characteristics influenced Isaiah's use of Babylon as a symbol.

Materialism and Intellectualism. Babylon was a cultural center of the ancient world. It was arguably the apex of wealth and wisdom. The city itself is said to have represented all the greatest achievements of man at that time. At its height, it proclaimed its glory to the world through its impressive architecture, which combined majesty with seemingly impregnable defense. Ancient historians described the great city in much detail. One modern scholar wrote concerning the description of Babylon the Great by the ancient historian Herodotus:

Herodotus claimed that [the city wall] was eighty-four feet wide and three hundred and thirty-six feet high. He also claimed that small one-story houses were built on the top of the wall on either side, and there was even then space enough between the houses to permit four chariots to drive abreast.

Herodotus has fared badly at the hands of modern critics, but in this instance the explorers found that this work of antiquity was even larger than he claimed. The outer retaining wall was twenty-three and a half feet thick and was made of baked bricks laid with asphalt. Inside of this there was a filling of sand and gravel which

²⁴ David Noel Freedman, ed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) Vol. I, 563.

²⁵ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 413.

extended sixty-nine feet, and then the inner retaining wall, which was forty-four feet thick. The whole structure, therefore, was one hundred and thirty-six and a half feet wide. They also verified the statement of Diodorus to the effect that many of the bricks of the wall and its citadels were beautifully colored.²⁶

In addition, there were many other impressive structures within the walls, including the famous hanging gardens created by Nebuchadnezzar, one of the wonders of the ancient world. The architecture of the great city drew many who wanted to learn more of the advanced sciences of the Babylonians. The great city also is thought to have led the ancient world in science and arts. The “sophistication” and materialism of Babylon were very likely appealing and were emulated by other nations, including the Jews. In a sense, Babylon was much like the “great and spacious building” described by Lehi and Nephi in the Book of Mormon.²⁷

Militarism. In addition, Babylon was noted for its military might. Even during Isaiah’s day when Assyria controlled the empire, Babylon repeatedly rebelled in an attempt to usurp control.²⁸ After the decline of the Assyrian empire, the Babylonians took over, carrying on the same policy of “world” domination with much the same brutality. When Babylonian forces decimated the temple at Jerusalem and carried away the majority of the covenant people captive to Babylon in 587 B.C., Babylon became a powerful symbol of opposition to God.

Idolatry. The Babylonians were known for their idolatry. The Babylonian religion consisted of a pantheon of gods, with Marduk as the supreme diety. “The Assyrians respected the cultural and religious prominence of the city, even when they ruled it.”²⁹ As

²⁶ Samuel Fallews, ed., *The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopedia and Scriptural Dictionary*, s.v. “Babylon,” 116, as cited in *Old Testament Student Manual*, 231.

²⁷ See 1 Nephi 8:26-28.

²⁸ Paul Achtemeier, ed. *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985) 142

²⁹ David Freedman, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000) 138.

Babylonian influence spread throughout the region, so also did Babylonian idolatry. In Isaiah's day people in the Near East typically believed in many gods. Each nation had its chosen god or gods, and if a nation was more powerful than another, it was claimed that it was because their god was more powerful than the other nation's god. Thus a great nation like Babylon would have had tremendous religious influence on other nations simply because it appeared to the people that the Babylonian gods were gods with great strength.

Immorality. Babylon was known for sinful lifestyles and riotous living. Sexual immorality was openly accepted. It preached love for treasures and the creations of man. It encouraged selfishness and pride. It sought to conquer all and bring them into submission and captivity. Despite how "civilized" the Babylonian society was, their own pride and selfishness had led them to lose all civility and morals. Will Durant wrote that "even Alexander, who was not above dying of drinking, was shocked by the morals of Babylon."³⁰ The true doctrine of Babylon was the worship of self. It preached of the greatness of man and of the need to gratify man's desires.

Tower of Babel

It may be that the story of the tower of Babel also influenced what Babylon came to represent to Isaiah and his contemporaries. While there is debate over the historical authenticity of the story, regardless of whether it is fact or folklore, it likely reflects much of the attitude held toward the Babylonians by those under the religious influence of the book of Genesis. In Genesis 11:3-4 we learn that the people were trying to build a tower to reach heaven and to make a name for themselves. Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, gave

³⁰ *Our Oriental Heritage*, "The Story of Civilization," vol. 1, 244, as cited in *Old Testament Student Manual: 1Kings – Malachi*, (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003)

us insight into how Jews in the first century and possibly even in Isaiah's day understood this story.

Now the sons of Noah were three,—Shem, Japhet, and Ham, born one hundred years before the Deluge. These first of all descended from the mountains into the plains, and fixed their habitation there; and persuaded others who were greatly afraid of the lower grounds on account of the flood, and so were very loath to come down from the higher places, to venture to follow their examples. Now the plain in which they first dwelt was called Shinar. God also commanded them to send colonies abroad, for the thorough peopling of the earth, that they might not raise seditions among themselves, but might cultivate a great part of the earth, and enjoy its fruits after a plentiful manner. But they were so ill instructed that they did not obey God; for which reason they fell into calamities, and were made sensible, by experience, of what sin they had been guilty: for when they flourished with a numerous youth, God admonished them again to send out colonies; but they, *imagining the prosperity they enjoyed was not derived from the favor of God, but supposing that their own power was the proper cause of the plentiful condition they were in, did not obey him.* Nay, they added to this their disobedience to the Divine will, the suspicion that they were therefore ordered to send out separate colonies, that, being divided asunder, they might the more easily be Oppressed.

Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an *affront and contempt of God.* He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah, a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it was *through his means they were happy,* but to believe that it was their own courage which procured that happiness. *He also gradually changed the government into tyranny, seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence on his power.* He also said he would be *revenged on God,* if he should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach! and that he would *avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers!*

Now the multitude were very ready to follow the determination of Nimrod, and to esteem it a *piece of cowardice to submit to God;* and they built a tower, neither sparing any pains, nor being in any degree negligent about the work: and, by reason of the multitude of hands employed in it, it grew very high, sooner than any one could expect; but the thickness of it was so great, and it was so strongly built, that thereby its great height seemed, upon the view, to be less than it really was. It was built of burnt brick, cemented together with mortar, made of bitumen, that it might not be liable to admit water. When God saw that they acted so madly, he did not resolve to destroy them utterly, since they were not grown wiser by the destruction of the former sinners; but he caused a tumult among them, by producing in them divers languages, and causing that, through the multitude of those languages, they should not be able

to understand one another. The place wherein they built the tower is now called *Babylon*, because of the confusion of that language which they readily understood before; for the Hebrews mean by the word *Babel*, confusion.³¹

This account attributes several attitudes and motives to the people of Babel that perhaps contributed to the symbolism Babylon would eventually obtain. First, the people did not want to submit to god, but believed that they could produce their own happiness. Secondly, they wanted to be free from the consequences of sin. They built the tower partially in an attempt to escape another flood, which they anticipated would come on account of their rebellion. Third, King Nimrod sought to gradually bring the people into submission and dependence on his power. Finally, in their mind, God was the enemy. Surely they knew that if their tower did reach heaven God would not welcome them. Nimrod's plan to "avenge himself on God" was likely a plan to overthrow heaven. Thus the tower was a sort of siege machine against the gates of heaven. They wanted not only to get in the easy way, without having to follow the commandments, but to overthrow God once they got there. These attitudes held by ancient Babel mirrored the same formula of wickedness Isaiah condemns in his oracle to Babylon.

Babylon was not only located in the same area as ancient Babel, but the Babylonians too, built a ziggurat in the center of the city as a shrine to Marduk.³² Though there is no evidence that the Babylonians equated the shrine with the ancient tower, if known to Isaiah and the Israelites, the impressive building may have stood as a symbol, linking the old city of wickedness with the new.

³¹ *Antiquities of the Jews*, 4: 1-3, emphasis added.

³² *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, I, 565.

A Divinely Directed Metaphor

While these things may all have contributed to Isaiah's symbolic use of Babylon, it is possible that it may not have been Isaiah's choice to use Babylon, but His from whom Isaiah received the revelation. "The spirit of prophecy may then have carried him to an ideal speaking point, so that from that standpoint he spoke of the greatest of Israel's enemies, Babylon, and enemy so great that in the Revelation it is made a type of the anti-Christ, the spirit that opposes the working of God."³³ In other words, the Lord inspired Isaiah to use Babylon as his symbol because of what it would represent to all those who would read his writings in the future.

The use of the image persists into the New Testament and modern scripture as well. In the Revelation chapter 17, John describes a great whore, "arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: and upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (v. 4-5). In modern revelation the Lord confirms Babylon as a symbol of worldliness and idolatry. In Doctrine and Covenants 1: 16 the Lord explains of the wicked, "They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall." Further, the Lord commands the righteous, "Go ye out from among the nations, even from Babylon, from the midst of wickedness, which is spiritual Babylon" (D&C 133:14). Babylon is a symbol used not just by one or two prophets, but by the Lord himself to signify the wickedness of the world.

³³ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 411.

Leupold explained, “From Gen. 11:9 onward down to the Revelation of John (14:8), Babel, or Babylon, becomes a kind of symbol of wickedness and unwholesome, hostile pride, or as G. A. Smith says: ‘. . . (she remains) in fact or symbol the enemy of God and the stronghold of darkness. . . . Babylon represents civilization; she is the brow of the world’s pride and enmity to God.’”³⁴

THE BURDEN

Isaiah focuses on the results of such enmity toward God in the three burden chapters that seem to be directed toward Babylon (chapters 13, 14, 21). In chapter 13 Isaiah describes the destruction and desolation which will come as a result of Babylon’s wickedness. “Howl ye; for the day of the LORD *is* at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man’s heart shall melt: And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces *shall be as* flames. Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for *their* evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible” (Isaiah 13:6-11).

Isaiah chapter twenty-one echoes the same theme of desolation found in chapter thirteen. It opens with the heading “The burden of the desert of the sea.” Based on the content of the prophecy, scholars generally agree that this, like chapters thirteen and fourteen, is a prophecy of the fall of Babylon. Though there is no way to know for certain why Isaiah

³⁴ *Exposition of Isaiah*, 239.

chose the title he did, it is possible that “desert of the sea” was applied to Babylon to support his prophecy. Leupold writes that “in Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions the land of Babylon is sometimes referred to as a “sea,” apparently because it was cut through by so many irrigation channels and was full of swamps. Also, the first part of the title—“wilderness”—is indicative of what the land will be after the judgment implied in the prophecy has befallen her.”³⁵ Another author not only explains the title, but also its implications. “Keil and Delitzsch believed Isaiah used a symbolic name, and they believed it alluded to Babylon. That city sat on a hot and dusty plain in the Euphrates valley, but anciently, before flood control dams were built, the whole plain was flooded each spring during the high water runoff of the Euphrates. Thus Babylon sat both in a desert and on a sea. This interpretation seems to be supported by Jeremiah’s description of Babylon as she that “dwellest upon many waters” (Jeremiah 51:13) and his promise that her waters would be “dried up” (Jeremiah 50:38). Spiritually or symbolically, John describes Babylon as sitting upon many waters. He then explains that the waters represent the nations and peoples of the earth. (See Revelation 17:1, 15.) If Isaiah used the same concept, the sea would represent Babylon’s dominion and the desert the coming loss of these dominions.”³⁶ Moreover, at the height of her glory, Babylon was full of beautiful gardens nourished by the fertile alluvial soil and the abundant water of the Euphrates. In the ancient near east, water was life. Throughout his writings, Isaiah echoed the fact that water represented life, prosperity, and happiness. Babylon was in all her glory like a sea, with seemingly endless prosperity. However, just as Isaiah promised, that lavish lifestyle ended. Babylon fell into ruin. The canals and pools of water eventually dried up until all that was left was a desert so barren that Isaiah promised it would never be

³⁵ *Exposition of Isaiah*, 333.

³⁶ *Old Testament Student Manual*, 157-158.

inhabited again. “And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation” (Isaiah 13:19-20).

Isaiah 14 not only continues to describe the judgments that will come to Babylon, but also seems to describe the sinful attitudes that brought that destruction. In this prophecy, Isaiah describes how the king of Babylon’s pride and lust for power resulted in his downfall. It seems that Isaiah makes an important link between Babylon in all her wickedness and worldly glory and the teachings and purposes of Satan. Latter-day Saints believe that in the pre-mortal world, Satan sought to destroy the agency of man, and take away the consequences of sin, on the condition that every soul depend on his power.³⁷ When Satan’s plan was rejected by the Father, he and the minions that followed him sought to destroy the Father and seize the throne.

Isaiah touches upon this doctrine in Isaiah 14. He prophesies of the fall of the king of Babylon and informs the reader of the great sin for which Babylon was to fall. “Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground which didst weaken the nations! *For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the clouds; I will be like the most High*” (Isaiah 14:11-14, emphasis added). Babylon, therefore, is compared to the same pride and enmity toward God that was held by the people of Babel, but that was originally preached by the father of lies, Lucifer.

