

## LDS Perspectives Podcast

### Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer

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*This is not a verbatim transcript.  
Some wording and grammar has been modified for clarity.*

**Laura Hales:** Hello, my name is Laura Hales. I'm here today with Joe Spencer, and I am hosting a podcast where we're going to talk about Isaiah in the Book of Mormon — something that most of us like to skip over. Joe, can you tell us a little bit about yourself.

**Joe Spencer:** Sure, I currently am teaching at Brigham Young University in the Department of Ancient Scripture. My training is in philosophy, so I have a PhD from the University of New Mexico in philosophy. I work on the Book of Mormon a great deal, especially Isaiah and covenantal theology, and then I do a lot of work in philosophy as well.

**Laura Hales:** Okay, tell us what covenantal philosophy is.

**Joe Spencer:** Covenantal theology?

**Laura Hales:** It's theology. There you go.

**Joe Spencer:** Covenantal theology. The idea here is just to look at how, running through all of scripture — but primarily I look at Isaiah, the Book of Mormon, the apostle Paul — there is this emphasis on a covenant that was made with Abraham and his descendants, and so on, that governs the way God works with human beings through history. Covenantal theology is looking at various aspects of how various people understood it. Of course, Genesis doesn't have the same understanding of it that Isaiah does, and Paul again has a new understanding. The Book of Mormon has something else to say. The Doctrine and Covenants goes in another direction still. The idea is to look at these various texts and see how they're thinking about God's having bound himself to humanity.

**Laura Hales:** That's fascinating. I can't wait to see what you write through the years on this really important topic, and I think it's a topic that's really relevant as we become more open these days to God making covenants with a whole bunch of different people.

*Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer*

**Joe Spencer:** Yes, I think that's absolutely crucial.

**Laura Hales:** Okay, in preparation for this podcast, Joe sent me an article that he had written in 2009.

**Joe Spencer:** Yeah, quite a while ago.

**Laura Hales:** The first thing that stood out to me was about two years ago, I became aware of what we would call *The Isaiah Problem* involving Deutero-Isaiah, and on about page three of this article you refer to, I think it's an *Improvement Era* article written by the Sidney Sperry from BYU addressing the Isaiah problem — in 1939. I'm a little bit late to this party. Joe, as a covenant theology scholar, do you think Isaiah in the Book of Mormon is a problem?

**Joe Spencer:** Depending on how we define the word "problem," yes. If by problem we mean does this spell doom or disaster for the Book of Mormon then, "no." But where problem means something like a set of difficulties that need to be worked through and sorted out, then, yeah, it's a problem. By far the majority consensus today among Isaiah scholars is that major portions of Isaiah were written a good deal later than they should have been to end up in the Book of Mormon. Even if we were to decide that they're wrong, we have to engage with the arguments of those Isaiah scholars. It is a problem, though I'm not convinced it means that the Book of Mormon is in any way false or unhistorical.

**Laura Hales:** You've written that in the past scholars have taken a misguided approach to why Isaiah is in the Book of Mormon. Could you briefly go over some of those approaches that you disagree with?

**Joe Spencer:** Well, for one, there's the sort of critical approach that you can find in whether it is anti-Mormon literature or critical literature that will say something like, "Well, Isaiah's in the Book of Mormon because Joseph Smith is concocting this thing out of his head and when he gets bored or runs out of ideas, he just starts quoting Isaiah to make up for lost time" or something, right? Or to give himself some time in order to come up with something else. That doesn't make a lot of sense when you actually look at how carefully integrated Isaiah is into the Book of Mormon. I'm also skeptical about the approach that just says something like, "Well, Nephi was just kind of into Isaiah. He kind of quotes from Isaiah, but this isn't the really important stuff." We have two different approaches that I think

## *Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer*

are problematic. One that says Joseph just brings this in, and then the other where it's kind of incidental. It's not really that important to what the Book of Mormon is doing.

**Laura Hales:** The way I've heard it is Nephi was on a desert island and this was the only book he had. He had the Pentateuch, he had a book maybe by Zenos and Isaiah, and he took to Isaiah. Is that what you're referring to?

