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## Nephi's Keys to Understanding Isaiah (2 Nephi 25:1-8)

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## Nephi's Keys to Understanding Isaiah (2 Nephi 25:1–8)

Donald W. Parry

*Unlocking Isaiah's prophecies requires a knowledge of their literary and geographical settings, being in tune with the Spirit, and acknowledging in hindsight their fulfillment.*



After Nephi recorded Isaiah chapters 2–14 (see 2 Nephi 12–24) on the plates, he authored eight verses, 2 Nephi 25:1–8, that pertain directly to the large Isaiah quotation. The verses make up a significant literary unit and serve as a transitional link between the Isaianic quotation and the remainder of 2 Nephi 25. In these eight verses, Nephi provides keys to understanding Isaiah's words, because, as Nephi explains and as students of Isaiah's writings know, "Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many . . . people to understand" (2 Nephi 25:1). This chapter briefly examines each of the following five keys given in 2 Nephi 25:

1. Understand the "manner of prophesying among the Jews" (verse 1).
2. Do not do "works of darkness" or "doings of abominations" (verse 2).
3. Be filled with the spirit of prophecy (verse 4).
4. Be familiar with the regions around Jerusalem (verse 6).
5. Live during the days that the prophecies of Isaiah are fulfilled (verse 7).

Let us briefly examine each of these five keys.

## **1. Understand How the Jews Prophesied (see 2 Nephi 25:1)**

Nephi explains, “Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of my people to understand; for they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews” (2 Nephi 25:1). The concept of understanding the “manner of prophesying among the Jews” was of sufficient import that Nephi used it as a theme throughout 2 Nephi 25:1–8. He includes the expressions “the manner of the Jews” (verse 2), “the things of the Jews” (verse 5), “the things of the prophets” (verse 5), “the things which were spoken unto the Jews” (verse 5), “the manner of the things of the Jews” (verse 5), and “the manner of the Jews” (verse 6). Joining all of these statements together into a composite statement creates the following summary: Isaiah spake many things that are hard for many people to understand because they do not know concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews, the things of the prophets, or the things of the Jews.

What are the “things of the prophets”? Or, what is the “manner of prophesying among the Jews”? Exactly what Nephi had in mind with these statements is unclear, but perhaps he was referring to several literary devices or figures—symbolic language, poetic parallelism, and prophetic speech forms—that composed the prophetic approach in that period.

### **Symbolism**

One prominent literary device connected to the manner of prophesying among the Jews deals with symbols and symbolic language. “Symbols are the timeless and universal language in which God, in his wisdom, has chosen to teach his gospel and bear witness of his Son. They are the

language of the scriptures, the language of revelation, the language of the Spirit, the language of faith. . . . They are a means whereby we enrich, deepen, and enhance understanding and expression. They enable us to give visual and conceptual form to ideas and feelings that may otherwise defy the power of words.”<sup>1</sup> Symbols “gain richness in their variety of meanings and purposes, which range from revealing to concealing great gospel truths.”<sup>2</sup> For these reasons, Isaiah and most of the prophets used symbols throughout their poetic writings, symbols whose meanings elude many readers.

Symbolism is an integral part of the Isaianic text. Isaiah drew upon his familial, social, cultural, religious, and political backgrounds for scores of different metaphors. He used common aspects of everyday life—geography, plants, animals, insects, rocks, minerals, atmospheric conditions, heavenly bodies and objects, famous persons, dress, common occupations, ecclesiastical offices, social callings, human anatomy, architecture, numbers, colors, various foods, and sacral and common actions—as symbols.

Isaianic symbols may be classified into twenty-one major categories. These are listed below with a sampling of symbols from Isaiah found in these categories.

- Persons—Abraham, Sarah, Jesse, David, Cyrus
- Actions—
  - (a) Sacral actions: anointings, sacrifices, ordinations, spreading forth the hands
  - (b) Common actions: drinking, eating, falling down, fornicating, shaving the hair, singing, sitting, childbirth
- Human Anatomy—arms, heart, eyes, face, beard, belly, blood, bones, cheeks, ears, feet, fingers
- Animals—ass, bear, beast, bird, bittern, bullock, calf, camel, cattle, crane