³⁷ See D&C 29:36-39, D&C 76:25-29, Moses 4:1-4.

THE FORMULA

In Isaiah 13, 14, and 21, the downfall of Babylon and her king are described with prophetic accuracy. In each chapter, Isaiah echoes the surprise that such a great and powerful empire could fall so quickly and without warning. The pride upon which the entire civilization was built is the very thing that blinds the rulers of Babylon to the impending destruction. They are so certain that they are secure and that they would remain in power forever that they could not see the end approaching.³⁸ So it is also with those who are of spiritual Babylon. They follow the pomp and glory and lifestyle of worldliness and sin and are blind to the consequences and “burdens” which they are heaping upon themselves. Such, Isaiah warns, is the burden of those who seek after the great and spacious buildings of Babylon. They like Babylon may flourish in sin and worldliness for a season but in the end will find that their lives are left desolate

This attitude of Babylon is evident in those who spend their lives building towers of pride in opposition to God and who adorn them with the idols of the world, the philosophies of men, and the indulgences of the flesh. Like Babylon of old, those in spiritual Babylon build the walls between themselves and the Spirit of the Lord high and thick. They become more concerned with making a name for themselves in the world’s way than with taking His name upon them. Those in the “great and spacious buildings” of Babylon make a mockery of the things of God. This attitude truly concerns Isaiah. The people of his day had begun to follow the broad roads that lead to spiritual Babylon, so to speak.³⁹

³⁸ See Isaiah 47.

³⁹ See for example Isaiah 7.

Thus, in these chapters Isaiah provides a formula that may be applied in many different ages and circumstances to those who fit the spiritual profile of Babylon. Just as the Tower of Babel crumbled and came to ruin suddenly, so also will Babylon the Great fall. Isaiah makes it clear in chapter's 13, 14, and 21 that the things that made Babylon great will be irrelevant when it falls. There are at least three important levels upon which these prophecies can be understood and Isaiah's formulas applied. First, they speak of the fall of ancient Babylon to the Persians. Secondly, they symbolize the destruction of the wicked at the Second Coming of Christ. Finally, they symbolize the spiritual consequences of those in any age who commit the sins of Babylon.

The Fall of Ancient Babylon

To the remnant of Israel contemporary with Isaiah, and to those who would live under Babylonian domination, this chapter is a promise that even Babylon the great will be defeated. Verses 2-5 describe the terrible army gathering together to overthrow Babylon. Verses 16 and 18 give specific reference to the Medes, whose favored weapon was the bow. Even the great architectural wonders of Babylon were to be destroyed and abandoned. "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation" (v. 19-20) In fact, the only creatures to inhabit these structures upon which such enormous amounts of time and resources were spent would be the wild beasts of the desert (see v. 21-22).

This prophetic pronouncement was fulfilled in 538 B.C. when the Medes came from Persia and conquered Babylon. The king of Babylon had ruled in such tyranny that the people plotted against him and aided the Persians in their siege of the city. That the king

would be removed and forgotten quickly by his people seems to be one of the points Isaiah stresses when describing the downfall of the king of Babylon in chapter 14. Within twenty years the walls of Babylon were to be destroyed, marking the gradual decline of the city. Shortly after the time of Christ the city had fallen completely into desolation and ruin and lay hidden for centuries.⁴⁰

The prophecy of the downfall of Babylon was very important to those living under the influence of the great empire. Edward Young explained:

That these prophecies appear in the Biblical book of Isaiah was not for the benefit of the Babylonians but for the people of God. From them they would learn that the hostile power of the world in its most powerful manifestation would finally be brought to ignominious defeat and ruin. No power that sets itself against God, be it as haughty and pretentious as was Babylonia, can prevail. Thus, Israel would learn that God does not permit to go unpunished the wickedness of those who have set themselves against the Lord and against His anointed, and who oppose His people.

To see the opponents of God's purposes punished would bring consolation and encouragement to the Jews, for it would teach them how precious their salvation was in God's sight. But they would also learn that they too were deserving of punishment, and that only by God's mercy had a remnant been spared. Then, too, the raging of nations is but a carrying out of God's purposes. He is in control of all things. A topsy-turvy world is not really topsy-turvy. Even the darkest moments are in God's providential control and rule.⁴¹

The Destruction of the Wicked at the Second Coming

The chapter heading for Isaiah 13 found in the LDS version of the Bible reads, "Destruction of Babylon is a type of destruction at Second Coming—It shall be a day of wrath and vengeance—Babylon (the world) shall fall forever." Through the lens of this inspired commentary, readers of chapter 13 view a great battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. The Lord has lifts up an ensign (the restored gospel) to gather his righteous in from all over the earth, sanctify them, and endow them with power (see v. 2-5).

⁴⁰ Victor Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982) 185.

⁴¹ *The Book of Isaiah*, 415.

Verses 7-13 are full of references to the Second Coming. The battle will not be fought in the manner of men, but with the weapons of God. Those who are on the Lord's side will be protected, while those who ally themselves with Babylon will fall to destruction and desolation.

In the end of chapter 14 Isaiah seems to weave the nations of Assyria and Philistia into the same cloth as Babylon. Each is an enemy to Israel, and as a result, these empires of men and idols, Isaiah promises, will fall. While these prophecies were fulfilled historically, they also appear to be types of the destruction of the wicked at the last days. For example, in the prophecy concerning Philistia we read, "Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken; for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent" (2 Nephi 24:29, see also Isaiah 14:29). Much has been written concerning the "serpent's root," the "cockatrice," and the "fiery flying serpent" mentioned here by Isaiah. Generally scholars feel it is referring to different Assyrian rulers who would successively smite the nations of the ancient near east.

Leupold wrote:

"The reference to the breaking of the rod that smote them does not require that a particular person is to be thought of, but merely that one instance of oppression has just been terminated. This event caused the Philistines to dream of a grander future. For this momentary relief does not herald prosperity but rather a succession of further evils. The point of comparison seems to be that after this momentary relief, things will not get better but worse. For that is the unquestioned meaning of the sequence: serpent, viper, flying serpent. Two possibilities of interpretation may be submitted as alternatives. Either these three point to a succession of Assyrian monarchs: Shalmanezer V, Sargon, Sennacherib; or to a succession of rulers of Judah, beginning with Hezekiah, who actually did smite the Philistines after they had achieved temporary independence."⁴²

⁴² *Exposition of Isaiah*, 270.

It seems that in addition to having fulfillment in Isaiah's day, this message to Philistia appears to also be closely associated with the Second Coming of Christ. Verse 30 seems to be prophesying of millennial conditions. "And the firstborn of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety: and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant" (Isaiah 14:30). It appears that this prophecy directed at the Philistines is a continuation of the same message associated with Babylon.

The usage of the word "root" in verse 29 perhaps echoes Isaiah's prophecy of Christ as the root and stem of Jesse in chapter 11. This verse certainly carries the same theme of something great growing out of the roots of something that came before but was cut off. Possibly Isaiah is using a form of parallelism here not to compare two things, but rather to contrast them. In Isaiah 11, one interpretation of the root and branch prophecy is that though apostasy destroyed much of the tree of the house of Israel effectively cutting it off from bearing fruit, the Savior came and started a new branch out of the same root that would grow and save the tree. The root in Isaiah's prophecy found in chapter 14 seems to carry a much more negative meaning. Just as in the previous prophecy Isaiah creates the imagery of a branch being broken, but out of the root that remains comes a much more dangerous branch, it is compared to a cockatrice or viper whose fruit is compared to a fiery flying serpent. Thus while one is prophesying of the Christ, the other seems to speak of the enemies of God, and even to the great anti-Christ, the serpent from Eden, Satan.

This prophecy toward Philistia seems to clarify and support the formula that Isaiah is describing for Babylon. Though the branches may be destroyed, as long as the root remains they will return with greater strength than before. Likewise, the great kingdoms and empires of the world that seek to put the people of God under oppression may fall, but as long as the

“root” desires that drive these kingdoms remain, another will follow. What then is the “root” out of which all wickedness grows? It is more than just Satan. In fact, Satan himself became what he did because he made this his “root” and began to teach it as his doctrine. Simply put, it is pride and selfishness--all that is symbolized by Babylon the Great. This is a root out of which wickedness grows. It was upon these principles that Assyria built its empire, and when it fell, the Babylonians grew up in their place. In the last days countless wicked kingdoms will grow up out of the stem of Satan in the foundations of the wicked nations that went before them. In other words, though the political empire may fall, spiritual Babylon will live on and out of it will grow another enemy to the people of God. That will continue until the Lord comes in glory and destroys the root.

Isaiah promises that when the Lord comes things on the earth will change. “And the firstborn of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety: and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant” (Isaiah 14:30). The Lord is speaking here to the Philistines, who thought they had escaped oppression with the death of the king of Assyria. He says to them, “I will kill *thy* root with famine.” The Lord is pointing out that the Philistines, who were constantly fighting against God’s people, are offshoots of that same root that the Assyrians are, along with all those who rebel against God and seek to bring others into oppression. When will the root be starved by famine? When the Savior returns and sanctifies the earth, the wicked will be burned and the love of God will reign on the earth and in the hearts of men. There will be no room for pride. Thus Babylon the Great, the symbol of all pride and worldliness, will fall. Its roots will wither and die. Satan will be bound at least in part because pride will have no place in the hearts of men. “What shall one

then answer the messengers of the nations? That the Lord hath founded Zion and the poor of his people shall trust in it” (Isaiah 14:32).

Spiritual Consequences For Confederacy With Babylon

There is another practical application to this prophecy concerning the burden of Babylon. Each person that enters this world must choose to whom he or she will ally himself or herself and what attitude he or she will hold toward God. All must decide whether to walk the path leading to the tree or to dance in the great and spacious building described by Lehi and Nephi (See 1 Nephi 8:26-27). All must carry a burden, either the burden of the cross, or the burden of Babylon. Isaiah’s prophecies concerning Babylon help each person discover what the effects of following spiritual Babylon would be. Isaiah’s message is that accepting the doctrine of Babylon will lead a person to fall. The once lavish lifestyle of sin will dry up and become a desert of desolation. Their joy is much like the prodigal son in Luke 15, who forsook his inheritance to seek Babylon, “and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in the land; and he began to be in want... And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him” (v. 13, 14, 16). Though pride and sin may bring satisfaction for a season, the Lord has promised that Babylon will fall, and her pools of water will be dried up, and those who have yoked themselves to Babylon, whose ruler is Satan, will find out for themselves what the “burden of Babylon” really is.

Thus Isaiah uses Babylon as the reference for his formula for those rebelling against God. Those who fill their lives with worldliness and sin and build up shrines to celebrate the pride of their hearts, while making thick walls to keep God out are really doing much of what the people of Babel did and what Lucifer himself did before the world began. They seek to

overthrow God and His programs in order to promote their own self interests. The result of such pursuits is the eventual loss of power, influence, and prosperity.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE BURDEN OF MOAB
ISAIAH 15-16

While both Babylon and Moab are used as symbols of pride, sin, and worldliness, it may be that Isaiah uses them to represent different types of prideful, wicked attitudes. From the Exodus, the kingdom of Moab was often considered an enemy to the people of God, a nation of sin and idolatry. Despite warnings from God and commandments to Israel not to associate with the gentile nation, the covenant people began to adopt Moab's pagan practices and lifestyles.⁴³ Thus, Isaiah writes to warn his people of the weakness of Moab and the danger of making them an ally, socially or spiritually, in a way similar to his warning to Babylon. It is the differences between the two nations that are instructive, however. Not all pride and worldliness are the same. Analyzing what Moab may have represented to the people contemporary to the Isaiah can provide additional insight into the depth of his prophecy.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Perhaps the most relevant stories concerning Moab illustrating the feelings of the prophets toward Moab are found in the Bible itself. According to Genesis, the nation of Moab was conceived through an incestuous relationship. The story is recorded in Genesis 19 that following the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's two daughters, who had escaped the catastrophe by taking refuge with their father in a cave, believed that civilization

⁴³ See examples explained below.

had been destroyed, and all men along with it. Supposing that human life would come to an end if they did not repopulate the earth, they led their father into entering into an incestuous relationship. “Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father. And the firstborn bare a son and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day” (Genesis 19:36-37). It is highly likely that this story of scandalous origin, whether accurate or not, affected the way the Israelites viewed Moab. Perhaps in Isaiah’s day as well, the Jews viewed Moab as an unclean nation conceived in sin. Thus Moab would become a symbol of immorality.