**Joe Spencer:** Yeah, that sort of idea. Just sort of what else does he do? He has a civilization of forty-five people, or something like this, and one book, yeah. But no, I think he's doing something much more careful and much more theologically interesting.

**Laura Hales:** You also have an issue with using Isaiah in the Book of Mormon to prove, or disprove, historicity. Is that correct?

**Joe Spencer:** Yeah, in many ways I'm just not interested in the question. In part because my training is as a philosopher not as a historian, so I don't know that I've fully prepared myself to make good, hard hitting arguments one way or the other. I have to leave that to specialists. But also, my worry is that when we focus on just trying to decide what Isaiah's presence in the Book of Mormon says about the book's historicity, we miss the richness, the theological depth of the claims the Book of Mormon is making with Isaiah.

**Laura Hales:** True confession time. I have tended to say in the past, and we've done it in our family scripture reading — we've called those the sticky pages at the end of second Nephi where we get to about 2 Nephi 8, and they start to stick together and then also, they flip to Mosiah. It's a really great thing. Let's talk about why, in your words, Isaiah is not only incidental to the historicity question but crucial to understanding the Book of Mormon because it is the thesis of what you write.

**Joe Spencer:** Yes, it's central for a couple of reasons. One is that if you, for the moment, just ignore everything after Nephi. Just looking at Nephi's writings. It is clear from structural things he does like the way he organizes his materials that the whole of his record is about Isaiah. Of course, 2 Nephi, I think that's relatively clear. But already in 1 Nephi, he tells you that the stuff at the core of 2 Nephi has his most important things. The plain and the precious, and then even in 1 Nephi, much earlier than 2 Nephi where we tend to trip up, you've got Nephi quoting from Isaiah.

## *Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer*

You've got him giving visions and then trying to explain them by using Isaiah. Throughout Nephi's record, Isaiah is the key. I can say a lot more about that but it really is, I think, central to Nephi's project. It does seem to disappear in Mosiah, and Alma, and Helaman. But I think the Book of Mormon has an account of why that happens, and it's not necessarily the happiest story. What's really telling is that when Jesus shows up in 3 Nephi, he says, "Get Isaiah back up. It's time to go back to what Nephi was doing."

There's this kind of restoration or reinvigoration of Nephi's interest in Isaiah, and that's, I think, suggestive that it opens that way and that at its climax, we have Christ himself saying, "Here's the key."

**Laura Hales:**

In your writing, you touched on, I think, some questions people have had and not really had satisfying answers for. When I read your take on why Isaiah's in the Book of Mormon, you discuss Isaiah being there for narrative reasons. This is a well thought out book. He's not just sitting down, "Okay, this is first draft." I need to think about what I write because once I put it on these plates I can't erase it very well. I can't crunch it up and throw it in a ball. He is designing the words very carefully, and you talk about three narrative hinges in the Book of Mormon. Yes, we primarily consider Isaiah being in 2 Nephi, and then just kind of gloss over other parts, and you're telling us they're crucial to the whole story of the civilization. At least, in the way they view their religion. Can you go over the three narrative hinges that you found with Isaiah in the Book of Mormon?

**Joe Spencer:**

Sure, the first one is just Nephi, and that's relatively obvious, right? He's obsessed with Isaiah. He has a lot of things to say about it. For the moment maybe, that's enough just there. Obviously, Isaiah is central to the project Nephi's working on. The second narrative hinge is the one we, I think, easily miss, and that's in Mosiah with the prophet Abinadi. We're well familiar with the general story, right? He's prophesying at the time of Noah, people aren't terribly happy with what he's saying, so he ends up accused in a kind of trial setting. But Noah's priests present him with a passage from Isaiah and say, "Interpret this passage. What does this mean?" And it seems relatively clear from the context that they understand the passage to justify their power. They're using it to say, "Oh, we are the people who Isaiah spoke about who have rebuilt Jerusalem." Meaning the land of Nephi, and who have allowed the Lord's arm to be made bare in the eyes of all the nations, i.e. we've won battles against the Lamanites,

*Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer*

etc. They see Isaiah saying, “This regime is the right one,” and so on. Abinadi is forced to interpret this text in a way that is not going to justify corrupt power, and so he introduces a totally non-Nephi-like interpretation of Isaiah.