- Objects—
  - (a) Sacred objects: incense, drink offering, temple, altar, burnt offering
  - (b) Common objects: ax, bed, bill of divorcement, book, chains, chariots, cup, idol
- Ecclesiastical Offices—prophet, priest
- Occupations—carpenter, creditor, fisherman, harvestman, king, officer, seller, servant
- Places—Assyria, Babylon, Sodom, Gomorrah, Egypt, Edom, Ariel, Jerusalem, Tarshish
- Plants—fig tree, cedar tree, flower, grass, groves, leaf, oak tree, olive tree, orchard, root, seed
- Elements/Rocks/Minerals—ashes, tin, iron, clay, clods, gold, light, rock, silver, dirt
- Foods—bread, barley, berries, butter, corn, fruit, grapes, honey, wine, milk, wheat
- Numbers—one, thousand
- Celestial Orbs/Objects—clouds, constellations, heaven, sun, moon, stars
- Time—day, daytime, night, noonday, winter, summer
- Colors—red, white, crimson, scarlet
- Atmospheric Conditions—storm, earthquake, flood, hail, tempest, wind, whirlwind
- Social Status—bridegroom, brother, children, daughter, father, firstborn, handmaid, slave, princess, queen, king
- Armor—armor, arrow, shield, sword, weapon, bow
- Geography—brook, river, cities, deep, desert, dry ground, field, highway, hill, mountain

- Names and Titles—
  - (a) Of deity: Jehovah, Wonderful, Immanuel
  - (b) Of persons: Beulah, Cyrus, Lucifer
  - (c) Of places: Edom, Israel
- Architectural items—gate, foundation, house, wall, pillar, watchtower, windows, bulwarks

In order to understand the writings of Isaiah, one must first become familiar with the symbolism, parallelistic structures, and prophetic and revelatory language Isaiah uses in his writings, which give clues to the prophet's intended meanings.<sup>3</sup>

### **Poetic Parallelism**

A second literary device that may be connected to the “manner of prophesying among the Jews” is poetic parallelism. Poetic parallelism may be defined as two short, balanced lines (phrases or sentences), with line one featuring words that are paralleled by the words of line two. Line two is a repetition, echo, or symmetrical counterpart of line one. Parallelisms rarely feature rhymes of assonance or consonance; rather, they present a harmonious construction of two expressions. Other parallel words may be synonymous or antithetical, or they may correspond in a number of other ways, including the following:

- Synonyms (or near synonyms), such as “heart–soul” and “statutes–commandments”;
- Identical words or phrases, such as “light–light” and “cry unto him–cry unto him”;
- Antonyms, such as “holy–unholy” and “poor–rich”;
- Complementaries, such as “bows–arrows” and “river–sea”;

- Different inflections of the same root, such as “to judge,” “a judge,” “judgment,” and “judgment-seat”;
- Gradations (an increase or decrease of the sense or idea), such as “the prince became king” and “forget God—sin against the Lord”;
- Superordinates, such as “breastplates—shields,” “wine—drink,” and “gold—metal”;
- Reciprocals, such as “to retire—to sleep,” “to eat—to be full,” and “to sin—pain of conscience”

Poetic parallelisms are poetic units often used in the book of Isaiah; they are found in almost every chapter. A preliminary count reveals more than one thousand parallelisms in Isaiah’s writings, indicating that Isaiah used the poetry as a major means of presenting his prophecies to the world. Poetic parallelism “can verify or confirm the interpretations of scriptural symbols.”<sup>4</sup> For example, the poetic parallel in 2 Nephi 8:24 (parallel to Isaiah 52:1: “Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem”) confirms the symbolic meaning of Zion as Jerusalem.

The following examples of parallelisms are from Isaiah 2:1–5 (parallel to 2 Nephi 12:1–5), where Isaiah prophesies concerning the mountain (temple) of the Lord. Here each parallel is arranged as a two-line unit; the underlined terms in each parallel unit correspond with one another, as do the bold terms.

Isaiah prophesied that in the last days the mountain of the Lord’s house

shall be established in the top of the **mountains**,  
and shall be exalted above the **hills**;

and all nations **shall flow** unto it.

And many people **shall go** and say,

Come ye,  
and let us go up  
to the mountain of the **Lord**,  
to the house of the **God of Jacob**;  
and he will teach us of **his ways**,  
and we will walk in **his paths**:  
for out of Zion shall go forth the **law**,  
and the **word** of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
And he shall judge among the **nations**,  
and shall rebuke many **people**:  
and they shall beat their swords into **plowshares**,  
and their spears into **pruninghooks**:  
nation shall not lift up **sword** against nation,  
neither shall they learn **war** any more.