Of all the biblical accounts outlining the relationship between Israel and Moab, perhaps the most defining event is that of their first meeting at the plains of Shittim during the Exodus. Numbers 22 records that as Israel was passing through the land on their way to their promised land they encountered several kingdoms and sought passage through them. Balak, king of Moab, wanted to destroy Israel, but he feared them because they had already defeated the armies of the Amorites and the people of Bashan who had refused to allow passage (See Num. 21:21-35, 22:2-4). In an effort to help him defeat the Israelites, Balak called upon the help of a diviner named Balaam to curse Israel. Despite the rewards offered by Balak, Balaam was forced by the Lord to bless Israel on three different occasions. Only after he realized that his people would be destroyed did Balak change his intentions toward Israel.

In an attempt to escape the consequences of his failed plan to destroy Israel and apparently at Balaam’s suggestion, Balak made a sort of ill-intended alliance with them. “And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat,

and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel” (Numbers 25:1-3).

Following this notorious first meeting with the Moabites, the people of Israel were again commanded specifically not to intermarry or adopt any of the religious practices of their neighbors.⁴⁴ This was because many of these practices were in direct violation of the theology of the Israelites. “Moab’s and its neighbors’ religions had several features in common. Animals were sacrificed on hilltop altars and standing stones marked holy sites. Sexuality was openly admitted into worship and the pantheon, astral symbolism appeared, gods were thought to bring military victory, and kings led priestly functions.”⁴⁵ The worship of Chemosh, chief god of the Moabites even included the burning of children in sacrificial fires.

Despite the shocking contrast in religious rituals between the Moabites and the children of Israel, it was not long before the people of Israel began adopting their neighbors’ pagan practices. Chemosh worship was practiced by Solomon (see 1 Kings 11:5-7) and continued to increase in popularity, especially in the northern kingdom (See 2 Kings 17:17). The wicked kings of Judah in Isaiah’s day also participated in this idolatry, even burning their own children in the same way as the Moabites (see 2 Chr. 28:3, 2Kings 16:3;21:6).

Ironically, while the people of Israel were allying themselves religiously to Moab, they were almost constantly at war with them politically. One nation would conquer the other and demand tribute be paid, then they would alternate, and the conquerors would become the conquered. In almost every way, Moab could be considered an enemy to God. They embraced moral values that were condemned by the God of Israel. Their religion

⁴⁴ See for example Deut. 18:10-11.

⁴⁵ Geoffrey w. Bromiley ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing co.1979) 395.

undermined the true worship of Jehovah. And they arrayed themselves in outright battle against Israel time and time again. Despite the enmity that existed between Moab and the Lord, that enmity did not exist in the same way between Moab and the children of Israel. The “burden” of this social alliance is the very thing Isaiah was warning against as he penned this prophecy of doom.

THE BURDEN

Isaiah’s prophecy in chapters 15 and 16 is dripping with sarcasm and irony. While Moab boasts of a lifestyle full of joy and rejoicing, productive fields, and plentiful water, Isaiah prophesies the reality is quite the opposite. He fills his prophecy with the sorrow and mourning that he foresees will come upon the Moabites. It is almost as though he is describing a funeral. “He is gone up to Bajith, and to Dibon, the high places, to weep: Moab shall howl over Nebo, and over Medeba; on all their heads shall be baldness, and every beard cut off. In their streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth: on the tops of their houses, and in their streets, every one shall howl, weeping abundantly.”

It is a little difficult from this prophecy to determine exactly what is causing the howling of Moab. Some assert that the prophesied lamentation was the result of Assyrian or later Babylonian invasion.⁴⁶ Brian C. Jones explains that the reason for their sorrow and subsequent exodus is “never made explicit.”

Are the Moabites to be imagined fleeing with the foe on their heels? Many commentaries at least imply this scenario. Several considerations make this questionable, however. First, the description of the flight in the poem never depicts the fugitives as pursued. This is not a headlong flight, but one on which the fugitives lament as they walk along. They carry a burden of supplies with them, and this suggests that they were not hotly pursued but had time to collect food stores. The poem depicts a deliberate and unharrassed exodus.

Second, at a number of points the poem indicates that some of the Moabites are still inhabiting their cities. The lamentation in the cities described in 15:1-4

⁴⁶ See for example, Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, 192.

makes no sense as a description of the behavior following an attack that destroyed the cities, and the depiction of Moab's failure upon its own high place indicates that one of its principal cult centers (Dibon?) is intact. Some of the Moabites have fled, but apparently not all. Those in the cities seem to have remained behind.⁴⁷

Though scholars may disagree on the specific events of which Isaiah may have been prophesying, Isaiah seems to give a formula that may apply in all these events as well as having modern application. His message is a clear warning to Moab and, more specifically, to those children of the covenant who have joined their hearts to Moab. It is a warning of the spiritual consequences of their idolatry. Many Israelites had followed after the ways of the Moabites seeking the prosperity of their pagan neighbors. Isaiah warns, however, that rather than joy and prosperity they would only find misery and desolation in the end.

THE FORMULA

Whatever it was that brought ruin upon the people of Moab, we learn from Isaiah's prophecy that it left them destitute. Their desperate condition ruined their self-sufficiency, and forced them to plead with Judah for help.⁴⁸ "Send ye the lamb to the ruler of the land from Sela to the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion. For it shall be, that, as a wandering bird cast out of the nest, so the daughters of Moab shall be at the fords of Arnon. Take counsel, execute judgment; make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday; hide the outcasts; bewray not him that wandereth. Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler: for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land" (Isaiah 16:1-4). The Moabites apparently carried whatever provisions they could with them and fled their home toward the Jordan River, intending to seek refuge within the borders of Judah. The leaders of Moab sent

⁴⁷ *Howling over Moab: Irony and Rhetoric in Isaiah 15-16*, (The Society of Biblical Literature, 1996), 247.

⁴⁸ Though Moab had previously sent lambs to Israel, Isaiah prophesies that they would turn to Judah. It is likely that at the time of the prophesied destruction on Moab, Israel had already been conquered and scattered by Assyrian invaders.

lambs to Jerusalem as a tribute and peace offering in order to soften their old adversary and create sympathy for their plight. Their plea to the Jews is for temporary shelter and support.

It is only because of dire need that Moab turned to the people of the Lord for help. Ironically, those who once boasted against the Israelites and sought to destroy them suddenly acted as though they have always been allies when in peril. It seems that the Moabites intended for their “friendship” with Judah only to be temporary. The alliance was superficial and insincere, and perhaps in the minds of the Moabites was only needful until they could return to their old way of life. Despite the forced outward “repentance,” their hearts remained unchanged.

The prophet Jeremiah records a similar prophecy to that of Isaiah concerning Moab. In it he echoes the same warnings about Moab’s insincere repentance.

“For because thou hast trusted in thy works and in thy treasures, thou shalt also be taken: and Chemosh shall go forth into captivity with his priests and his princes together. And the spoiler shall come upon every city, and no city shall escape: the valley also shall perish, and the plain shall be destroyed, as the Lord hath spoken. Give wings unto Moab, that it may flee and get away: for the cities thereof shall be desolate, without any to dwell therein. *Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.* Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: *therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.* Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send unto him wanderers, that shall cause him to wander, and shall empty his vessels, and break their bottles (Jeremiah 48:7-12, emphasis added).

Jeremiah gives the impression that the children of Moab are simply trying to save themselves by pretending to be friends of the Lord. Because they do the work of the Lord “deceitfully” they shall be cursed. Jeremiah compares them to soldiers who go through the motions of warfare and combat, but never actually go through with the “dirty work.” Their taste for sin and worldliness is not changed. Though they may outwardly appear to be sincere, their hearts are not changed.

Try as they may to fool the Lord of Hosts by feigning loyalty and submissiveness and by offering lambs, possibly to be sacrificed upon the altars of the temple at Jerusalem, they cannot hide their desires from the Lord. Isaiah explains that while the Lord is merciful to forgive the sins of those who have truly repented, He is also quick to exercise judgment on those who will not. “And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it I truth in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness. We have heard of the pride of Moab; he is very proud: even of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath: but his lies shall not be so” (Isaiah 16:5-6).

Isaiah provides a perfect pattern for many who live in pride and wickedness in our day. There are many in our day who are spiritually like Moab. They fill their lives with wine and rejoicing. They bow themselves to gods crafted by the hands of men. They seek to follow a self-centered life and think that they will always prosper. But eventually the “burdens” of Moab catch up with them. The consequences that follow for modern Moab are just as Isaiah describes. A life of wandering in sorrow and emptiness is the true “burden” of Moab.

Just as Moab sought to join itself to Judah when faced with hardship, so also there are many who will return to God in an effort to escape the consequences of the sinful life which they have chosen. Though they outwardly bow the knee of devotion to the Lord, inwardly they desire to worship at the high places of Chemosh. Their sorrow for sins is much like that which Mormon describes the Nephites in Mormon 2:13 felt. “But behold this my joy was vain, for their sorrowing was not unto repentance, because of the goodness of God; but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin.” Such people regret out of necessity, but never really change. It is a regret

born of pride rather than of humility. Pride-based regret is not repentance. Such a person may go through the outward motions of repentance but just like ancient Moab, their “lies shall not be so.” The Lord will drive them back into the wilderness of their affliction until they truly humble themselves and desire to change.

CHAPTER FIVE
THE BURDEN OF DAMASCUS
ISAIAH 17

In chapter seventeen, Isaiah continues his pattern of singling out neighboring nations and pronouncing doom upon them. In this prophecy, Isaiah turns attention to the kingdom of Syria centered in Damascus. Like Moab, Syria was generally a political enemy to Israel, except during periods when it better suited its political designs to form an alliance. During much of Isaiah's day, Syria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel had united their forces in an attempt to rebel against Assyrian domination. While Isaiah's other burden prophecies appear to also apply somewhat to the children of Israel, in this chapter Isaiah clearly links Israel to Damascus so that it appears that the "burden of Damascus" is also borne by Israel.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Generally the term "Syria" refers to the area surrounding Damascus. It is sometimes referred to as Aram in the Old Testament. Arameans settled the area early in the Iron age (1200 B.C.) and established several city-states. It was a coalition of these city-states that first opposed the Israelites, and eventually became subject to King Saul's Israel. Near the end of Solomon's reign, however, Rezon, the leader of a marauding band, placed himself on the throne in Damascus and drove the Israelites out of southern Syria. This is the beginning of the "kingdom" of Aram or Syria.⁴⁹ Damascus's power continued to increase under the leadership of a new king, who took the throne name of Ben Hadad. Following the death of

⁴⁹ Paul J. Achtemeier, ed. *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985) 1314.

Solomon and the division of Israel, it eventually gained the upper hand in the ongoing conflict and generally dominated Israel.⁵⁰

Damascus had great power and influence in the region partially because of its geographic location. “Damascus lies in a great oasis east of the Anti-Lebanon mountains, fed by the river Barada (“Abana” 2 Kings 5:12), which also provides a route westward into the elevated rift valley of the Beqa’a. Eastward the folds of the Anti-Lebanon spread fanwise toward the north-east, and southeastward lie the great basalt outflows, extending far into Arabia. These barriers to movement direct all routes toward the rich oasis, making Damascus a city of major commercial importance.”⁵¹ Thus Damascus became a gateway between the Mesopotamian east and the regions occupied by Egypt, Israel, and their neighbors. Since all the riches of Babylon and Assyria came to Israel and Judah through Damascus, Damascus may have come to be a symbol of worldly sophistication and extravagance to the covenant people.

Evidence of the influence of Syria on Israel and Judah is found throughout the Old Testament. The Arameans borrowed much of their culture from their neighbors. They worshiped the typical Semitic gods including Ba’al or Hadad.⁵² The most impressive evidence of the influence Damascus had in the region is found in its language. Because of the important role Damascus played in trade and commerce, Aramaic became the international language in the region by the time the Persian Empire came to power. Perhaps the strategic location of Damascus, its military might, and political influence all worked together to persuade Israel to form an alliance with the eventual goal of defeating the Assyrian oppressors.

⁵⁰Trent C. Butler, ed. *Holman Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991) 1083

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, 1314

This link between Israel and Syria is identified early in Isaiah's oracle. "The burden of Damascus. "Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. The cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid. The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: *they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel*, saith the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 17:1-3, emphasis added). Perhaps Isaiah links Israel to Syria in this prophecy because they have bound themselves together in many ways, including politically and socially.

As early as the reign of Solomon the political and social alliances between the Israelites and the Syrians were beginning to take root. 1 Kings 11:1-2 records that Solomon married many "strange women" of the neighboring nations including Syria "concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, "Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." The record also reveals that Solomon even built places of worship for the gods of the strangers in and around Jerusalem. This alliance initiated by Solomon continued to influence the children of Israel long after his death.