For Nephi, it’s all about the Abrahamic covenant and the history of Israel. Abinadi reads Isaiah, and it’s all about the coming of Jesus Christ. He quotes from Isaiah 53 about the suffering servant. He quotes other bits from Isaiah 52 and develops a Christological interpretation of Isaiah. It seems that this is a narrative hinge. Because suddenly Isaiah, after this, more or less disappears from the Book of Mormon. You can see the Nephite’s going, “Okay, if Abinadi is right and Isaiah is really just about Jesus, can we just talk about Jesus?” [That’s a good thing] to do, right? And so for generations, and for one hundred years of the Book of Mormon, there’s no talk of Isaiah, really, at all. The third narrative hinge comes when Christ shows up, and he says, “Let’s go back to what Nephi’s doing.”

That, I think, we’re relatively familiar with because we like to quote Jesus saying, “Great are the words of Isaiah, a commandment I give you. Read these things diligently.” And so on. So, we know Jesus like’s Isaiah, but we don’t tend to look at what he has to say about him. But what’s really striking is not only does he go back to reading Isaiah in a Nephi-like way. It’s about the history of Israel. It’s about the covenant. But also he uses the very passage that Noah’s priests presented to Abinadi, and he interprets it in terms of the covenant and the history of Israel rather than in terms of the coming of Jesus. We have Christ himself saying, “Yeah, maybe that’s about me in a certain way. Really, here’s how I want to read it.” There we have a kind of hinge that turns us back to Nephi. If we see the whole of the Book of Mormon that way, then we can see a kind of strong initial emphasis on Isaiah, historical reasons that there was a shift away from it for a time, and then a kind of restoration that refocuses the Book of Mormon intensely on the question.

**Laura Hales:** It’s not only quoting Isaiah, and keeping Isaiah prominent in their discourse, it’s what Isaiah is saying about the nature of God and how to baptize.

**Joe Spencer:** Yeah, it’s that, and I’d say even a good deal further. There’s the sort of double question that Abinadi, and then Jesus, both address about the nature of God, the nature of the Godhead. Then Abinadi, of course, has

## *Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer*

these things to say in Mosiah 15 that we're all very confused by about the Father in the Son and in 35:11, in connection with his return to Isaiah. Christ clarifies the nature of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost apparently because debates had risen in the wake of Abinadi's talk.

He also addresses the question of baptism. Abinadi inspires Alma who launches a baptismal tradition, and Christ addresses that as well in 3 Nephi and sets up a new baptismal regime. But what you find in Isaiah goes, I think, far beyond even those two questions. Work I've done more recently than this article has, I think, helped me to see that what's even more central here is just the identity of the people of God, the role the covenant plays in history, and this is what interests the Book of Mormon as a whole. Nephi and Christ in particular.

**Laura Hales:** Okay, now I'm going to take each of these narrative hinges, and I'm going to bring out a point that was interesting to me. When I am reading 2 Nephi, and it's talking about covenantal history. At that point, I feel like this doesn't really apply to my life, and there is a line in this article where you say that Nephi misappropriates the term *likening*, and I'd like you to elaborate on that for a little bit. Because I think that scripture where it says, "We should liken all scripture unto us," and then we go to those and we're like, "I'm seeing nothing here." Why do you think it's misappropriated?

**Joe Spencer:** We often take Nephi to mean something just like, "Yeah, I should apply this to my everyday life." But it's pretty clear in context that Nephi means something very specific by *likening*. You can find this the clearest in 1 Nephi 19. That's a passage we like to quote. You also find it in 2 Nephi 6; you find it in 2 Nephi 11. Various places Nephi and Jacob used this term *likening*, and they seem to mean the following. It means to recognize the original historical meaning of the text of Isaiah, and then to find in it a kind of pattern for God's working with human beings or with the covenant people in particular, and then to see how that covenant pattern applies again and again in history.

