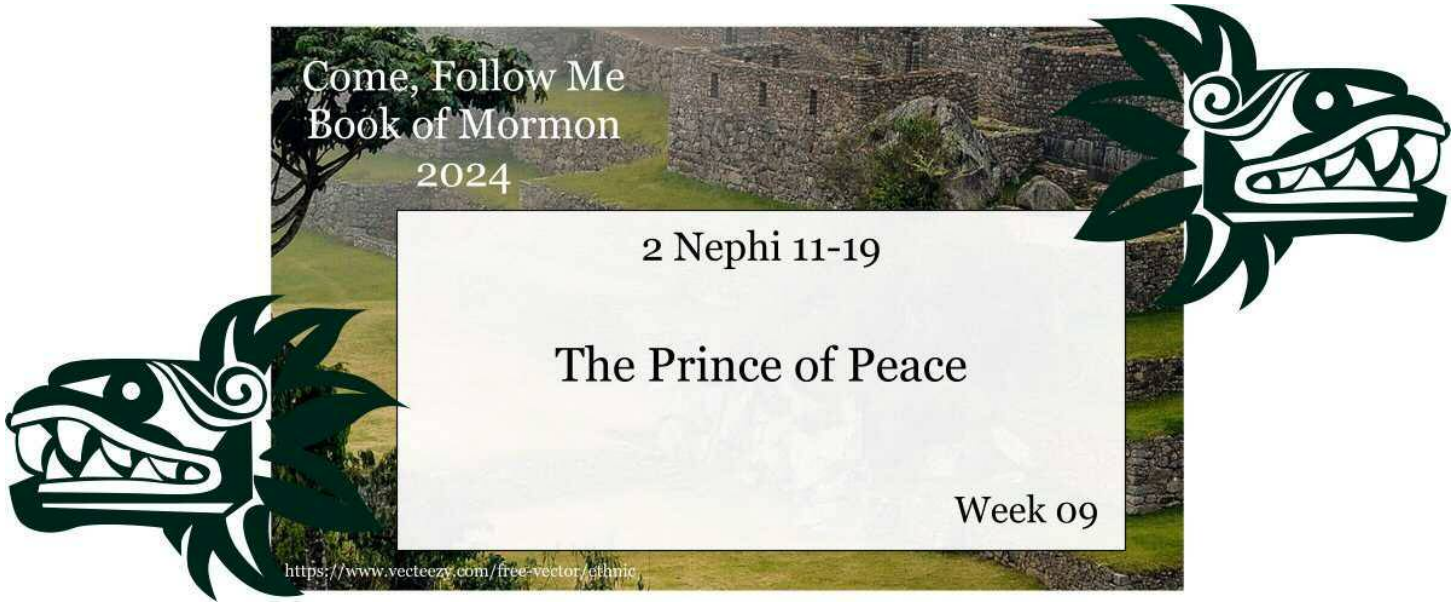

Week 09 is scheduled for study Feb. 26-March 3, 2024. Learn of Christ and his role as the Prince of Peace in any time period. The more you know the better off you will be.

Becoming comfortable with Isaiah

The manual begins this week with three ways to become more comfortable with Isaiah. Isaiah was well educated. His writings are littered with the highest forms of poetry of his generation. This writing style acts as both a deterrent for us as well as a blessing for us. As a fourth example for understanding Isaiah, you might have read Isaiah and noticed that there often appears to be the same sentiment expressed again and again, one right after the other. The only difference between them is that they are restated in a different form. This is part of the poetic style Isaiah uses in his writings. This practice can help us come to understand Isaiah little better. So if you read a statement then see that the next statement is very similar to the one before it, chances are good that Isaiah is restating his point or statement in other words. Following is an example of Isaiah's habit of repeating himself.