In addition to political alliances there were countless social, philosophical, and religious ties forged. Throughout the Old Testament we find stories of prophets in Northern Israel battling the influence of the idolatry of Syria and her neighbors. Elijah, in his confrontation with the priests of Baal asked the people, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" (1 Kings 18 : 21). Shortly afterward, against the counsel of the Lord, Ahab made a covenant to free Ben-Hadad, king of Syria (1 Kings 20:34). It was to Hosea, a prophet in northern Israel, that the Lord said, "Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people: for thou

hast gone a whoring from thy God” (Hosea 9:1). The people of northern Israel had committed spiritual adultery by breaking the covenant they had made with the One to whom they were sealed and by prostituting themselves with the idols of the Syrians and other nations of the region.

The story from the Bible that perhaps best illustrates what Syria symbolized to Isaiah and his contemporaries is that of the Syrio-Ephramite war. Isaiah used the theme of political alliances as a symbol for the abandonment of God and the true religion by the leaders and people of Israel in these chapters. At the time the prophecy found in chapters 7-8 was given (about 734 B.C.) Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel formed an alliance in an attempt to break out of Assyrian control. When Judah would not join in the rebellion, the allies determined to wage a war against Jerusalem in an attempt to coerce them.⁵³ Isaiah recorded the events as follows: “And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it. And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim” (Isaiah 7:1-2). Their intention to control Judah through a puppet king is recorded in the same chapter, sixth verse. “Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal.” Thus northern Israel acted as an enemy to the Lord. They ignored the covenant with God and forged agreements with Damascus for their own gain. By turning on their own people and ignoring the warnings contained in scripture concerning unholy alliances, the people of northern Israel descended to the level of their neighbors. As a result, they received the same condemnation.

⁵³ Victor Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, 1982, 139.

It is interesting to note that there is a progression in the groups of people to whom Isaiah extends this “burden.” Initially he speaks to Syria, then to Ephraim (or northern Israel). In verses 3 and 4, however, Syria is grouped with “the children of Israel” and “Jacob.” Some scholars suggest that Isaiah intends these terms only to apply to the tribes found in the northern Kingdom.⁵⁴ While it could be interpreted that way, perhaps it should not be. If it is true that Isaiah’s prophecies extend beyond the conditions of nations during or near his own lifetime to include covenant people, and in addition, include many different layers of meaning, it may be setting too narrow a scope to limit these writings to only the Israelites of the northern kingdom of Isaiah’s day. Indeed, though northern Israel embraced idolatry more quickly than Judah (as it appears from the Bible account), Judah was not far behind. As for the political alliance made with the Syrians, Judah too made alliances with other gentile nations. Therefore, it is not folly to suppose that the prophecies and predictions here placed upon Syria can apply to all of the house of Israel as well, at least figuratively if not literally.

THE BURDEN

Historically, the downfall of Syria to the Assyrians did not happen as quickly and completely as Isaiah prophesied. This leads to the conclusion that either the prophecy has yet to be fulfilled completely, or that Isaiah was merely speaking figuratively. Leupold suggests “the ‘ruin’ the prophet speaks of is rather to be interpreted in the sense that Damascus became a mere ruin of her former self. She was stripped of her power and her importance. She descended to the level of an Assyrian province after her capture by that nation. The spirit of this prophecy was clearly fulfilled if not the letter.”⁵⁵ Or perhaps Isaiah

⁵⁴ See for example Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, p. 470.

⁵⁵ *Exposition of Isaiah*, 291.

is speaking not as much of Damascus as a political entity, but as a spiritual or symbolic one, just as he prophesied of spiritual Babylon in previous chapters. Any combination of these possibilities can be instructive when applied to the Israel-Syria coalition.

The imagery Isaiah uses in this prophecy to describe the spiritual alliance between covenant people and the heathen nation is quite powerful. “Because though hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shall set it with strange slips” (Isaiah 17:10). This verse describes first, the abandonment by Israel of their God, and second, their replacing Him with idolatrous worship. The imagery is of Israelites planting gardens or “groves” for pagan worship. Victor Ludlow explained, “The phrase ‘finest plants in verse 10 is translated as ‘pleasant plants’ in the King James Version and as ‘plants of pleasantness’ in the Jewish Publication Society translation. Some authorities see in this phrase an allusion to the pagan ‘gardens of Adonis.’ Adonis is the Greek name for the Syrian pagan god Naaman, meaning ‘pleasantness.’ Thus the ‘plants of ‘pleasantness’ might be the ‘plants of Naaman’ (or Adonis), which were important symbols of regeneration in fertility rituals.”⁵⁶ Concerning the term “strange slips,” Ludlow explained, “Slips are small cuttings, also known as *scions*, grafted into fruit trees or vines.”⁵⁷ Just as these plants are being transplanted from foreign soil to the ground dedicated to Jehovah, so also are the philosophies and practices of the strangers (gentiles) being grafted into Israel.⁵⁸

Just as Israel abandoned God in exchange for the “groves” of the gentiles, many today worship the idols of worldliness ahead of the gospel. They think the immediate gratifications of the world will make them happier and more prosperous. Isaiah warned of

⁵⁶ *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, Poet*, 201.

⁵⁷ *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, Poet*, 201.

⁵⁸ Cleon Skousen, *Isaiah Speaks to Modern times*, (Ensign Publishing Company: Salt Lake City, 1984) 306.

this mirage when he wrote, “In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow” (Isaiah 17:11). Those who choose to “draw . . . sin as it were with a cart rope” (Isaiah 5:18) and carry the “burden” of the world may find temporary fulfillment, and expect their blossoming lifestyle to bring forth fruit. But when the harvest comes, the only fruit is sorrow and despair.

As in all of the other “burden” prophecies, Isaiah describes the fruits of idolatry with adjectives that invoke a feeling of famine or hardship. “And in that day it shall come to pass, that the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean” (Isaiah 17:4). Rather than the fatness and plenty promised by the Lord if the house of Jacob would keep the covenant, they will see only hunger and want. “And it shall be as when the harvestman gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm” (Isaiah 17:5). The harvest is so small the harvester will be able to carry it all in his arms. This, like Moab and Babylon, is the burden of Damascus. Those who seek joy and fullness of life from worldly pleasures will find only hunger and emptiness.

THE FORMULA

Unlike Babylon and Moab, the “burden” prophecy attached to Syria (and also to Israel) offers hope for their repentance and redemption. In the previous oracles, Isaiah left no evidence that the enemies of Israel would in any way survive. Babylon, because of pride, had no interest in repenting, and therefore was promised complete destruction by the prophet. Moab “repented” only because of prideful and selfish reason, and therefore was rejected by the Lord as well. Though this prophecy is very brief and gives no clue concerning the attitude

of the Syrians toward repentance, it does open the door to the possibility of future redemption. At this point, Isaiah begins to weave the theme of redemption into the tapestry of his prophecy.

First, Isaiah makes it clear that Israel will not be completely destroyed because of their transgression. The King James Version records, “Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the Lord God of Israel” (Isaiah 17:6). Donald Parry explained this verse, “In ancient Israel, the landless poor were permitted to glean any grains and produce that remained after the harvest (Deut. 24:19-22; Ruth 2:2-3). The olives (KJV reads “grapes”) that the gleaners could not reach with their hands were knocked from the upper branches with a stick, or they were shaken from the tree.”⁵⁹ After the harvest of destruction is reaped upon ancient Israel and Damascus, and Israel’s inhabitants are carried away and lost, God will leave a remnant, like the olives left for gleaners after harvest.

This remnant will at some point be gathered in and return to the knowledge of the Lord. “At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect that which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images” (Isaiah” 17:7-8). In the last day, during the restoration of all things, the Lord will gather those that remain of Israel to his gospel, and they will bring with them many of their gentile neighbors. Where once the pagan neighbors pulled the covenant people from the true worship, in the last days, the covenant people will forsake the idolatry of the world and return to God. Perhaps because they are linked in the prophecy, some of spiritual Syria will follow their lead.

⁵⁹ *Understanding Isaiah*, 168.

Isaiah chapter 17 follows much of the same themes of the other “burden” prophecies. Syria is a nation full of idolatry, pride, and designs that oppose those of Jehovah, and like other gentile nations is a symbol for worldliness and sin. Israel is warned that by tying herself to her pagan neighbors she will have to shoulder the same fate. Isaiah again predicts that despite the temporary gratification that may be found in pursuing the sinful ways of idolatry, it will afford no lasting happiness and prosperity. Rather the harvest of consequences will be one of sorrow and emptiness. Unlike the other prophecies examined so far, however, Isaiah’s oracle to Damascus introduces the possibility for future redemption. Isaiah seems to be using Syria as a symbol for Israel’s infidelity toward Jehovah. But in addition to describing the misery both Israel and Syria would encounter for turning from the God of Israel, Isaiah also prophesies that at some point, a new generation will eventually grow out of the few who were not destroyed completely by their unholy alliances. These, Isaiah predicted, would repent and turn to their God. This prophecy to Syria, then, may be the first type or symbol of the eventual repentance of Israel in the burden chapters. Isaiah promises that when “a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel” then the Lord will offer redemption and gather in Israel’s remnants (Isaiah 17:7).

During Isaiah’s day, one of the main purposes for Israel uniting with Syria was to hold back the Assyrian soldiers who would flood into their lands. Isaiah prophesies that if God’s people remember Him when the wicked influences of the nations rush into Israel like a mighty flood, the Lord will provide a respite from the storm. “Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! The nations shall rush like the rushing of many

waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind” (Isaiah 17:12-13, cf Isaiah 8)). In this chapter Isaiah has opened the door to Israel’s redemption and promises the Lord’s protection if they will return to Him. In the chapters following he will show how it is to be accomplished.

Isaiah provides several important spiritual formulas in this chapter. First among them is the simple truth that any who join with the world and its philosophies and wickedness will share in their destruction. In other words, those who plant what the world plants, will reap what the world reaps. Though there doesn’t appear to be a very definite type for repentance in this chapter as in the other chapters, Isaiah does use this prophecy to open the door for true repentance. Just as the Lord would leave a remnant of Israel, so also does there remain for those who have united with the world in rebelling against God, the possibility to repent and return to Him.

CHAPTER SIX
THE LAND SHADOWING WITH WINGS
ISAIAH 18

Some scholars of Isaiah in the past have felt that Isaiah 18 is unusually obscure and that it seems out of place among the burden prophesies. “Isaiah 18 has perplexed scholars and translators as much as any other Isaianic chapter. In this chapter, the unnamed land, its messengers, their purpose, the people they visit, their relationship, and the historical context are all obscure. Various scholars identify several lands and peoples throughout Africa and Asia as the subject matter, but their speculations differ greatly concerning when and how this prophecy is fulfilled.”⁶⁰ Despite the initial problems that arise during an analysis of this prophecy, a sufficient effort to study the background and meaning of the text—especially in light of modern revelation—confirms that this chapter is one of the most beautiful examples of prophetic poetry in all of scripture. One author wrote, “This glorious bit of revelation is to be classed among the best and most profound utterances, done with prophetic artistry.”⁶¹

One of the reasons this chapter is difficult is that it doesn’t *seem* to fit among the burden chapters. There is no “burden” attached to any nation. While the King James Version opens the chapter with a “Woe” that has much the same feel as a “burden,” this may be a misleading translation. The Hebrew word *hoy*, may be translated as “woe,” but generally it does not carry a negative connotation. It may be interpreted as a simple salutation such as, “hail,” “ah,” or “ho.” Various translations use these different words in place of the

⁶⁰ Victor Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, 203.

⁶¹ As cited in Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 301.

KJV “woe,” which may have been inserted because of this prophecy’s position among Isaiah’s pronouncements of doom. This wording may lead to a much more positive interpretation of this prophecy than in the surrounding “burdens.”

Though the interpretations of this chapter are quite varied among scholars, they can be grouped into two general categories. The first category is the traditional view that the land referred to is Egypt, Ethiopia, or some nation in African and that this prophecy refers to an event that took place closer to Isaiah’s lifetime. The second category of interpretation is a Latter-day Saint view, which grows mostly out of inspired prophetic commentary. While Latter-day Saints believe that inspired prophetic commentary is the word of the Lord, and is itself scripture, this does not necessarily eliminate the first category of interpretations as a viable explanation as well. Because of the dualistic nature of prophecy discussed earlier, one prophetic utterance may have multiple layers of meaning and fulfillments. It is possible that Isaiah has interwoven prophecies concerning different time periods because their theme is the same. In other words, Isaiah may be prophesying of certain events to come during his lifetime, but using them as a symbol of events that would be realized in the last days.

THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION

Much of the discussion concerning the people to whom this prophecy refers is centered around the phrase, “land shadowing with wings.” Other versions translate it something like, “land of whirring wings”⁶² or “land of buzzing wings.”⁶³ From this many argue that Isaiah is referring to the many insects located along the Nile. Isaiah says that the land is “beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,” and that it sends “ambassadors by the sea (Nile), even

⁶² Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary*, The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1974, 89.