Rather than taking a text and saying, "How does this give me an understanding of my own peculiar life?" Nephi seems to say something like, "*In this we find the way God deals with peoples.*" And then sets a pattern that repeats again and again. The thing that Nephi likens to Isaiah most consistently is the stuff he's seen in vision, rather than his own particular life. He doesn't want to say, "Oh, how do I make sense of our

*Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer*

trek across the wilderness? or across the ocean? Oh, Isaiah can help me see that.”

He says, *“I’ve seen in vision this whole history of the relationship between the remnants of Israel, and the new world, and the gentiles from Europe, and the rise of Christianity. How can Isaiah make sense of that?”* And that’s what he means by likening.

**Laura Hales:** Then we move to Abinadi who’s before Noah’s priest. I was fascinated that Noah’s priests were so familiar with the words of Isaiah. Here’s a group that left Zarahemla. I guess we can do some speculation if they had, maybe, a paper copy of the brass plates. Likely they didn’t have it memorized. Do you have any guesses on how they were so familiar with the words of Isaiah?

**Joe Spencer:** There seem to have been copies in some sense because of Abinadi, also he knows Exodus well enough to quote the Ten Commandments at length. It would seem that there is some availability of texts. Even if we were to play that card, I think there’s enough evidence here to suggest that this kind of interpretation of this Isaiah text has been going on for long enough in this colony of Zeniff already. We may not really have an indication the priests know Isaiah that well. It may just be that this proof text has been floating around and has become so ideologically dominant that they know it even if they don’t have the text ready at hand.

**Laura Hales:** They could have had it from oral history, which was prevalent in the Old World at that time for passing down doctrine. Why do you think Abinadi, who we see as a great man of God, made such a huge departure in his preaching to Noah from Nephi?

**Joe Spencer:** It’s a great question. I’m convinced that Mormon wants us to see it as something God does through Abinadi, rather than sort of like Abinadi comes along and we go off in this funny direction.

**Laura Hales:** He’s not going rogue.

**Joe Spencer:** Right. I don’t think he’s going rogue. I think Abinadi is presented in the text with a situation that’s almost impossible. Here’s this text, and they can say, “Look, we’re likening. Here’s the pattern, the covenant pattern, you find. Here it is being lived out in our own circumstances. We’re just doing what Nephi told us.” And if Abinadi were to say, “Well, Nephi’s

*Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer*

wrong. This is not going to go well.” If he were just to say, “Well, no. I think maybe it means these other nuances.” Then the argument would never get anywhere. If he just says, “Totally new interpretive regime. Here we go.” Then we can get somewhere, and I see it as divinely deliberate. The other thing here that I think is really interesting and important is that you remember this moment in the Abinadi story where they go to lay their hands on him and his face is shining, and the text explicitly connects this to Moses on the mountain. We often go, “Oh well, he’s been reading the Ten Commandments. He’s like Moses.” That’s possible but another way we could interpret this is if you look at the moment in the Moses story in Exodus where Moses’s face shines. It’s when he comes down after the second time of receiving the law, right?

He’s come down with the law the first time, and he smashes it because of the idol worship. He goes back up and receives a new law, and it’s when he comes down with a new law, a lower law, as Latter-day Saints interpreted it, that his face is shining. I wonder if maybe Mormon is making an allusion deliberately in saying, “Abinadi is giving you, Isaiah, in a new way, a kind of lower law that people can handle for a time. Focus them on Jesus. Let’s get these people to survive until Jesus comes, and then they’ll be ready for something more like the fullness of Isaiah.”

**Laura Hales:** Now didn’t Matthew do the same thing when he was talking about Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration? He alluded to the burning bush. Whenever there’s a new law, I guess, this would be likening. That glow on Abinadi would say, “Okay, here’s a new law because you can’t live the old one.”

**Joe Spencer:** Yeah, I think something like that except that with Abinadi, it’s almost the inverse of what we get with Matthew, right? Here the new law is the lower law.