2 Nephi 18:14-15 talks about the first coming of Christ to Israel. These verses describe the two results of his coming.

> 14 And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

15 And many among them shall stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.

Let's look at these two verses and see the different ways Isaiah says the same thing, but in different words to help people understand him. Verse 14 starts by telling Israel that Christ is their sanctuary. A sanctuary is a place of refuge and safety. The rest of this verse and verse 15 describe what will happen to the people of Israel who don't turn to Christ in Isaiah's day or when Jesus comes in the flesh. (His analogy is actually true in any time period.)

When you walk down a path you sometimes will stumble over a stone in your path. This is what Isaiah is referring to when he says Jesus will be "for a stone of stumbling" to the people in Jerusalem. They will have difficulty dealing with this object in their path, because they don't believe he is worth their time and effort to properly deal with. His presence will cause many to hurt themselves, because they refuse to acknowledge him as the source of strength he came to earth to be. Jesus is supposed to be our rock, our strength, but to those who refuse to believe him, he becomes an impediment to their way of life. They "stumble" over him and his teachings.

A "rock of offense" can be seen as something that causes us to feel uncomfortable and resentful. This rock refers back to the rock, the person or philosophy the people will stumble over. Those who refused to believe in the teachings of Jesus took offense with him and his teachings. They became so resentful of him that eventually they could not justify him living any longer and sought to put him to death. Think of it like trying to kick the rock you just tripped over out of your path. It is an annoyance to you, as if it is the rock's fault you tripped over it.

This verse also makes reference to "both the houses of Israel." Remember that in the days of Isaiah, Israel or the Northern Kingdom had not yet been carried away by the Assyrians. The kingdom of Israel was the Northern Kingdom and Judah was the Southern Kingdom. Both kingdoms were comprised of tribes of Israel, all related to one another.

Finally, Isaiah refers to the "gin and snare." A gin and a snare are synonyms for the same thing, a small trap you set for catching birds or small mammals. They are usually caught by using a string or thin rope with a noose on a slipknot. The more they struggle, the tighter the knot becomes. Isaiah is telling the people in these two verses that if they

don't turn to the safety found in Christ, their Messiah, they will stumble, fall, be broken, caught or snared, and then will be taken. The Northern Kingdom was eventually taken by the Assyrians and carried into captivity, and Judah was taken by Babylon into captivity a hundred years later during Lehi's lifetime.

In Christ's day the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem rejected the Messiah and were scattered by the Romans to the far reaches of their empire, destroying them as a nation. Isaiah was right on the money. He used simple examples to illustrate profound truths about Israel, their behavior, and the subsequent consequences of their behavior. All of it could have been avoided had they turned to Christ, either in Isaiah's day, Lehi's day, or in Jesus's day.

Day 1

2 Nephi 11-19 - Isaiah testified of Jesus Christ.

Nephi and Isaiah are kindred spirits. Both prophets take great delight in talking about the Savior and his role in our lives. Both men spent their lives teaching their people about their Savior that was to come. They wanted the people to accept the truth of the coming of their Messiah and the blessings that come from keeping his commandments. Both men used the law of Witnesses to "prove" the truth about the coming of Jesus into mortality to save anyone who is willing to believe in him.

The law of Witnesses, the need to prove all truth by the mouth of 2 or more witnesses, was given to Adam and Eve and is honored by God in all generations of time. Both prophets referred back to previous prophets to help confirm what they taught their people about Christ. Isaiah referred back to the greatest authority of his day, Moses, while Nephi referred back to the greatest authority on Christ of his own day, which was Isaiah. In both instances their only desire was for people to believe their words about the coming of Christ and the salvation he would bring the people, the good news or gospel.

Day 2

2 Nephi 12-13; 15 - The proud and worldly will be humbled.

Pride is an interesting and terrifying thing. There is something about how we work, emotionally, socially, and mentally, that allows us to think unrealistically. For example, let's say I'm driving straight towards my desired destination. I know that any side roads will lead me away from where I say I want to go. Intellectually I know this to be true. Yet while I am driving there are places along the road that tempt me to stop and stay for a while, or perhaps I need to step off my path and head down a side street to find this extra tasty place that promises so much to me. What happens once I step off my course and head in a different direction is that the likelihood of my continuing to be distracted increases with each accepted diversion. Before long I have all but forgotten where I wanted to go in the first place, and the entertainments and pleasures of where I am make my final goal seem distant and perhaps not all that important any longer.

