



Joseph M. Spencer

The Interview: In this episode of the LDS Perspectives Podcast, Laura Harris Hales discusses tips for understanding Isaiah in the Old Testament with Joseph M. Spencer, author of [*The Vision of All: Twenty-five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi's Record*](#).

The Book of Isaiah is a high-context scripture that overwhelms most readers. But because of its conspicuous presence in the Book of Mormon, it begs to be examined more closely. The Book of Mormon can inform us on how those prophets likened or interpreted Isaiah, but our study is incomplete without studying what Isaiah may have meant when it was written and in its Old Testament context. But figuring that out takes a bit of work. Spencer suggests four strategies for a serious study of Isaiah:

1. Don't rely solely on the King James Version of the Bible. It is 400 years old and contains archaic language. Consult a modern translation like the NRSV. If you want, you can even compare the verses in the KJV to the NRSV for clarity.
2. Don't stress if every verse or word doesn't make sense. Use context clues to figure out basic ideas.
3. Don't get lost in the details. Isaiah contains a lot of imagery. Not all of it is crucial to understanding its basic message.
4. Don't look for the Messiah in every passage. More likely than not Isaiah isn't talking about the Messiah but rather a messiah like King Hezekiah.

Also, keep Isaiah's big picture in mind. For one, the Isaianic writings have many meanings. Just as Book of Mormon prophets saw Isaiah differently, modern scholars promote different interpretations. It might be wise to avoid the mindset that any particular verse has one set meaning.

Isaiah is also written systematically, which helps us understand the message. The first part of the book is about the creating of a remnant and the second is about deliverance. The prophets in the first part of the book are counselled to write, but in the second half they are told to read. There are patterns to look for, and Isaiah's theme is covenantal. Israel is the chosen people of the Lord and the promises of the Abrahamic covenant will be restored in time to the remnant.

Join us for this fascinating discussion where we re-examine some popular Isaiah passages in light of their Old Testament context.

About Our Guest: Joseph M. Spencer holds a PhD in philosophy from the University of New Mexico. Currently, he is an assistant professor in the ancient scripture department at BYU. He has published extensively on Latter-day Saint scripture and theology in *BYU Studies Quarterly*, the *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture*, and the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, where he serves as editor. He is co-editor of the book series *Introductions to Mormon Thought*, which he is co-editing with Matt Bowman for the University of Illinois Press. Dr. Spencer is also associate director of the Mormon Theology Seminar.

Transcript: For a transcript of this podcast, go to [LDS Perspectives Podcast](#).

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