**Laura Hales:** But instead of a greater law, we have the lower law. Just like Moses received a lower law.

**Joe Spencer:** But then the idea is when Christ comes, he’ll bring a higher law as he does in Matthew.

**Laura Hales:** And so when Christ comes what exactly does he change that Nephite culture has been doing for 200 years?

*Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer*

**Joe Spencer:** He refocuses Isaiah on the covenant and on Israel's history, and especially on the future of Israel's history. The remnants of Israel, the New World, Lamanite's to survive into the present, and the role they have in relation to gentile Christianity brought from Europe. He refocuses Isaiah in a likening way on that whole story and says we can find, in Isaiah, a clear pattern for understanding what's at stake in that.

**Laura Hales:** He does clarify that there's a Father and a Son and a Holy Ghost, and he actually changes the way they do baptisms in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, correct?

**Joe Spencer:** Yeah, and he ties all of that into his interpretation of Isaiah in a really interesting way. He quotes this passage that the priests present to Abinadi, but he quotes it twice, and the first time he quotes it, it stands exactly as you find it in a King James Bible, "The Lord, the arm of the Lord is made bearable of law." He quotes it in chapter 2 later, and he changes the words, and here, it's clear this is not supposed to be like the original wording because he's just quoted it the way it stands in the Bible, and the second time he replaces instances of the Lord with the Father, and then he follows his quotation with, "And the Father, and the Son are one." He clearly is tying this vision of the Godhead that he's introducing to his interpretation of Isaiah and wants to distinguish between the role of the Father and the role of the Son and the unfolding of covenantal history.

**Laura Hales:** And then you go back to 1 Nephi.

**Joe Spencer:** Good.

**Laura Hales:** Nephi quotes from what we would consider First Isaiah and Second Isaiah, which is Deutero-Isaiah. You give a reason for why he goes to both of those sections even though we think Second Isaiah was written after Nephi's family left Jerusalem.

**Joe Spencer:** Yeah. What people divide the text of Isaiah up into is First Isaiah, which is 1 through 39, Second Isaiah, which is Isaiah 40 through 55, and Third Isaiah, which is Isaiah 56 through 66. It's interesting that Third Isaiah, more or less, doesn't show up in the Book of Mormon at all. But Nephi is interested in First Isaiah and Second Isaiah. When he quotes from Second Isaiah, what he seems to be interested in is this prophetic pattern is maybe the best way to put it. This prophetic idea that Isaiah has, that Israel goes into exile, leaves the Holy Land to find itself among Gentiles. When God

## *Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer*

redeems Israel, the Gentiles have a chance to learn of Israel's true God, and as a result, have an opportunity to join in the work of redeeming Israel and become a part of the covenant itself. That's what Nephi seems to find in Second Isaiah, and he sees that as not only what happens in, say, the exile in Babylon but as what's going to happen with the remnant of Israel in the New World.

Gentile Christians will come to the New World and when God redeems the remnant of Israel, the descendants of Lehi, then Gentile Christians will have a chance to see the fullness of the Abrahamic covenant at work and they'll transform Christianity in the right direction. What we would call the Restoration. What he sees in First Isaiah seems to be slightly different. There he seems to see some prophecies of the Messiah, but primarily he seems to see a story about how the remnant is created in the first place. The devastations and destructions that come on Israel for failing to understand their covenant obligation, and the result, being, that they are winnowed down to a remnant that will be prepared to receive the full picture. Here we get into some complications. I don't know how much we want to go into this, but many interpreters of Isaiah today see a link between First and Second Isaiah and that First Isaiah has an emphasis on a sealed book.

Israel is not prepared, they're rebellious, and so they're going to go through this history of destruction and winnowing down to a remnant. But Isaiah has all these prophecies about that, and he's forced to seal them all up for a later generation that will be ready to receive the ... The remnant is that generation that will later be able to read the book.