⁶³ Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 303.

in vessels of bulrushes (papyrus)” (v. 1-2).⁶⁴ These comments suggest that Isaiah is speaking of some group of people located along the Nile.

Historical Background

The next problem scholars encounter is finding a historical reference for the events predicted in Isaiah’s prophecy. The text claims that the powerful African nation mentioned above will send ambassadors to Judah. Victor Ludlow summarized the general consensus among Isaiah commentators on this. “If any semblance of a historical consensus does exist, it centers around an African delegation representing a new dynasty in Egypt that sought support from King Hezekiah of Judah. The best guess for the date of their visit is about 705 B.C., just after the death of King Sargon of Assyria when Hezekiah and other neighboring states established an anti-Assyrian confederation. Shabako, the Ethiopian pharaoh of the twenty-first or Nubian Dynasty, apparently sent a delegation to Judah in order to discuss a united effort against the disorganized Assyrians. Isaiah’s message to this delegation was that the Lord would subdue Judah’s enemies, implying that political measures against the Assyrians were unnecessary and futile. Therefore Judah did not need to make an alliance with the Egyptians, her former oppressors. Indeed, Isaiah promises a time when gifts from a distant land (perhaps Assyria or Africa) will be brought to Mount Zion, indicating a somewhat universal sovereignty of the Lord’s people in Jerusalem.”⁶⁵

The Burden

The traditional view suggests that the “ensign on the mountains,” (v. 3) is a call for the gathering of armies to battle. As the enemies are gathering their strength against the people of the Lord, the Lord says, “I will take my rest, and I will consider in my dwelling

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, 203.

place like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest. For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches.” (v. 4-5). In other words, as the threat of attack mounts, Isaiah says the Lord will do nothing. He will allow the situation to blossom and ripen. Then suddenly He will prune his vineyard, destroying the enemies of the people of God. The bodies of the dead, like branches after a pruning will be piled together. “They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beast of the earth shall winter upon them” (v. 6). Then will Zion’s sovereignty be established and the nations will bring gifts to Israel.

The Formula

If this prophecy does refer to Egypt, Ethiopia, or some other nation from the region, then Isaiah’s message in this chapter is very similar to that which will come in his oracle to Egypt in the next two chapters. Here, however, Isaiah begins to warn Israel of the futility of trusting in the arm of flesh. He warns that though man may seem to prosper and have great power, the Lord will cut off those who do not look to their maker for support.

A LATTER-DAY SAINT VIEW

There is another very different interpretation of this prophecy that also is insightful. This Latter-day Saint interpretation is much more positive than the traditional view. While the “ambassadors” and their offer of alliance was rejected by Isaiah according to the traditional interpretation, in one LDS interpretation of these verses the efforts of the “land shadowing with wings” is absolutely essential to the salvation of Israel. Joseph Fielding Smith pointed out that the initial “woe” is definitely a mistranslation and should be rendered

as an enthusiastic greeting such as “hail.”⁶⁶ Further, because of such prophetic commentary on these verses, Latter-day Saint scholars who read the description of the nation as “the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,” (v. 1) would point out that the Hebrew indicates that this nation is to be found *far* beyond the rivers of Cush.⁶⁷ Hyrum Smith once stated that “North and South America are the symbol of wings.”⁶⁸ Joseph Fielding Smith expounded on this idea that Isaiah was prophesying of the latter-day Zion when he said, “Think of your map. About twenty-five years ago one of the current magazines printed on the cover the American continents in the shape of wings, with the body of the bird between. . . . Does not this hemisphere take the shape of wings; the spread out wings of a bird?”⁶⁹

Historical Background

With the aid of prophetic inspiration, this chapter in Isaiah goes from one of the most obscure prophecies to one of incredibly profound insights.

Concerning the Americas’ role in this prophecy, Victor Ludlow wrote the following:

Many reasons exist for identifying America as the “land shadowing with wings.” . . . Christian and Jewish Bible commentators use a variety of phrases to describe the land Isaiah refers to, many of which can be applied to America. Some examples are:

A land whose extreme parts are shaded by mountains or hills.
(America is a land of everlasting hills and mountains. [Gen. 49:26; D&C 49:25; 133:31.] A single mountain range extends from north to south.)

A land whose sails are spread out as an eagle. (The eagle is the national symbol of both the United States and Mexico.)

A land on the wings or extremities of the world. (From Jerusalem, America is the farthest country to either the east or west.)

A land under the expanding rays of the morning sun. (Many Indians claim that their ancestors or their great white god "came out of the east.")

⁶⁶ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Signs of the Times*, (Independence, Mo: Press of Zion’s Printing and Publishing Co., 1943) 45-46

⁶⁷ Cleon Skousen, *Isaiah Speaks to Modern Times*, 310.

⁶⁸ *History of the Church*, Vol. 6, 322.

⁶⁹ Smith, *Signs of the Times*, 46

A land that is most sheltered. (America is a land protected by the Lord [1 Ne. 13:12-19].)

A land furnishing protection, as a hen's wings are a shelter for young chicks. (America has a tradition of defending the oppressed.)

There are many ways in which America is a "land shadowing with wings." (Most of these suggestions are found in Barnes, *Notes on Isaiah* 1:335-36.)

The symbol of wings is also very prevalent in the scriptures and usually represents shelter (Ps. 57:1; 17:8; 91:4; Matt. 23:27; Ruth 2:12; 3 Ne. 10:4-6), movement (Ex. 19:4; Ps. 18:10; D&C 77:4; 88:45; 2 Ne. 4:25) or power (2 Ne. 25:13; Ezek. 17:3, 7; Isa. 40:31; D&C 124:18, 99; Mal. 4:2). In Jewish literature, the presence and protection of the Lord for his chosen people is often represented by a wing and is called the *shechinah*. (See BD, "Shechinah.") It is clear that "the land in the shadow of wings" recorded in Isaiah 18 must be a land of refuge, shelter, and power. The phrase connotes the special protection promised America by the Lord (Ether 2:7-12; 2 Ne. 1:5-11), and thus can be the land shadowed by "the divine spirit" (VLL).⁷⁰

With this interpretation of the "land shadowing with wings," the intent of the rest of the prophecy seems to fall into place. Isaiah next describes the role of America in the last days. "That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, saying, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled!" (Isaiah 18:2). Concerning the land to whom the messengers are sent, Joseph Fielding Smith asked, "Do you know of any land like that? Terrible in the beginning and later meted out and scattered, peeled and a curse upon the land? That land is Palestine."⁷¹ This description fits the Holy Land perfectly. When they first established themselves in the land, they were feared by the nations. Idolatry and sin, however, made them weak until eventually they were scattered by the armies of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Romans. The occupying armies marched through the land and sometimes divided it into provinces and appointed governors. The word "rivers" may allude to the Tigris and Euphrates, from the

⁷⁰ Victor L. Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1982], 205.

⁷¹ Smith, *Signs of the Times*, 46-47

homeland of the Assyrians and Babylonians, whose forces flooded into the land.⁷² “Peeled” may be referring to the practice by conquerors of shaving the heads and faces of their defeated foes to humiliate them. President Smith also offered this alternative explanation of the fulfillment of this verse, “We read in the scriptures of the great cedars of Lebanon, and the trees upon the mountains. These were swept off when the curse came upon the land, and the rains have washed down the soil into the valleys where the rivers have spoiled the land, as Isaiah predicted.”⁷³

The Burden

Who then are the ambassadors sent to scattered Israel? They are sent forth from Zion in vessels of papyrus to the lost of Jacob. The ships of bulrushes may simply be a symbol for swiftness in transportation. Their duty is made clear in verse three. “All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountains; and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye.” The messengers sent throughout the world are to raise up an ensign, and to sound the trumpet. They are to signal the gathering. President Smith further explained, “This chapter is clearly a reference to the sending forth of the missionaries to the nations of the earth to gather again this people who are scattered and peeled. The ensign has been lifted upon the mountains, and the work of gathering has been going on for over one hundred years. No one understands this chapter, but the Latter-day Saints, and we can see how it is being fulfilled.”⁷⁴

As the restored gospel is preached to the ends of the earth it will separate the wheat from the tares, the fruit from the branches. “In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their

⁷² See also Isaiah 8:8

⁷³ Smith, *Signs of the Times*, 47-48.

⁷⁴ Smith, *Signs of the Times*, 49.

beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion” (Isaiah 18:7). The “burden” that is carried in this prophecy is a much different one from that of the other chapters. These ambassadors carry a gift to offer the Lord. While it is not a burden of destruction, the responsibility associated with it may be heavy at times. The burden or gift they bring to the Lord is the House of Israel, restored to the knowledge of the truth.⁷⁵

The Formula

When viewed through the aid of modern prophetic interpretation, this prophecy carries a much different message. Isaiah seems to be promising that even in an apostate world, there will be some who will remember the Lord. Those who have repented and taken up the cross of Christ will then carry the burden of spreading the message abroad and gathering lost Israel back to the knowledge of their God.

TWO INTERPRETATIONS, ONE MESSAGE

There seems to be a progression in Isaiah’s use of political entities as spiritual symbols. Isaiah used Babylon as a symbol of pride and worldliness. Those who carry the burden of Babylon have no intention of repenting because they are filled with enmity toward God. Likewise, the defining characteristic of Moab is also pride, but those who endeavor to lift Moab’s yoke make an attempt to feign repentance in a bid to save themselves. Their pride-based repentance, however, is obviously insincere and leads to their destruction. During his treatment of Damascus, Isaiah introduces a new theme into his prophecy. While he still warns of the desolation that comes from uniting with the world, Isaiah prophesies of

⁷⁵ Notice that in this verse the same description is given as in verse two, but here it seems to be used to describe the people offering the gift (latter-day Zion or America). Notice that this description could be equally applicable to the United States., for it is a land terrible from the beginning, a nation that has been explored and measured out and divided politically, and is criss-crossed by rivers.

the repentance of a remnant of Israel. Despite her insistence on seeking after the gods of the gentiles, we are told by Isaiah that Israel will one day forsake the idols and return to the Lord. This is where the “land shadowing with wings” comes into the prophecy. Perhaps Isaiah inserts a dualistic prophecy that may apply to both those who continue in wickedness, and those who choose to repent and return to the Lord. For those who refuse to repent, the traditional interpretation of this prophecy would best apply to their situation. They would be carrying the burden of destruction. On the other hand, that remnant of Israel mentioned in the previous chapter that repents and returns to the Lord would take up the responsibility to become ambassadors for the Lord and gather Israel. Isaiah is foreshadowing the “marvelous work and a wonder” that will begin in America and by which the Lord will gather and reclaim that scattered remnant of Israel that will believe in him. Thus for the repentant, the land shadowing with wings becomes a symbol of the true repentance of Israel.

Perhaps then, despite the diversity of views concerning this chapter, there is one message that ties both interpretations together. Isaiah may be warning Israel to choose her fate. Either Israel must serve the Lord in humble righteousness, or be humbled by sudden destruction and captivity.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE BURDEN OF EGYPT

ISAIAH 19-20

The role of Egypt as a symbol of worldliness is quite evident throughout the Old Testament. Egypt was one of the oldest and most advanced civilizations in the ancient near east. It represented the ingenuity of man in science, art and architecture, politics and warfare. Even in our modern society of scientific advancement, many gaze in awe at the ingenuity of the wonders that remain of an ancient Egyptian civilization. Perhaps it was the grandeur of the ancient Egypt built by men that blinded Moses to man's insignificance next to God. After seeing in vision all the creations of the Almighty, Moses exclaimed, "Now for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing *I never had supposed*" (Moses 1:10, emphasis added). Egypt inspired awe in the inhabitants of the ancient world and influenced the people of the region in many ways.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

One of the most important sources for the symbolism attached to Egypt is the Exodus story. It seems evident from what happened later in the biblical account that the children of Israel's worship of the true God had been influenced by their years in captivity to the Egyptians. It seems they had become corrupted by the Egyptian lifestyle and religion. It can be argued that they were in bondage to the Egyptians not only physically, but spiritually as well. Thus the Lord sent a deliverer to free them from captivity and teach them the true religion. Even after being freed by Pharaoh, the effects of the spiritual bondage were

revealed throughout the Exodus as the people desired to return, and even resorted to idolatry. As it has been often noted, it took a lot of effort to get the children of Israel out of Egypt, but it took even more to get Egypt out of the children of Israel. Egypt has come to represent captivity to sin, wickedness and worldliness. Even by the time of Isaiah, Israel was still enticed by the boasting of Egyptian power. Perhaps it was because of this tendency of Israel to desire to return to the “flesh pots” of Egypt (Exodus 16:3), that Isaiah proclaimed the “burden of Egypt.”