By way of example, the following remarks explain the first parallelistic unit shown above. Many elements in the two lines of the first parallel unit correspond in one way or another. Both lines feature the verb *shall be*. The verb *established* in line one is synonymous with the verb *exalted* in line two. The prepositional phrase in line one, *in the top of*, correlates with the preposition in line two, *above*: both refer to height, elevation, or eminence. Line one presents the term *mountains*, which harmonizes with the word *hills* of line two: they are virtual synonyms, and both are preceded with the definite article *the*. In several aspects, these parallelisms possess corresponding elements; line two represents a counterpart or near mirror-image of line one. The parallel units in the book of Isaiah, when similarly examined, can be found to possess analogous features.



### Prophetic Speech Forms

A third literary device found in Isaiah's writings pertains to the so-called prophetic speech forms,<sup>5</sup> which are directly connected to the prophetic approach ("manner of prophesying" or "things of the prophets"). They belong to the world of prophets and prophecy and are well-attested in the writings of Isaiah, Hosea, Ezekiel, Helaman, Joseph Smith, and many other prophets. By definition, prophetic speech forms are brief revelatory statements that (1) are attached to speeches, prophecies, or other revelations from God; (2) frequently contain the name of God; and (3) are often located at the beginning or end of a revelation or both. Prophetic speech forms have a significant function in prophetic writings: they indicate prophetic authority and prerogative. Nonprophets may not use the forms with power, because the power attached to the forms originates from God. Nor may nonprophets use the forms with authority; any attempt to do so would be met with disaster.<sup>6</sup>

The following five prophetic speech forms are found in the book of Isaiah. The form is identified first, followed by an example or explanation or both.

*Messenger Formula*—"Thus saith the Lord." (See, for example, Isaiah 7:7.) The messenger formula, used forty-six times in the writings of Isaiah, introduces prophetic language, and so it is often located at the beginning of a revelatory unit. God, through his prophet, is the ultimate source of the formula; hence its purpose is to announce both the divine authority and the origin of the revelation.

*Proclamation Formula*—"Hearken unto me" or "Hear the word of the Lord." (See, for example, Isaiah 48:1, parallel to 1 Nephi 20:1.) The proclamation formula is frequently located at the beginning of a revelatory pronouncement. Its

primary function is to serve as a summons to hearken to God's word as it is revealed through the prophets.

*Oath Formula*—"As the Lord liveth" or "The Lord of hosts hath sworn." (See, for example, Isaiah 14:24.) This declaration, a solemn promise or oath that calls upon the existence of the Lord, is added to a revelation to accentuate it.

*Woe Oracle*—"Wo unto them that" or a similar accusation form that comprises the term "woe" one or more times in the oracle and is located within a judgment speech. (See, for example, Isaiah 5:8, 11, 20–22, parallel to 2 Nephi 15:8, 11, 20–22.) "The characteristic woe oracle consists of the accusation, the addressee, the intent of the accusation, and the promise of judgment."<sup>7</sup>

*Revelation Formula*—"The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw" (Isaiah 2:1, parallel to 2 Nephi 12:1; see also Isaiah 1:1) and "The Lord spake also unto me, again, saying" (Isaiah 8:5, 11, parallel to 2 Nephi 18:5, 11). The revelation formula consists of phrases that indicate prophetic authority and often provide the source of the revelation.

## **2. Do Not Commit Works of Darkness or Abomination (see 2 Nephi 25:2)**

"Works of darkness" and "doings of abominations" (2 Nephi 25:2) conceal the meaning of prophetic speech from the one committing evil acts. When Laman and Lemuel complained that Lehi had taught things that were "hard to be understood" (1 Nephi 15:3), Nephi asked them, "Have ye inquired of the Lord?" (1 Nephi 15:8). He then provided a formula for understanding the prophetic word, including Isaiah's teachings: "If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask [the Lord] in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping [his] commandments, surely these things shall

be known unto you” (1 Nephi 15:11). Those who are involved in works of darkness and who break the commandments never understand the revelations of God or the things of the prophets.