**Laura Hales:**

Okay, now your discussion on this fascinated me. I turned to the Isaiah chapter you were talking about because I hadn't heard of a "sealed book" in Isaiah before or that Isaiah was having trouble with his people. They weren't being righteous, or Isaiah, or the redactors, or the team of scribes — whatever — that wrote First Isaiah. So, he sealed up what he had. That is not a typical LDS interpretation. So, I went to my LDS scriptures, and I opened it up to read it, just to verify, and in the head note the first word was *Nephites*, and it was almost jarring. I'm like, "Whoa, why are there Nephites in the Old Testament?" I think this is a good place to talk about the difference between scripture and head notes, I think, and you could take a stab, or I could take a stab. But I don't want to say anything about LDS scriptures because that's what I read. Those head notes represented

*Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer*

the best scholarship we had in the '70s, which isn't to mean scholarship has stopped, right, since that time. What would you like to add?

**Joe Spencer:** I can understand where the chapter heading is coming from if you go to Isaiah 29 in the Bible, right? In the LDS edition of the Bible. Because Nephi likens Isaiah 29 to that history, and so it doesn't make ... It's not surprising to see a Latter-day Saint go, "Oh, okay. Nephi sees that this is the meaning of Isaiah." But if we see what I mean by *likening*, then we can go, "Okay, Isaiah 29 has its own story to tell about what Isaiah goes through and why he seals up his prophecies." Of course Nephi sees in it a pattern that he can liken to the history he seen in vision. I don't think it's surprising to see the way the heading is written, but I think it's important for us to recognize that that's not, probably, what Isaiah himself had in mind. It's what Nephi did with Isaiah.

**Laura Hales:** I think the idea that the Book of Mormon had a portion sealed may have led to this idea that this is the sealing of a book that was referred to.

**Joe Spencer:** I think it's important for us to, and this goes for all of the passages in Isaiah that show up in the Book of Mormon. It's important for us to read them in Isaiah's context, and history, and setting and then recognize the Book of Mormon is tampering in a good way — in a theologically productive way with Isaiah — and the same way that we do today, right? We love to cite Amos 3:7 and say, "Oh, look at how this tells us about the pattern of prophets." And Amos would go, "Hang on. Whoa. I was doing something a little different in my context and so forth." You're totally free to use it that way, and I think we're inspired to do so, but it's not the only meaning of Amos nor is it what Amos himself would have understood.

**Laura Hales:** And it's great when we take this scripture in context and see, initially, what it meant then go on from there. But that has to come first.

**Joe Spencer:** Yeah, I think we are maybe at a unique time in the history of the church where it's easier for us to be responsible about that than it has been in the past. I hope we do just that as a people and get more responsible about that. We're totally free to say there's a Mormon interpretation of this biblical text, but we'll do a lot better in conversing with other religions, and so on, if we can say this is a Mormon interpretation. But we can see how there are other interpretations, and that they're interesting and instructive as well.

*Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer*

**Laura Hales:** And maybe they can add depth to our interpretation.

**Joe Spencer:** And allow ... Exactly, yeah. One that will allow us to add depth to ours, and two, it'll allow our interpretation, our traditional interpretations, to give depth to other people's interpretations. Whereas if we just say this is the meaning of the text, we close off the conversation, and people aren't interested in learning from our readings.

**Laura Hales:** That's never fun when we're like that: "I'm right, and I don't want to hear what you have to say." Okay, you recently had a book release. It's called *The Vision of All: Twenty-Five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi's Record*. Can you tell us a little bit, in just a few minutes, what is in this book?

**Joe Spencer:** Sure. Yeah, so it continues the project I've been working on for years. It's closely related to my other books. I began working on Isaiah and the Book of Mormon in *An Other Testament*, which was republished recently by the Maxwell Institute, and then I deal with Isaiah but mostly with Paul and the Doctrine and Covenants on the same themes in my book *For Zion*. What I've done in this book, in *The Vision of All*, is I've tried to take the sorts of things that I've been working on in these other books and work them out in detail and at length in a totally accessible, non-scholarly way. *An Other Testament* is borderline unreadable because it's theologically very heavy, and it's very textually involved with scores of footnotes per chapter, etc. Here what I try to do is just say, if I were to give a twenty-five lecture series on what Nephi's doing with Isaiah, how would I do it? And I wrote it in the chatty way I am in my classroom. Just trying to riddle out Isaiah's role in Nephi's record. There are no footnotes. There's a small bibliography in the back just so people can find books I mention along the way.