This is how our mind works. If God tells me that to return home to Him I have to do certain things, stay focused, and be consistent, when I choose any other path, even for a minute, I have lost my focus, am no longer consistent, and start to forget, by degrees, where it was I wanted to go, or why I wanted to go there. We are easily distracted in this life, and our memories aren't all that great. That is why we have repetition, to remind us and help us stay focused. This is what regular temple attendance does for us, and what the weekly sacrament is for, to remind us.

An interesting side note to our taking alternate routes to where we want to go is that once we choose to step off the given path to our chosen destination, it doesn't matter how far off the path we go, for neither choice is going to take us where we ultimately want to be. Yes, taking out a gun and deliberately shooting someone is worse behavior than taking a sip of beer, but can I really justify or excuse either behavior? If nothing I do once I step off the path back to God is justifiable before God then can I really say that one behavior is more appropriate than another? Both are damaging to my soul. All that is different is the degree of the damage. This is why none of us are in any position to judge another person's choices. Only Christ can determine the punishment that will be meeted out to each person for such choices that remain unrepented of in the day of judgment.

Now I am focusing on justifying that my current behavior is less damning than the behavior of my neighbor. Neither behavior will return us to God, but I have already lost sight of the fact that I shouldn't be doing even the most innocuous thing, for it still deprives me of my goal to return to God. This is why daily repentance is needed. Each

day I need to reset my sights on returning to God and leaving the world behind in my behavior. My attitudes need to stay focused on doing as Jesus would do, loving as Jesus would love, and reaching out to those around me to take them along for the journey home. It is true that we cannot be saved alone. We must bring others with us or we will still stand condemned for selfishness and fear of the arm of flesh.

The point of the chapters in today's lesson is that the wicked will one day be humbled. Christ will be the only one exalted. Isn't it interesting that humility and doing good just don't mix with choosing evil in any form? When we step off to the side of the covenant path the end result will be increased pride, entitlement, secrecy, and a resentment of any effort to get us to return to the covenant path. This is the nature of evil. It is seductive, alluring, and promises pleasures and comforts that cannot be sustained. Only God's goodness can be sustained from this life into the eternities. This is the message of the prophets to us. Return to God through obedience to Christ and the commandments he has given us. We must choose to be humble, remembering Christ's example to us, and his promises that those who keep his commandments will find eternal joy in their lives that no mortal source can begin to match.

Day 3

2 Nephi 12:2-3 - The temple is the house of the Lord.

Let's look at mountains for a moment. Israel lived in a desert with very little to recommend itself to vegetation and grass. Both vegetation and grass are needed to raise herds of sheep, goats, etc. To get enough food to sustain their animals they often had to resort to herding them up into the nearest mountain. Why? Because mountains are high. They catch the lower clouds as they pass by, causing them to drop their moisture on the nearest side of the mountain.

I lived in Hawaii for a while. We lived on a spur of the mountain that got rain literally almost every day of the year. We may have only gotten 15 minutes worth of water at 3:00 a.m. most of the time, but it could be counted on to happen. This consistent supply of water, even in small amounts, allowed us to grow an alley along one side of our house with hundreds of orchids and ferns, as well as fern trees. The water made all the difference. It didn't always do that in Hawaii. The area around La'ie, where the temple is located, used to be pretty barren. Even birds avoided it, because so little grew

there. When the temple was built the prophet promised that the birds would return to La'ie. No one could figure out how that could be possible.

Two things happened within a couple decades of the temple dedication. The first thing was the discovery of artesian wells. This gave the farmers on the windward side of the island a consistent source of water for their crops. The second thing came in the form of a government ecology project. They planted rows and rows of tall-growing trees on the mountain sides of windward O'ahu, the side that receives the ocean breezes. As it turned out, those trees at the top of the ridges grew just tall enough to catch the clouds as they rose from the ocean and tried to sail by. Because the clouds got trapped by the trees, they began to drop their rain. This increase in rain also changed the plants that would grow on that part of the island. The increase in the number of trees and other plants attracted the birds. Now the windward side of the island is like an aviary with birds everywhere. Who knew? Well, I guess the Prophet did.