That Egypt was still a symbol of pride and sin during Isaiah’s day is evident in the writings of Isaiah. “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?” (Isaiah 51:9). Here Isaiah may be using the name “Rahab” to describe ancient Egypt. “Rahab” literally means “strong” in Hebrew, but is used to signify pride.⁷⁶ Further, Isaiah uses a dragon to represent Egypt. In first verse of chapter 27 Isaiah uses the same imagery. “In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.” It is clear not only from their context, but also from the writings of Ezekiel, that these verses seem to apply at least in part to Egypt. Ezekiel wrote, “Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, my river is mine own, and I have made it for myself” (29:3). The sea dwelling dragon used as a symbol of Egypt may also be used as a representation of Satan himself. Like Babylon, Egypt can be a symbol of Satan and his dominions on the earth.

⁷⁶ James Strong, *Strong's New Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. (Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990).

Under the heavy weight of Assyrian oppression, the territories surrounding Judah grew rebellious and determined to free themselves of Assyrian control. A coalition was formed which included the most powerful nation in the region, Egypt. Young explained, “It was the year 711 that Assyria marched toward Egypt. Three years earlier, in 713, Ashdod had rebelled against Assyria. Its king Azuri had been removed and his brother Achimit placed upon the throne. This man was deposed by the people, however, and a man by the name of Jaman sat upon the throne in his place. Other cities of Philistia took part in the revolt, and Edom, Moab, and Judah were also invited to join. In addition the Egyptians also promised their help. As [Isaiah 20 as well as later chapters] show, Isaiah was opposed to trusting in Egypt, and it may be that at this time some attention was paid to his words; for as far as we know, Judah was not attacked by Sargon, who was then at the height of his power. Jaman fled to Egypt for help, but was treacherously turned over to the Assyrians by the Ethiopian king then reigning in Egypt.”⁷⁷ Isaiah’s warning to Judah not to put trust in the strength of the gentiles and his prophecy that their strength would fail and they would meet with destruction follows the same pattern as the other “burden” prophecies. Isaiah uses political situations to represent the spiritual condition of Israel.

THE BURDEN

The woes pronounced on Egypt carry much of the same feeling as those attached to the other nations. Isaiah warns that the current prosperity will soon fail, leaving the people to mourn their poverty. “Behold the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it” (Isaiah 19:1). The power of the Lord, Isaiah promises, will drive the

⁷⁷ *The Book of Isaiah*, Book 2, p. 51.

pride and idolatry out of the hearts of the people, leaving them humble and prepared to accept the Lord as their God.

Isaiah then lists several different ways that the Lord will pour out His judgment upon Egypt. First he prophesies of various forms of internal political strife among the Egyptians. “And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother and every one against his neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom” (Isaiah 19:2). Scholars have tried to tie this prophecy to a specific event in Egyptian history. Young explained, “Herodotus (ii. 141-147) states that there were civil wars in the days of Psammetichus, who finally succeeded in uniting Egypt. At earlier periods also, namely during the 23rd and 24th dynasties, there were disorders and uprisings. Is it these to which Isaiah refers? Some commentators think so, but more likely he is presenting a general picture of a period of disorders caused by the judgment of God. His intention is not so much to depict one particular epoch of civil war as it is to show that when God acts in judgment, the nation will lose unity.”⁷⁸ In addition to civil war, Isaiah also prophesies of a wicked ruler who oppresses the people. “And the Egyptians will I give over to a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 19: 4). Likewise, this issue may be applied, though with much room for argument, to various periods. Young further enumerates the different opinions of scholars concerning this verse. “In line with his general dispensational interpretation, Bultema believes that the king will be the little horn mentioned in Daniel 7. Gesenius thinks that it is Psammetichus, and Penna suggests that it may be the Ethiopian Piankhi or the Assyrian Sargon II. Fisher thinks that the prophecy was fulfilled through Esarhaddon who conquered Egypt about 670, and Duhm claims that it was Ochus.” Though any or all of these may be considered a partial fulfillment of Isaiah’s

⁷⁸ *The Book of Isaiah*, 16.

prophecy, it is very possible given the prophecies to which it is linked in this chapter that all the aspects of this divine oracle will not be fully realized until the Second Coming.

In addition to political strife, Isaiah predicts agricultural ruin resulting from the failure of the Nile. “And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up. And they shall turn the rivers far away; and the brooks of defence shall be emptied and dried up: the reeds and flags shall wither. The paper reeds by the brooks, by the mouth of the brooks, and every thing sown by the brooks, shall wither, be drive away, and be no more. The fishers also shall mourn, and all they that cast angle into the brooks shall lament, and they that spread nets upon the waters shall languish. Moreover they that work in fine flax, and they that weave networks, shall be confounded. And they shall be broken in the purposes thereof, all that make sluices and ponds for fish” (Isaiah 19:5-10). The Nile is the life-blood of Egypt. As it diminishes, so also does Egypt’s economy. Victor Ludlow offers an interesting illustration of how disruption of the Nile river could fulfill this prophecy. “In 1960, construction began on the Aswan Dam, and engineering wonder but ecological and social nightmare. Built to provide abundant, cheap, clean hydroelectric power, to store water for irrigation, and to control flooding, the dam was to help fulfill President Nasser’s dream of bringing Egyptian society out of the “dark ages” and into a powerful position among third world countries. Within a decade, Nasser hoped to deliver the country from poverty and famine, and to double its income through industrialization. Yet more than a decade after the dam’s completion in 1971, poverty is still rampant (the average Egyptian worker’s daily salary is only three dollars, the nation is deep in debt, and progress toward modernization is very slow). Countless other problems have resulted from building the dam. Though some

problems were anticipated, their magnitude was never even imagined.”⁷⁹ This is a fulfillment of the warning issued by Isaiah to Egypt that following the gods of the world would not lead to lasting prosperity.

In addition to the various temporal fulfillments of Isaiah’s prophecy to Egypt, it is important to examine the spiritual symbolism. As in the other “burdens” Isaiah leans heavily on the imagery of water. Water is the symbol of life and prosperity in the scriptures. The world in all its pomp and glory promises an abundance of water and a bountiful life, full of fatness. The proponents of worldly philosophies offer happiness and satisfaction at the click of a button. Isaiah prophesies that initially many people will buy into these teachings, looking for an answer to the famine in their lives. “And they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards” (Isaiah 19:3). In reality, however, they sell neither happiness, nor truth. “The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have also seduced Egypt, even they that are the stay of the tribes thereof. The Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit” (Isaiah 19:13-14). Those who chase blindly and desperately after the “water” of the world foolishly chase a mirage. There is no water to be found in the deserts of sin. Though the world, like Egypt of old, may boast in its own philosophies and claim to have wisdom, the Lord promises that “the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof: and I will destroy the counsel thereof. . . . Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counselors of Pharaoh is become brutish: how say ye unto Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings? Where are they? Where are thy wise men? And let them tell thee

⁷⁹ *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, 214. The author offers an extensive list of the negative effects the Dam has exerted on the economy of Egypt, many of which fit well with Isaiah’s prophecy.

now, and let them know what the Lord of hosts hath purposed upon Egypt” (Isaiah 19:3, 11-12).

THE FORMULA

It appears that the judgments poured out by the Lord upon Egypt will have a powerful effect on the people. Once the Egyptians abandon their idols and are able to see through the lies taught by the worldly ministers of sin, Isaiah prophesies that they will repent and join themselves to the true worship of the Lord. There seems to be a gradual progression toward true and complete conversion, which Isaiah weaves into his prophecy. “And the land of Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt, every one that maketh mention thereof shall be afraid in himself, because of the Lord of hosts, which he hath determined against it. In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction. In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea they shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and perform it” (Isaiah 19:17-21). Some scholars, especially those who don’t believe in actual prophecy, have attempted to link these predictions with various places and events in Egyptian history. But this prophecy may not have been completely fulfilled, and therefore, for now, its full implications must remain obscure.⁸⁰

It is interesting to examine the manner in which Isaiah develops the theme of the redemption of Egypt. Isaiah first describes what the Lord will do to humble Egypt. The

⁸⁰ Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, 220-222.

initial result after they abandon their own idols and realize that it is the power of the Lord that is upon them is that they are afraid of Jehovah and His people (see v. 16-17). Next Isaiah prophesies of five cities whose inhabitants enter into covenant with the Lord. Also implied is the presence of a temple in Egypt. Verse 20 begins to refer to Egypt as a whole, looking to the Lord for deliverance. In response to this the Lord sends one like Moses, a type of Christ, to lead them to the truth. Then will the Egyptians make and keep sacred covenants and offer oblations in the sacred places of God. The end result is that Egypt is brought into the fold of God and joined to Israel. “In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance” (Isaiah 19:23-25).

The process of repentance to be followed by the Egyptians in this prophecy is initiated by the hardships brought about by the Lord in response to their pride and sinfulness. “And the Lord shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the Lord, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them” (Isaiah 19:22). The Lord will smite them until they turn to Him and seek his healing power. Perhaps the reason why the Egyptians need to be smitten before they see the truth is best illustrated in chapter twenty. Here is found the record of a prophecy which was acted out by Isaiah. “At the same time spake the Lord by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot” (v. 2). The purpose of the prophecy is to warn Judah not to look to Egypt and Ethiopia for

deliverance because Egyptian themselves would fall to the enemy. “So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptian prisoners, and the Ethiopian captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt” (Isaiah 20:4).

While this prophecy has historical application to events in Isaiah’s time, it also serves as a “sign and a wonder upon Egypt and Ethiopia” (v.3) regarding their conversion to the Lord. The Egyptians had such confidence in their ability to remain in power that even the people of the Lord, Judah, were tempted to look to them for aid. But the Lord is warning through Isaiah that he would expose their folly and strip them of their pride. He promises that they would be “afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory” (Isaiah 20:5). Egypt is to take a humiliating loss, and find herself stripped of all the adornments that had blinded them in order to make them realize that the glory of Egypt, the idols, the wisdom, and the gospel of the world can not deliver them.

Thus Egypt becomes a type of repentance to all who have placed themselves in the spiritual realms of Egypt. Those who seek after the idols of worldliness and who preach the philosophies of men will eventually find that their river of prosperity is dried up. They must become totally stripped of all their pride and wickedness. If they will not do it themselves, God will ultimately do it for them. However, once they have been fully humbled, they have the opportunity to repent and come unto the true God. This group of people, unlike those in Babylon, eventually come to their senses and realize their mistake. The trials in their lives lead them to understand that the source to which they looked for meaning in life was a lie. They begin to ask the question, “whither [shall] we flee for help to be delivered . . . and how shall we escape?” (Isaiah 20: 6). Like the Egyptians of whom Isaiah prophesies, those who

turn from the temples of Egypt and seek refuge in the sanctuary of the Lord will be healed and numbered among the chosen of Israel.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BURDEN OF THE VALLEY OF THE VISION

ISAIAH 22

After prophesying concerning the surrounding nations who have been opposed to the cause of the Lord, the prophet Isaiah then focuses his words back on the covenant people. Scholars generally agree based on the context of the chapter that the “valley of the vision” is Jerusalem. Perhaps Jerusalem is included here among the pagan nations because she has forgotten her God and has joined herself to the other nations. This prophecy, along with the prophecy of the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel found in chapter 17, appears to support Isaiah’s warning to the people against joining with the nations. The prophecy concerning the doom of Jerusalem follows the same pattern as the other “burden” prophecies because those in the holy city are guilty of the same crime.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter clearly describes a historical situation in which Jerusalem is surrounded by enemies. This prophecy is a remarkable description of the events that took place in connection with the Assyrian invasion and siege of Jerusalem. However, the prophecy also seems to fit somewhat with attacks on Jerusalem made by the Babylonians and the Romans. It seems likely that Isaiah was using a formula to prophesy of these events and events yet to occur, perhaps jumping from one time period to another. Isaiah gives specifics of each particular event, but uses one general theme. If so, then it follows that Isaiah is not as

interested in describing the attack as he is in describing a general theme that all the events have in common. In other words, he was outlining a formula that would apply to God's people in many ages. In this case it appears that the theme Isaiah wishes to emphasize is the sinful attitude held by the remnant of Israel. As a result, this study will not attempt to link the prophecy to any specific time period in interpreting this prophecy. Instead it will focus on the sinful attitude Isaiah describes in association with the events.

THE BURDEN

In this prophecy Isaiah announces his grief at the fall of the daughter of Zion. Jerusalem had become the most important city to the children of Israel. It was the holy city, mount Zion, where the great priests offered sacrifice and where kings such as David and Solomon had ruled in splendor and glory. Now, Isaiah laments that it is fallen. "Therefore said I, Look away from me; I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people." It is the "spoiling" of Jerusalem that so concerns Isaiah. Though there is a reference to an actual siege of Jerusalem, Isaiah seems more focused on what is going on within the city, or even within the hearts of the people. Perhaps then, Isaiah is using this battle as a symbol of the spiritual spoiling of the people of Jerusalem.