But there's no apparatus at all. Very well as non-scholarly ... Well, as non-scholarly as I can muster while trying to sort out Isaiah and Nephi. But I've tried to write it for the average Latter-day Saint, and it just works from one end to the other. What is Nephi's record? What are his overarching purposes? What does he see in vision in light of all of that? What is he doing with Isaiah? Can we go sort of chapter by chapter? What are the basic themes here? What are strategies for reading? I hope I've brought Isaiah both down to earth while also keeping him complex. The way he should be instead of making him easier or ... I've tried to demystify without simplifying if, maybe, that's a way to put it.

*Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer*

**Laura Hales:** And maybe give us a little bravery to read those chapters instead of having sticky pages.

**Joe Spencer:** I think that's right. What's needed is bravery. That's a good way to put it. Isaiah's tough and people get excited. A New Year's resolution: I'm going to read Isaiah this year, right? And I'm going to get serious about this in two chapters in ...

**Laura Hales:** And by the way, it's never been my New Year's resolution.

**Joe Spencer:** Good. But yeah, I think people tend to start reading Isaiah, and they get a couple of chapters in, and they just throw up their hands and say, "What do you do with a cow and sheep? What does this even mean?" But I try to give enough resources in there to say, "Look, here's how to find a good commentary." So that when you come across a passage where you can just go, "No idea." Here's how to find some answers. Here are what translations you might look at as alternatives to the King James to help you sort of get oriented. Here's how to understand what Nephi's doing so you don't assume that everything Nephi tells you about Isaiah gives you all the information you need. Yeah, we need some bravery, but we also need some tools.

**Laura Hales:** Oh, absolutely. When you start a long trek across the plains, the last thing you want to do is to not have flour in your cart and why reinvent the wheel? If someone's going to help you, tap into that resource.

**Joe Spencer:** Yeah, and there's maybe an aspect of bravery that's important there. It's easy for us as Latter-day Saints to be distrusting toward biblical scholarship. But we have certain faith commitments that are going to make us say, "Alright Second Isaiah was probably written earlier or whatever." But these people have worked on this text for 2000 years. They've done a lot more Hebrew study than we have collectively. They know a lot more about ancient world history, and so on, than we do collectively. We have a lot to learn, but it takes a bit of bravery to read biblical scholarship and learn from it.

**Laura Hales:** Is this way out there? I look at the Old Testament, and I think this is Jewish scripture. I should pay attention to how they interpret it.

**Joe Spencer:** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, and Nephi himself emphasizes the importance of understanding the manner of prophesying among the Jews and so on.

*Episode 8: What is Isaiah Doing in the Book of Mormon? with Joseph M. Spencer*

He says you should know something about Jewish history, Jewish culture, and Jewish geography. We should pay as much attention as possible. It gets complicated with Isaiah, in particular, because there's a very long history of Protestant scriptural theology and acts of Jesus, and it's a lot easier to find Protestants talking about Isaiah than it is to find Jews talking about Isaiah. But there is good Jewish scholarship about Isaiah that should be consulted, I think.

**Laura Hales:** Now, in conclusion, just in five sentences or less.

**Joe Spencer:** We'll see.

**Laura Hales:** Or more. What would you like to tell members of the church about Isaiah and Nephi? What do you think would be most valuable for them at this point?

**Joe Spencer:** I guess I would say, one, we can't get around it. We absolutely can't get around it. We have to read Isaiah and read him carefully. If we miss it, we're missing the Book of Mormon. The title page itself says that the Book of Mormon was written to the remnant of Israel to show what great things the Lord has done for their fathers, and also to the convincing of Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ. Its primary purpose is to focus on the Abrahamic covenant and the way the Book of Mormon makes sense of the Abrahamic covenant is through Isaiah. If we're serious about that book, we've got to get serious about Isaiah.

**Laura Hales:** Thanks, Joe. I appreciate you visiting with us today.

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