### 3. Have the Spirit of Prophecy (See 2 Nephi 25:4)

A third vital key to understanding the writings of Isaiah is set forth by Nephi, who taught that the “words of Isaiah . . . are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy” (2 Nephi 25:4). It is natural that the reader be required to possess the spirit of prophecy in order to understand Isaiah’s words, because the same spirit of prophecy provided or prompted the words of revelation to Isaiah; subsequently, it can provide those who diligently search Isaiah’s prophecies with the interpretation of Isaiah’s words. Nephi told his brethren that the prophecies of Isaiah “were manifest unto the prophet [Isaiah] by the voice of the Spirit; for by the Spirit are all things made known unto the prophets, which shall come upon the children of men according to the flesh” (1 Nephi 22:2).

Within scripture, the expression *spirit of prophecy* belongs almost exclusively to the Book of Mormon. It appears there more than twenty times, compared to only one occurrence in the Bible. This phrase as defined in scripture refers to the testimony of Jesus (see Revelation 19:10; see also Alma 6:8).<sup>8</sup> Joseph Smith understood this well and made frequent reference to it in his sermons.<sup>9</sup> On one occasion he explained, “No man can be a minister of Jesus Christ except he has the testimony of Jesus; and this is the spirit of prophecy. Whenever salvation has been administered, it has been by testimony.”<sup>10</sup>

Several ancient prophets have connected the spirit of prophecy to the Holy Ghost or the Spirit of God (see Alma

5:47), to truth (see Alma 5:47; 6:8; 43:2), and to the gifts of the Holy Ghost, including the gift of tongues and the gift of translation (see Alma 9:21). Modern prophets view the spirit of prophecy and the Holy Ghost as virtually equivalent. Elder Delbert Stapley stated, "The Holy Ghost is the spirit of prophecy."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, President Wilford Woodruff wrote, "It is the privilege of every man and woman in this kingdom to enjoy the spirit of prophecy, which is the Spirit of God."<sup>12</sup>

The spirit of prophecy is intimately bound to the concept of revelation; the two are frequently presented as a pair (see, for example, the Book of Mormon title page; Jacob 4:6; Alma 6:8; 9:21; 17:3). Furthermore, the expression *the spirit of revelation and prophecy* (see Alma 4:20; 8:24; see also Alma 23:6 and 3 Nephi 3:19) is a common formula in the Book of Mormon.

Individuals who possess the spirit of prophecy, or the testimony of Jesus, are, in a sense, prophets—not in terms of having the high calling of members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators, but in terms of possessing a personal, revealed testimony of Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup> If a person has the spirit of prophecy, he or she is a prophet—that is, on the same level of understanding as a prophet—and can therefore understand the writings of the prophets, such as Isaiah, who wrote by the spirit of prophecy. The fruits of the spirit of prophecy are many: besides being able to understand the writings of the prophets, one who possesses the spirit of prophecy may also have the gifts of discernment, revelation, translation of inspired scripture, and prophecy.<sup>14</sup>

The formula for receiving the spirit of prophecy is presented in Alma 17:2–3, where three key themes—diligent scriptural search, much prayer, and fasting—are set forth:

Now these sons of Mosiah . . . had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God. But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation.

#### **4. Become Familiar with the Regions around Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 25:6)**

Nephi writes, “But behold, I, Nephi, have not taught my children after the manner of the Jews; but behold, I, of myself, have dwelt at Jerusalem, wherefore I know concerning the regions round about” (2 Nephi 25:6). In the context of 2 Nephi 25:1–8, this statement indicates that diligent searchers will more readily understand the book of Isaiah if they comprehend things pertaining to the “regions round about” Jerusalem.

Isaiah’s prophecies frequently mention geographical place-names and physical features connected with the ancient Near East. There are more than 100 different geographical place-names in the book of Isaiah (see chart 1), including cities (e.g., Jerusalem, Sodom, Bozrah), lands (e.g., Egypt, Israel), regions (e.g., Bashan, Galilee, Naphtali), valleys (e.g., Achor, Rephaim), mountains (e.g., Carmel, Lebanon), and oases (e.g., Nimrim, Tema). Many place-names appear more than once: for example, Jerusalem is mentioned forty-eight times; Egypt, forty-one; Moab, twenty-one; Ethiopia, six; Samaria, eight; and Damascus, seven.

Understanding aspects of the place-names may explain the meaning behind Isaiah’s use of the name. At times, when Isaiah refers to a place-name, he makes an actual reference to that city, territory, or country; on other occasions, Isaiah

## Chart 1

### Place-Names in the Book of Isaiah

A representative list of place-names in the book of Isaiah. (Numbers in parentheses indicate how often the name appears in the book of Isaiah. The names in italics also appear in the Book of Mormon.)

