
“LET THE METAPHORS
SPEAK TO YOU”

An LDS Commentary on Isaiah

ANN N. MADSEN

Dedicated to those who live in the time about which Isaiah prophesied

Isaiah 5

Once again, ignore the chapter break here; Isaiah 5 is a continuation of Isaiah 4.

Both the Joseph Smith Translation and the Book of Mormon add two words which show clearly that no chapter break is needed here. The two simple words begin chapter 5: “and then.”

It is possible that the beloved here is Jerusalem, although it is difficult to say for sure.

At this point the Book of Mormon becomes a great tool to aid in understanding Isaiah because Jacob 5 and Isaiah 5 both describe a vineyard, as does 2 Nephi 1–7. It is an interesting exercise in understanding these vineyard’s dying trees as we examine them from both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon texts. One question as we begin comparing the details from both texts; is the same vineyard being used as a metaphor by Zenos¹ as well as Isaiah? Zenos prefaces his telling of the allegory in Jacob 1:5–6 with the following:

For because of faith and great anxiety, it truly had been made manifest unto us concerning our people, *what things should happen unto them*. And we also had many revelations, and the spirit of much prophecy; wherefore, we knew of Christ and his kingdom, which should come.

The Jacob 5 account is much more extensive (seventy-seven verses), and it is more complicated, with more comings and goings described as they care for the trees of the vineyard. Isaiah 5, on the other hand, is completed in thirty verses and is less complicated, concerned mostly with outcomes. Each one could be called an allegory or a parable.

¹ A prophet mentioned only in the Book of Mormon by Jacob.

An allegory is defined as a short moral story where one thing is represented by another. Thus, in our two vineyard allegories the olive tree that is old and dying represents the house of Israel.² and the men of Judah are “His pleasant plant.”

Who is the owner of this troubled vineyard? The LORD, Jehovah, Christ.

Isaiah 5:2 describes a biblical vineyard in great detail.

In both texts the owner has a vineyard³ “in a very fruitful hill,” and is concerned that the tree (or trees) are beginning to decay. In each text we are informed that they represent the house of Israel and that the men of Judah his “pleasant plants.” In both texts we are asked the tender, mournful question, “What could have been done more in my vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes.” Ponder, what is the difference in this instance between wild grapes and tame, cultivated grapes? Also, compare the intensive labor in the lengthy Jacob account and the outcomes in both.

Consider these two allegories to expand your understanding of the future of the house of Israel. Are we part of these prophecies’ fulfillment?

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² For more on this, see Jacob 5:3 and Isaiah 5:7.

³ Olive groves were referred to as vineyards in ancient Biblical Hebrew texts, as well as gardens of grapes.