A look at the nature of the conflict in which the people of Jerusalem found themselves can be instructive. Isaiah writes in verse three, "Your rulers have all fled together; they were captured without the use of a bow. All of you who were found were captured, though they had fled far away (NRSV)." This interesting verse can be applied to spiritual conditions among the remnant of Jacob as well as to the result of war. Rather than choosing righteous spiritual leaders, the people followed those who told them what they

wanted to hear. The result was that the leaders had led themselves and the people into captivity. Isaiah emphasizes that it was not the weapons of the enemy that led to the captivity of the people, but their own wickedness. The road the people followed led naturally to captivity. Now they are surrounded by the results of the wicked choices just as the armies of the enemy trapped them behind their walls. “And it shall come to pass, that thy choicest valleys shall be full of chariots, and the horsemen shall set themselves in array at the gate” (Isaiah 22:7). Because the inhabitants of Jerusalem have transgressed and forgotten the Lord and because they have sought to hide their iniquity from the eyes of God, the Lord will expose them and strip away the “covering of Judah.” (v. 8).

Isaiah outlines several different sinful attitudes exhibited by the people of Jerusalem in the face of pending doom. Each of these is quite relevant and instructive to God’s people in any age.

Trusting in the Arm of Flesh

It is on the eve of battle, with the threat of death imminent with the rising sun that the sinful inner desires of the people are illuminated. Isaiah powerfully illustrates the wickedness of the people by describing how they act when faced with likely destruction. The people spend much time making physical preparations for battle. Isaiah mentions that the building to which the people look for salvation is the “house of the forest” (v. 8). One commentary explains, “This phrase refers to a building constructed under Solomon’s direction on the temple mount, which formed part of Solomon’s palace complex. The structure was called *house of the forest* because it was constructed of cedar columns and beams, and it housed armor and other items (1 Kgs. 7:2-5; 10:17-21). Isaiah’s inspired words show irony in the situation: the Jews prepared for the coming war by trusting in their

armories, including the house of the forest, but they ignored the most significant building on the very same mount: Solomon's temple—the only place from which both temporal and spiritual salvation could have come.”⁸¹

The problem is that rather than using their time and energy to call on God, they place trust in the arm of flesh. Rather than repairing the cracks and weaknesses in their soul caused by sin, they seek to strengthen the walls of Jerusalem. They rush to fill the city's cisterns with water instead of seeking for Living Waters. Rather than counting their blessings, they count houses in order to fill their ranks with soldiers. Rather than fortifying their faith in the Lord, they dig ditches. In all their efforts at survival their sin is abundantly clear. They forget the power by which Jerusalem was made great in the first place. “But ye have not looked unto the maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago” (Isaiah 22:9-11).

“Eat, Drink, and Be Merry, for Tomorrow We Die”

As Isaiah describes the mood of Jerusalem he seems to contradict himself somewhat. He intermingles descriptions of people rejoicing with prophecies of destruction and mourning. “What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to the housetops? Thou that art full of stirs, a tumultuous city, a joyous city” (Isaiah 22: 1-2). Perhaps it is Isaiah's purpose to emphasize this contradiction in the people themselves. Isaiah may purposely be illustrating the inappropriate response the people have toward conflict. While some of the people see the conflict as a “call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth” (v. 12), others are described, surprisingly, quite to the contrary. “And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die” (v. 13). Herein lies another major sin of Jerusalem.

⁸¹ Donald Parry, *Understanding Isaiah*, 197.

When all the consequences of sin are realized, when the true weight of the burden that the people have chosen to carry is hefted, they would rather completely surrender to the desires of the flesh than to repent and return to God. For those who carry the burden of the valley of the vision, it appears easier to continue down the path of sin than to turn to God and accept His outstretched hand. Because such people refuse to turn to the Lord, even after the Lord has smitten them into complete humiliation, their repentance cannot be completed. “Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts” (Isaiah 22:14).

Sepulchres of Vanity

Isaiah then turns his attention to Shebna, the treasurer in Jerusalem. Concerning the importance of Shebna’s position Young wrote, “The office of *soken* was of great importance, probably one of the highest in the land. A second title is also given Shebna, namely, ‘the one over the house.’” This office is attested at the time of Solomon (1 Kings 4:6) and could have been created by him. In Isaiah’s day it had become a position of great significance, probably that of vizier.”⁸² Isaiah chooses to direct his prophecy toward Shebna because of his position of influence over the people and also because Shebna embodies the general attitude of the people toward the impending doom. From Isaiah’s words to Shebna we learn how the treasurer is spending his resources to prepare for his possible death. “What hast thou here? And whom hast thou here, that thou hast hewed thee out a sepulcher here, as he that heweth him out a sepulchres on high, and that graveth an habitation for himself in a rock?” (Isaiah 22:16). This leader of Jerusalem apparently had spent his time building a tomb that would glorify him long after he was dead. He was trying to leave a name and legacy for himself. This was another great sin of Jerusalem. Rather than preparing themselves for the afterlife in

⁸² *The Book of Isaiah*, 105.

a way that would crown them with eternal glory, they filled their lives with the glory of the world. Isaiah points out that people like Shebna are wasting their time because they cannot take earthly riches with them. In addition to applying to Shebna when he is carried away captive by the invading army, this verse may also have reference to what would happen to Shebna after he died. It may refer to the spirit world and Shebna's consequence for filling his life with worldliness. "Behold, the Lord will carry thee away with a mighty captivity, and will surely cover thee. He will surely violently turn and toss thee like a ball into a large country: there shalt thou die, and there the chariots of thy glory shall be the shame of thy lord's house. And I will drive thee from thy station, and from thy state shall he pull thee down" (Isaiah 22:17-19). Isaiah warns that the glory of riches, titles, and worldly adornments will eventually be meaningless, and those who have invested their energy in seeking them will find themselves ashamed of those things.

THE FORMULA

Though the city of Jerusalem was centered around the house of Jehovah, He was no longer at the center of their lives and hearts. Isaiah uses this detailed prophecy to reveal what was truly in the hearts of the people. Isaiah seems to be asserting that when a person is faced with death, their true nature and desires will manifest themselves through the person's actions. Many are simply consumed with fear and desperation. Those who love sin and riotous living seek to get as much of that lifestyle as they can before the inevitable. Those who love fame, power, and glory, like Shebna seek to ensure that their fame will live on after they are gone. For all of them, the destruction has come because of their decisions. Rather than recognizing their mistakes and trying to correct them through repentance and reliance upon God, they deal with it in their various prideful ways. When the consequences of their

selfishness catch up with them, rather than repenting and returning to God, many seem to simply continue down the path they are on. Pride can cause people to choose certain death over repentance.

It seems that on at least one level the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem was not fulfilled. When the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem, whatever their initial reaction may have been, Hezekiah encouraged the people to make both physical and spiritual preparations. Hezekiah put his trust in the Lord and as a result the people were saved from destruction. While Israelites in later generations realized the sorrow and destruction prophesied by Isaiah because their attitudes reflected those described in this chapter, Hezekiah's people escaped doom by changing their attitudes. Thus the formula provided by Isaiah here seems to be not only outlining the different sinful attitudes that people may have in the face of doom, but also to show that the merciful covenants made by the Lord to Israel will never be repealed. Despite the selfish and prideful attitudes described by Isaiah that lead to the destruction of Jerusalem, Isaiah does offer hope for a change in the hearts of the people. Just as the Lord sent a fish to rescue Jonah, so also Isaiah teaches that the Lord will provide hope and a way out to the people of Jerusalem though they may not want or deserve it. That hope is symbolized by a man named Eliakim, who was to replace the wicked treasurer. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open" (Isaiah 22:1-22). In the same way that Shebna represented the sinfulness of Judah, Eliakim personifies the

repentance and return to glory of Jerusalem. The name Eliakim means “God will cause to arise.”⁸³

The promise that comes through this prophecy concerning Eliakim is that though the people have brought themselves into captivity because of sin, the Lord will cause them to arise and return to Jerusalem. Jerusalem will also be raised from ruin to her former glory. After Israel has returned to the Lord in righteousness, it shall again be firm and immovable in glory and power. “And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious thron to his father house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father’s house, the offspring and the issue, all the vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons” (Isaiah 22:23-24).⁸⁴

In summary, Isaiah depicts the inhabitants of Jerusalem as having become so deeply entrenched in sinful behavior that they are trapped. They are like a city with poor defenses, surrounded by an army of innumerable hosts. Their continual self-serving choices have led them to this point of sorrow. Surprisingly, however, once they become aware of the impending doom, rather than turn back to the safety of the Lord, they increase their speed toward destruction. In contrast to those described in the prophecy concerning Egypt, not even trials and tribulation leads the people back to the Lord. Similarly there are many today like those of ancient Jerusalem, who once they fall into the depths of sin and discover the sorrow attached to it, chose to “eat, drink, and be merry” rather than repent. Their reaction is “Well, I’ve sinned now, I might as well just keep going on in sinning. When they realize the seriousness of their sin, and that God will not allow them to find happiness in sin, rather than

⁸³ See footnotes in LDS edition of the Bible.

⁸⁴ These verses are part of a very complex but interesting prophecy that points to the Atonement of Christ. A more in depth study concerning the “nail in the sure place” will follow in chapter 11.

call on God for help, give up spiritually, or trust in their own strength to try to correct the situation.

The good news is repentance is possible through Him who was fastened to the cross by a “nail in a sure place.” Eventually, the Lord will change the hearts of the people. Rather than following the example of Shebna, Israel will eventually “arise” and remember its former glory. They will look to their God, like Eliakim, and will seek to establish the priestly kingdom of God once again. Then will they remain steadfast in their devotion to Jehovah, and their worship in His holy house.

CHAPTER NINE
THE BURDEN OF TYRE
ISAIAH 23

Isaiah ends his prophecies to the nations by pronouncing the “burden of Tyre.” The prophecies against Babylon and Tyre act as bookends completing Isaiah’s warning to those who seek means of entering the “great and spacious building” (see 1 Nephi :26-27). “It is fitting that the oracles directed against the nontheocratic nations concluded with one against Tyre; for as Babylon was at the heart of the kingdom of man, so Tyre was the central city of human commerce. Babylon was the center of land power, and Tyre the power on the sea. There was a contrast between them, however; for Babylon, as the center of the kingdom of man, had extended her sway through warlike means, conquering other peoples and incorporating them into her intended worldwide kingdom; whereas Tyre has extended her sway and influence through peaceful means, such as trade and commerce and the planting of colonies.”⁸⁵ Tyre, then, like all the other nations, acts as a symbol for worldliness, especially materialism and the love of money.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Tyre was a bit different from the other gentile nations in that the Phoenicians were never really political enemies of Israel. The Phoenicians were merchants, with Tyre as their main trade port. They were interested in acquiring riches not through conquest, but through trade. War is not good for trade. As a result, the Phoenicians often sought to maintain peace with their neighbors, including Israel. Hiram, king of Tyre often offered aid to Israel in the

⁸⁵ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 2, 121.

form of traded goods and materials for building to David and Solomon. “And Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon; for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the room of his father: for Hiram was ever a lover of David. . . . So Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees according to all his desire. And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household. . . .” (1 Kings 5:1,11-12). The interaction between the Phoenicians and the Israelites deepened until the two became somewhat interdependent (see 1 Kings 7:13-45; 9:11-14,26-28). Even centuries later when Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, Tyre supplied men and material to aid in the reconstruction effort (see Ezra 3:7).

Perhaps the story which best symbolizes the relationship between Israel and Tyre is the marriage of Ahab and Jezebel. Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre and priest of Astarte.⁸⁶ This peaceful union between the Phoenicians and northern Israel turned out to be one of the most spiritually destructive events leading to the corruption of the people and their eventual scattering. Jezebel popularized her pagan religion among the people. The union between Ahab and Jezebel became a symbol for the unholy alliance between Israel and the worship of the idols of pride and materialism. This same alliance between God’s people and the idols of the world has been a burden for the people of God since Isaiah’s day. Thus Isaiah recorded the “burden of Tyre.”

THE BURDEN

In accordance with the pattern he has previously followed Isaiah opens his oracle to the Phoenicians by describing the destruction of the principle cities and its effect on the people. “Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Chittim it is revealed to them. Be still, ye inhabitants of the isle; thou

⁸⁶ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol 2, 144.

whom the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished” (Isaiah 23:1-2). Isaiah prophesies of the desolation of the major cities of the Phoenicians, and the devastation felt by the outlying settlements of the empire. Like the other burden prophecies there is much disagreement about what exactly Isaiah was predicting, perhaps more so among this oracle than any other.⁸⁷ Though there is no exact fit, scholars have variously attributed the prophesied attack on the Phoenicians to Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmanezzer, and Sennacherib, all of whom laid siege to Tyre at various times. In addition, the city was also besieged by Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians, and was eventually brought down from glory by the brutal assault of Alexander the Great.⁸⁸ Perhaps the destruction Isaiah warns of is yet to come. It is also possible that all these events are woven into Isaiah’s prophecy, and that his purpose is not to describe a specific event, but to use fragments of events to demonstrate the sinful attitude of the people, and the spiritual destruction that it results in.