Achor (1)	Dimon (2)	<i>Jerusalem</i> (48)	Perazim (1)
<i>Aiath</i> (1)	Dumah (1)	Jerusalem's (1)	Pul (1)
<i>Ammon</i> (1)	<i>Eden</i> (2)	Jesurun (1)	Ramah (1)
<i>Anathoth</i> (1)	<i>Edom</i> (2)	<i>Jordan</i> (1)	<i>Ramath</i> (1)
Ar (1)	Eglaim (1)	<i>Judah</i> (29)	Rephaim (1)
Arabia (1)	<i>Egypt</i> (41)	Kedar (4)	Rezeph (1)
Ariel (5)	<i>Elam</i> (3)	Kir (2)	<i>Samaria</i> (8)
Armenia (1)	Elealeh (2)	Kir-hareseth (1)	Seir (1)
Arnon (1)	<i>Ephraim</i> (9)	Kir-harsh (1)	Seba (1)
<i>Arpad</i> (1)	Ethiopia (6)	Lachish (2)	Sela (1)
Arphad (1)	Ethiopians (1)	<i>Laish</i> (1)	Sepharvaim
Aroer (1)	<i>Galilee</i> (1)	<i>Lebanon</i> (9)	(2)
Ashdod (2)	<i>Gallim</i> (1)	Libna (1)	Sharon (3)
<i>Assyria</i> (34)	<i>Geba</i> (1)	Lud (1)	Sheba (1)
<i>Babylon</i> (13)	<i>Gebim</i> (1)	Luhith (2)	<i>Shiloah</i> (1)
Bajith (1)	Gibeon (1)	<i>Madmenah</i> (1)	<i>Shinar</i> (1)
<i>Bashan</i> (2)	<i>Gibeah</i> (1)	Medeba (1)	Sibmah (2)
Beerelim (1)	<i>Gomorrhah</i> (3)	Medes (1)	<i>Sinim</i> (1)
Bozrah (2)	Gozan (1)	Media (1)	<i>Sodom</i> (4)
<i>Calno</i> (1)	<i>Hamath</i> (4)	<i>Michmash</i> (1)	<i>Syria</i> (7)
Canaan (1)	Hanes (1)	<i>Midian</i> (1)	<i>Syrians</i> (1)
<i>Carchemish</i> (1)	Haran (1)	<i>Migron</i> (1)	<i>Tarshish</i> (7)
Carmel (3)	Hena (1)	<i>Moab</i> (21)	Telassar (1)
Chaldea (1)	Hephzi-bah (1)	<i>Naphtali</i> (1)	Tema (1)
Chaldees (1)	Heshbon (3)	Nebo (2)	Topheth (1)
Chittim (2)	Horonaim (1)	Nimrim (1)	Tubal (1)
City of David	Idumea (2)	Nineveh (1)	Tyre (7)
(1)	<i>Israel</i> (5)	<i>Nob</i> (1)	<i>Zebulun</i> (1)
<i>Cush</i> (1)	Ivah (1)	Noph (1)	Zidon (3)
<i>Damascus</i> (7)	Jahaz (1)	<i>Oreb</i> (1)	<i>Zion</i> (43)
Dedan(im)	Javan (1)	<i>Palestina</i> (2)	Zoan (3)
Dibon (1)	Jazer (2)	<i>Pathros</i> (1)	Zoar (1)

attaches a symbolic meaning to the place-name. The following are some examples of symbolic references to place-names:

*Sodom*—(see Isaiah 3:9; 13:19, parallel to 2 Nephi 13:9; 23:19). Inhabitants of the ancient cities of Sodom (with Gomorrah) committed enormous sins (see Ezekiel 16:49–50). Besides being lazy, prideful, and neglecting the poor, Sodom’s inhabitants committed “fornication, and [went] after strange flesh” (Jude 1:7). Isaiah used Sodom as an example of a wicked city that was judged and destroyed by the power of God, never to be rebuilt, and he prophesied that other cities would be similarly destroyed by God’s power around the time of the second coming of Christ. Hence, Sodom symbolizes all wicked cities of the last days that will suffer the judgments of God.