The point about the Hawaii water story is that the height of mountains brings fertility that deserts can't produce. And because they were high, and away from people, the Lord would call the prophet to the top of the mountain to talk to him when He wanted to deliver a message. The tops of mountains were considered sacred places, because that is where the Lord spoke to His prophets. When we talk about the temple being the mountain of the Lord's house, we are pairing the image of sacred mountain tops with the sanctity of someone's home. In this case we are saying it is God's house, the place we go to find Him. Home carries with it an assumption of intimacy that you just don't find in other public spaces. Reread 2 Nephi 12:2-3 with these images in mind.

The temple is a place we can go for personal instruction from the Spirit. Our attendance at the temple instructs us in our personal duties to God, performs sacred ordinances that offers salvation to one of God's children, and is a place rich in the influence of the Holy Spirit. This is why attendance at the temple on a regular basis can be so beneficial in helping us find answers to our prayers, aligning our attitudes and perspectives, and in bringing us peace that is difficult to find outside those sacred walls. The temple represents all that is best about God.

Day 4

2 Nephi 12-19 - Jesus Christ will redeem His people.

I hope you have read the recommended chapters and verses in today's lesson. Did you notice that almost all of them refer to the Millennium? The promise is that God will redeem His people, but the full redemption from having to deal with a wicked world will not happen until Jesus returns and begins his millennial reign. The beginning of God's promise to redeem Israel began with the Restoration of Christ's gospel through Joseph Smith. Much work has already taken place, and much more will be done to prepare for Christ's return. But the judgment of the wicked, leaving only the righteous on the earth, will not take place until Christ's actual return and the burning of the earth. This is when the earth herself will be baptized with fire. She will be purged of all the wickedness that currently resides upon her face.

The second coming of the Savior will be a mass redemption of Israel, but in the meantime we can be redeemed on an individual basis. But this redemption, like any redemption, must be through our personal choices. We must be doing those things that can allow God to purify us, sanctify our lives, and bring us closer to being like Christ. How can we individually seek redemption?

In our ward we are encouraging the members to seek to be a little better today than they were yesterday. As part of our ward missionary plan we are asking each of us to pick a couple of things we want to get better at doing and working on it. For example, if we aren't reading scriptures every day then let's work on making scripture reading a habit. We choose the action and God provides the attendant miracles. If I want to be a better missionary, I can start by being a better minister to those for whom I have been given responsibility. Do I know the name of each person in their household? What do I know about each person? Do I even have a record of their birthday, or the anniversary date of the parents? Am I reaching out to them on their special day? How much of an effort am I making to be more a part of their life, so they believe in my sincerity when I say I want to be there for them at all times, good and bad?

To become a better missionary I must learn to become a better minister. I must learn to love more unconditionally, more readily, being more forgiving, and being less judgmental in my attitudes. I also need to learn to let people minister more freely to me and my household. They may be awkward or clumsy in their efforts, but do I show appreciation and acceptance of their effort? This is how we become redeemed as individuals and as a people. If we can't do this deliberately for ourselves now then when

Christ returns we probably won't be in that number to be redeemed, because we will not have already shown our intention and desire to become redeemable.

Personal Study

Look for patterns

I suggest you do a search on the gospelstudy.us home page. Use the word "patterns". The first seven articles that populate the screen are articles I have already written on the patterns of God's behavior. Pick one and read it.

We sometimes suffer under the false assumption that God is unpredictable and capricious. He is not. God is very predictable and solid in His behavior. Once you get an idea as to how He thinks, and how He usually behaves, you will begin to see many patterns of behavior emerge that demonstrate His consistency and His constancy. Happy hunting!

Click the link below to

print a PDF copy of the article.

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