Isaiah uses helpful imagery to support his prophecy. Foremost among these images is the Phoenician capital city of Tyre, “the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth” (Isaiah 23:8). The Phoenician’s domination of the sea lanes adds to the symbolism of pride Isaiah attaches to Tyre. Ezekiel also wrote, “Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord God; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God. . . . With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast set

⁸⁷ Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, 162.

⁸⁸ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 2, 144.

thine heart as the heart of God; Behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness” (Ezekiel, 28:2,4-5). Because Tyre is the symbol of pride and materialism, the Lord has “purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth” (Isaiah 23: 9).

Isaiah calls Tyre a “mart of nations.” Tyre was a port city centered around Mediterranean trade. Goods, peoples, philosophies, religions, lifestyles, fashions, and knowledge from all over the ancient Near East intermingled in Tyre. It appears that the Phoenicians had few enemies because it was bad for business. It is as if Tyre sought to make each nation believe that their closest ally was the Phoenicians. If it meant worshipping their gods, or wearing their clothes, or speaking their language, the merchants were willing. Their gestures were not made out of any sincere love for the people, but out of sincere love for their money.

Isaiah introduces a powerful image to convey this idea of feigned union. “And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king: after the end of seventy years shall Tyre sing as an *harlot*” (Isaiah 23:15, emphasis added). Though Tyre goes through the motions of covenant-based union and loyalty, she is really only interested in personal gain. John the Revelator uses this same imagery to describe the “whore that sitteth upon many waters” (See Revelation 17). The Phoenicians are not “enemies” to the people of the Lord, nor are they allies. Their heart has no allegiance except to themselves. They are as a harlot who offers for hire her “love.” “Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered” (Isaiah 23:16). Isaiah seems to indicate

that the glory of Tyre will diminish for a period during which she will be “forgotten.” Eventually, however, she will sell herself to the nations of the earth again. “And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years that the Lord will visit Tyre, and she shall turn to her hire, and shall commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth” (Isaiah 23:17).

THE FORMULA

Tyre was no enemy to the people of Israel. On the contrary, the Phoenicians enjoyed friendly trade with the people of the Lord. So what is the attitude exhibited by Tyre that leads to desolation and of which the prophet seeks to warn the people? Perhaps it is the fact that though Tyre was no enemy to the Lord, neither was she a true ally of God. Though outwardly she made treaties and offered goods to help in the cause of Israel, even building up a sanctuary to the Lord, there was no true devotion and dedication. Though she played the harlot and committed “fornication with all the kingdoms of the world,” she remained an oppressed virgin (unmarried), and without children (the fruit of such a covenant relationship) (see v. 4, 12).

Among the Saints of modern Israel there may be some who spiritually are like the merchants of Tyre. They swear allegiance to the Lord regularly through ordinances. They have a testimony of the restored gospel. Religion, however, has become a social issue for them. They may follow the precepts of the Church outwardly in order to fit in to the Mormon culture or perhaps even to gain popularity or respect. But these “fence-sitters” do not have the fire of the covenant burning in their hearts. They have allied themselves with the enemies of God: pride, materialism, and sin. On Sunday they attend Church and sing

praises to the Lord, but during the rest of the week they follow the example of the world rather than the commandments of God.

Evidences of this spiritual infidelity are found even among the covenant people in all ages. The Book of Mormon details the “pride cycle” in which the members of the ancient Nephite church would begin to wear costly apparel and to look down on those who had less than they. In our day Latter-day Saints sustain the president of the Church as a prophet, seer, and revelator, but some refuse to follow his counsel concerning Sabbath observance or excessive debt. Often missionaries enter the field unworthily, with no desire to actually serve the Lord, but go only because of the social benefits that come from receiving the title “returned missionary.”

Isaiah’s message is not just directed to the Phoenician people but to ancient and modern Israel. In Isaiah’s day the covenant people were committing spiritual adultery. They had promised devotion and fidelity to the Lord, but they chose to go “a whoring” after other gods. They joined themselves to other nations, other religions, and the idols of the world for personal gain. They themselves had become a marketplace of the nations like Tyre. So also do many of the modern remnant of Israel today. Of such the Lord said, “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:16). That is the burden of Tyre.

That destruction upon such people will not come immediately, however, Isaiah informs us. The Lord will use these spiritual merchants for his own good. “And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord: it shall not be treasured or laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for

“durable clothing” (Isaiah 23:18)⁸⁹. In other words, though the ancient craftsmen of Tyre weren’t really converted to the Lord, the Lord still used their skills to build his holy Temple. Likewise, the missionary who is not serving for the right reasons can still be an instrument in the hands of God to bring people to the truth. God will not destroy them immediately, but give them time to choose whom they will serve. In the mean time the Lord will use their talents and abilities, even without their full devotion, to accomplish his glorious purposes in establishing Zion.

⁸⁹ Donald Parry explains that the phrase “her hire shall be holiness to the Lord” may refer to the ancient practice of dedicating the goods and a treasures of a conquered city to the Lord as a holy offering (*Understanding Isaiah*, 211).

CHAPTER TEN

SUMMARY

The Book of Mormon makes it clear that the writings of Isaiah are of great relevance to the latter-day reader. As a result of the unequivocal importance the Book of Mormon attaches to the record of Isaiah, students of these sacred writings should approach their study with the determination to find personal meaning. Prior to including a lengthy quote from Isaiah in his record, Nephi encouraged such an approach. “And now I write some of the words of Isaiah, that whoso of my people shall see these words may lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men. Now these are the words, and *ye may liken them unto you and unto all men*” (2 Nephi 11:8, emphasis added). Nephi himself then seems to model this approach in chapters 25-30 as he comments on Isaiah’s writings, applying them to his people and his dispensation as well as those in the latter days.

While there is much of Isaiah that clearly applies to the modern reader, there are some portions of Isaiah that seem to cause some difficulty for finding personal meaning. One such section is the portion of Isaiah’s writings referred to as the burden chapters, comprising chapters 13-23 the text. These chapters are laden with references to political circumstances and cultural dimensions of Isaiah’s time period. Much of the research that has been done on these chapters has revolved around understanding the historical context in which they were written. Such research is an important foundation from which multiple applications may be drawn.

This paper has attempted to build a framework upon the foundation laid by historical scholarship for modern and personal application. It has used critical and historical methods of analysis to formulate principles that are as applicable in our day as they were in Isaiah's day. This study has suggested that Isaiah's writings may be viewed as spiritual "formulas" with many different variables (relevant prophesied events from different time periods and circumstances) that may be inserted into the formulas to apply them to any given people or dispensation. With this approach many of Isaiah's prophecies in the burden chapters can be viewed as dualistic, applying to more than one people, place, time, or circumstance

THE FORMULA MESSAGE OF THE BURDEN CHAPTERS

In these chapters of Isaiah the prophet systematically pronounces a burden on several of the neighboring nations of Israel and Judah. It appears that one reason for this is to show Israel the consequences of these nations' worldly attitudes toward Jehovah. Isaiah may be warning that those who likewise sow such attitudes will reap the same destruction. Some of the prophecies are directed at portions of the covenant people who have themselves adopted sinful attitudes toward God. They warn of impending destruction for such tendencies. On the other hand, Isaiah also introduces the theme of redemption into his writings and explains what it takes for nations and individuals to return to the Lord and serve Him. It is helpful to look at these chapters not only individually for what attitude each group symbolizes and the messages in them, but also to look at the prophecies as a whole to find over-arching themes.

The Burden of Babylon

The Babylon of Isaiah's day was the cultural center of the region and represented the wisdom and influence of man. Israel was greatly influenced by the religion, science, culture, and philosophy of Babylon. Israelites may have linked Babylon to the tower of Babel, a

symbol of a complete rebellion against God. Thus, Isaiah uses Babylon as the symbol of ultimate pride, complete rebellion and enmity toward God. Isaiah predicts that the destruction of such will be sudden and complete. The formula message here is simply, “Pride and rebellion lead to a sudden fall.”

The Burden of Moab

Like Babylon, Moab is also a symbol of pride and wickedness. Unlike Babylon, however, when the consequences of their sinfulness are realized by Moab they come to Jehovah and His people for help. But their “repentance” is born of necessity in order to escape the difficult consequences of their choices and not out of sincere desire to serve the Lord. Isaiah’s formula message here is that pride based and feigned repentance lead to rejection by the Lord and the destructive consequences that follow.

The Burden of Damascus (Syria)

In this prophecy Isaiah emphasizes the danger that follows when a covenant people link themselves to unrighteous peoples. Because Israel had made such a confederacy, Isaiah warns that they will be beaten, scattered, and will forget their true identity. Such is the case with those who abandon God for worldliness. But Isaiah also introduces the theme of redemption with the promise that the remnant of Israel will eventually be reclaimed. His formula message is that alliance with worldliness and sin will cause God’s people to be lost, but the Lord will leave the door open for them to return to Him.

The Burden of the Land Shadowing with Wings

This dualistic prophecy carries a powerful message about the choice between oppression and redemption. Isaiah’s formula message is made up of two parts that can be put together into a single formula. To those who choose to continue in pride, selfishness, and sin

rather than submitting to God's will, this prophecy warns that they will find only captivity.

To those that submit themselves and become His servants, Isaiah promises they will not only find redemption but will become servants of the Lord to bring about His eternal purposes.

The Burden of Egypt

Egypt, like Babylon, was a great symbol of the enticements and pride of the world. As with Babylon, Isaiah warns of the dangers of putting trust in Egypt. However, unlike his prophecy concerning Babylon, Isaiah proclaims that Egypt can change its ways. He warns that they must be stripped completely from all their worldliness and appear before the Lord in humility. Then Isaiah promises that they will be made partakers of the same blessings promised to Israel. The formula is that only after one has been stripped of pride and sin will they be able to truly come unto the Lord.

The Burden of the Valley of Vision (Jerusalem)

It may be said that the true measure of one's faith becomes apparent in the face of impending doom. Isaiah illustrates how Jerusalem, whose inhabitants are supposed to put their trust in God, prepares for impending attack. Rather than relying on the Lord they resort to various self-centered and faithless diversions which reveal their true attitudes toward God. God will not deliver a people who do not fear and serve Him.

The Burden of Tyre

Tyre was best known for being a center of commerce in the region. It traded with many of the surrounding kingdoms. On the surface they appeared to be allies to Israel, even helping to build Solomon's temple. But their true allegiance was to themselves. They, like a harlot, went through the motions of devotion, but would then offer that same devotion to the enemies of Israel. Isaiah's formula is that those who use religion when it serves them best,

but then have no trouble employing evil when it is of most benefit, will not receive the blessings of true fidelity to the Lord.

A chiasm can be seen in these burden chapters. The outer portions of the chiastic structure are those attitudes that are most blatantly rebellious and sinful, and those that feign devotion for prideful and selfish reasons. More inward in the structure we find Syria and Egypt, whom Isaiah warns should not be trusted and will cause Israel frustration. It is also here that Isaiah emphasizes the possibility of redemption once these nations have been made humble. Finally at the center of the chiasm we find the dualistic prophecy related to the “land shadowing with wings,” emphasizing the message that redemption is available through service to the Lord.

CONCLUSION

The message or formula of these chapters taken together is quite instructive. Each of these nations to which burden prophecies are directed can be viewed as types of different spiritual attitudes toward God—attitudes which cause the enmity toward and separation from God that the ancient pagan nations Isaiah refers to embodied. Such prideful and selfish attitudes as Isaiah associates with the neighboring nations of Israel and Judah can only lead to captivity, destruction and sorrow. But the Lord does allow for the redemption of His people on condition of their humility and service to him. Those who strip themselves of pride and return to the Lord will be joined with His people and receive their promised blessings.

These prophecies are remarkably relevant to people in all different times, places, and circumstances. By understanding the formulas Isaiah presents relevant applications can be made to individuals, families, nations, etc. Perhaps all people have espoused each of these

same worldly attitudes to some degree at some point in their lives. The burden prophecies help those who study them to not only recognize such dangerous tendencies in themselves, but to realign themselves with the will of the Lord. Perhaps because of this powerful application and influence the Lord proclaimed, “Great are the words of Isaiah. For surely he spake as touching *all things* concerning my people” (3 Nephi 23: 1-2, emphasis added). The burden prophecies, like the rest of the writings of Isaiah, have amazing power to inspire readers and help them to be restored unto God.

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