*Assyria*—(see Isaiah 7:17–18, 20; 10:12; 11:11, 16, parallel to 2 Nephi 17:17–18, 20; 18:7; 20:12; 21:11, 16). As the scriptures indicate, Assyria represents warring nations of the last days. “The great eastern empire of Assyria of biblical days, with its appalling cruel monarchs and its seemingly invincible armies, is a type of the warring nations of the latter days who will fight against Israel. However, although they succeeded then in deporting the northern tribes of Israel from the Israelite homeland, the God of Israel will prevail against the modern Assyrian nations and they will be burned as ‘thorns and briars’ (See Isaiah 10).”<sup>15</sup>

*Jerusalem*—(see Isaiah 2:3; 3:1; 4:3–4; 5:3; 10:12, 32, parallel to 2 Nephi 12:3; 13:1; 14:3–4; 15:3; 20:12, 32). Isaiah’s titles for Jerusalem point out her sacred mission and prophetic calling as the place where the infinite atonement of Jesus Christ would take place. Isaiah calls Jerusalem “the holy city” (Isaiah 52:1), “the city of righteousness” (Isaiah 1:26), “the faithful city” (Isaiah 1:26), and “the city of the Lord” (Isaiah 60:14).

*Tarshish, ships of*—(see Isaiah 2:16, parallel to 2 Nephi 12:16; see also Isaiah 23:1). Tarshish was a famous commer-

cial port perhaps located on the Mediterranean Sea. Its exact location is presently unknown. Its ships carried riches and exotic materials of all sorts, including gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks (see 1 Kings 10:22). Ancient Tarshish and its ships symbolize the materialism and worldliness during the time of the “day of the Lord” (Isaiah 2:12), or the last days (see Isaiah 2), and Isaiah’s prophecy thus speaks of the eventual destruction of cities that traffic in worldliness.

In addition to place-names, Isaiah speaks of various physical features of the ancient Near East (see Chart 2).

In many instances, Isaiah uses these terms literally to denote a geographical item, while on other occasions he uses them symbolically to point to some deeper truth. Being aware that a place-name may have symbolic meaning aids a reader in that he or she can look for the deeper meaning intended by the prophet, applying Nephi’s other keys when appropriate.<sup>16</sup>

Chart 2		
<b>Geographical Features in Isaiah’s Prophecies</b>		
A selected list of bodies of water, places of human habitation, cardinal directions, and physical features found in Isaiah’s prophecies. (Numbers in parentheses indicate how often the word appears in the book of Isaiah. Words in italics appear in the Book of Mormon.)		
brook(s) (6)	<i>fountain(s)</i> (1)	<i>river(s)</i> (26)
<i>caves</i> (1)	<i>ground</i> (15)	<i>sea(s)</i> (29)
<i>channel(s)</i> (2)	<i>hill(s)</i> (16)	sluices (1)
<i>city/cities</i> (60)	<i>island(s)</i> (7)	<i>south</i> (3)
<i>clefts</i> (1)	<i>isle(s)</i> (12)	<i>springs</i> (8)
<i>clifts</i> (1)	<i>land(s)</i> (83)	<i>stream(s)</i> (10)
<i>country/countries</i> (7)	<i>mount/moun-</i>	<i>valley(s)</i> (13)
<i>desert(s)</i> (12)	<i>tain(s)</i> (58)	<i>villages</i> (1)
<i>east</i> (6)	<i>north</i> (5)	<i>waves</i> (2)
<i>field(s)</i> (18)	<i>place(s)</i> (54)	<i>west</i> (5)
<i>flood(s)</i> (3)	<i>ponds</i> (1)	<i>wilderness</i> (21)
<i>fords</i> (1)	<i>pool(s)</i> (8)	



## **5. Live during the Days in Which the Prophecies of Isaiah Are Fulfilled (See 2 Nephi 25:7)**

Nephi prophesies, “In the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled men shall know of a surety, at the times when they shall come to pass. . . . For I know that [Isaiah’s prophecies] shall be of great worth unto them in the last days; for in that day shall they understand them” (2 Nephi 25:7–8). Nephi specifically identifies the “last days” as the time when many of Isaiah’s prophecies will be fulfilled. Simply observing this prophet’s prophecies being fulfilled helps readers recognize and understand Isaiah’s words.

In my view, several of Isaiah’s prophecies are presently being fulfilled, at least in a partial manner. These include the invitation for Israel to repent and cleanse themselves (see Isaiah 1:16–20), the building of temples (see Isaiah 2:1–5), the lifting of the ensign to the nations for Israel’s gathering (see Isaiah 5:26–30; 11:11–16; see also Isaiah 10:20–27; 14:1–3; 49:8–26; 55:12–13), the Lord calling forth his armies (see Isaiah 13:1–5; compare D&C 105, especially verses 26 and 31), the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (see JST Isaiah 29:11–14), the welcoming of the Gentiles to the covenant (see Isaiah 56:1–8), and the restoration of Zion (see Isaiah 33:17–24; see also Isaiah 35:5–10; 54:1–3), and Israel’s flight from Babylon (see Isaiah 48:20–22). Many other prophecies are also being fulfilled, as discerning members of the church will note, particularly with the aid of Nephi’s interpretations.

### **Conclusion**

Nephi provides two keys dealing with temporal or mechanical approaches to Isaiah. These include understanding the area in and around Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 25:6) and

comprehending the “manner of prophesying among the Jews” (2 Nephi 25:1), including symbols. Nephi also sets forth two keys that are connected with spiritual things: possessing the “spirit of prophecy” (2 Nephi 25:4) and avoiding “works of darkness” (2 Nephi 25:2). Nephi’s fifth key deals with living during the days when the prophecies of Isaiah are fulfilled (see 2 Nephi 25:7).

I do not believe that anyone can fully understand Isaiah’s prophecies without taking the time and effort to examine them thoroughly, or in scriptural terms, *search*. Jesus declared, “Behold they [the words of Isaiah] are written, ye have them before you, therefore *search* them” (3 Nephi 20:11). Later, Jesus commanded: “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). Moroni set forth the imperative “*Search* the prophecies of Isaiah” (Mormon 8:23). Using the keys given by Nephi, we can search the words of Isaiah and truly come to understand them, thereby drawing closer to the Lord and gaining a fuller knowledge of the events of the last days.

## Notes

1. Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 1.
2. *Ibid.*, ix.
3. Those interested in learning more about scriptural symbolism will benefit from learning about the eight different types of symbolism, discussed in Joseph Fielding McConkie and Donald W. Parry, *A Guide to Scriptural Symbols* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), and from learning to use an exhaustive concordance of scriptural terms. See also McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism*.
4. McConkie and Parry, *A Guide to Scriptural Symbols*, 10.

5. For a study on the subject, see David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 88–100.

6. The scriptures record instances of two false prophets who attempted to use the messenger formula, discussed below, in their prophecies. Both false prophets (see Zedekiah in 1 Kings 22:11 and 2 Chronicles 18:10; and Hananiah in Jeremiah 28:10–11) were severely dealt with by God.

7. See Donald W. Parry, “‘Thus Saith the Lord’: Prophetic Language in Samuel’s Speech,” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 182. This article also contains examples of the woe oracle from the Book of Mormon.

8. President John Taylor explained, “These scriptures evidently show that the testimony of Jesus was the very principle, essence, and power of the spirit of prophecy whereby the ancient prophets were inspired” (John Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom*, comp. G. Homer Durham [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964], 120). See also JST 1 Corinthians 2:11.

9. See, for example, Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 300, 312, 314.

10. *Ibid.*, 160.

11. Delbert L. Stapley, untitled address, *Conference Report* (October 1966): 113.

12. Wilford Woodruff, *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, comp. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 61.

13. Joseph Smith presented the basic definition of a prophet:

If any person should ask me if I were a prophet, I should not deny it, as that would give me the lie; for, according to John, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy; therefore, if I profess to be a witness or teacher, and have not the spirit of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus, I must be a false witness; but if I be a true teacher and witness, I must possess the spirit of prophecy, and that constitutes a prophet. (Smith, *Teachings*, 269)

Wilford Woodruff similarly taught that Brigham Young “is a prophet, I am a prophet, you are, and anybody is a prophet who has the testimony of Jesus Christ, for that is the spirit of prophecy” (Woodruff, *Discourses*, 90).

14. See Book of Mormon title page; Jacob 1:6; Alma 12:7; 16:5–6; 25:16; 37:15; Joseph Smith–History 1:73. See also Smith, *Teachings*, 259; and Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 131.

15. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Donald W. Parry, *A Guide to Scriptural Symbols* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 18.

16. To understand the symbolic meaning of a place-name, a reader may refer to scholarly commentary, such as that given in McConkie and Parry, *A Guide to Scriptural Symbols* and McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism*.