

Rel A 304 Reading Questions for Tuesday, December 5

2 Nephi 11

Skim through 2 Nephi 12–24 (a modified quotation of Isaiah 2–14)

2 Nephi 25:1–11

Joseph M. Spencer, *The Vision of All: Twenty-five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi's Record*, Contemporary Studies in Scripture (Salt Lake City: Kofford, 2016), 239–43.

2 Nephi 25:12–19

Spencer, *Vision of All*, 243–47.

Today's reading is the first of two days we're going to spend on the book of 2 Nephi. The chapters we're covering today are a notorious crux for many a Book of Mormon reader, but hopefully with the Isaiah background you now possess, plus a little additional guidance, you'll be able to make a lot more sense of these chapters over the course of this week.

To help us understand Nephi's use of Isaiah, we need to look at how Nephi's two books are organized. When Joseph Smith dictated the translation of the Book of Mormon to his scribes, the translation included the identification of chapter breaks, with Joseph saying "chapter" in between sentences. We assume, then, that Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, and Moroni had a way of marking subsections within their books, and those came across in translation as the English word "chapter." These chapter breaks can give us enormous insight into how the ancient authors intended us to understand their books.

Here's the trick, though: the chapter breaks we have in our copies of the Book of Mormon today are *not* the same chapter breaks that Joseph received with the translation. That original chapter system was used in the 1830 printed edition of the Book of Mormon (with numbers added to the chapter breaks to make it easier to navigate), but in 1879 Elder Orson Pratt was assigned to prepare a new edition of the Book of Mormon and he decided to reorganize the chapters. Most likely, he did not realize that the original chapters were part of the inspired translation and instead assumed that the printer had invented them as he prepared the 1830 edition. Elder Pratt thought the chapters were too long, and in some cases he thought a chapter break would make more sense if it were moved. So, he rearranged the chapter breaks (adding verse numbers for the first time as well), and that's the system the Book of Mormon uses today.

Although Elder Pratt meant well with his reorganizing, today Book of Mormon scholars believe that the original chapter breaks can clarify how Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni intended us to read their books. For 1 and 2 Nephi, the tables below provide a breakdown of the original system vs. the current system (for a full chart, [see here](#)). The original numbers are in Roman numerals, which is customary in Book of Mormon studies to distinguish them from the modern numbers.

1 Nephi		
Original Chapter	Modern Chapters	Description
<i>Part 1: Abridgment of Lehi's Record</i>		
I	1–5	Lehi's first visions, departure, return for the plates
II	6–9	Second return for Ishmael's family, the dream of the tree of life
<i>Part 2: Nephi's Own Proceedings, Reign, and Ministry</i>		
III	10–14	Nephi's long vision of Israel's history
IV	15	Nephi's explanation of his father's dream to his brothers
V	16:1–19:21	Desert trek, building a ship, ocean voyage, prophecies
VI	19:22–21:26	Quotation of brass plates prophecies: Isaiah 48–49
VII	22	Nephi's explanation of Isaiah to his brothers

2 Nephi		
Original Chapter	Modern Chapters	Description
<i>Part 1: Nephi's Account of the Family's Breakup</i>		
I	1–2	Lehi's last words
II	3	Lehi's quotation of Joseph of Egypt
III	4	Lehi's death and Nephi's poetic reflections
IV	5	The separation of the Lamanites
<i>Part 2: Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah's Teachings on the Destiny of Israel</i>		
V	6–8	Jacob's interpretation of Isaiah 49:22–52:2
VI	9	Jacob's sermon on resurrection and judgment
VII	10	Jacob's interpretation of Isaiah 49:22–23
VIII	11–15	Nephi's introduction and quotation of Isaiah 2–5
IX	16–22	Nephi's quotation of Isaiah 6–12
X	23–24	Nephi's quotation of Isaiah 13–14
XI	25–27	Nephi's likening of Isaiah 2–14 and 29
XII	28–30	Nephi's prophecies and interpretations of Jacob and Isaiah
<i>Part 3: Nephi's Conclusion</i>		
XIII	31	The doctrine of Christ
XI	32	Nephi's clarification
XV	33	Nephi's farewell

1. The Book of Mormon has been published with two different chapter systems, one that was used from 1830–1878 and one from 1879 to the present. The current system was devised by Elder Orson Pratt. Where did the original system come from?

2 Nephi 11

In his introduction to “the Isaiah chapters,” Nephi gives some preliminary hints about what he is up to. Notice that he “delights” in four ideas:

(1) “My soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.”

(2) “My soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers [=the Abrahamic covenant].”

(3) “My soul delighteth in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death.”

(4) “My soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish. For if there be no Christ there be no God; and if there be no God we are not, for there could have been no creation. But there is a God, and he is Christ, and he cometh in the fulness of his own time.”

You should watch out for these ideas as you read today.

2. Before quoting thirteen entire chapters of Isaiah, Nephi explains that he hopes these words will allow his readers to have what reaction? In addition to the interpretation Nephi will provide later, he encourages his readers themselves to liken Isaiah’s words to whom?

Skim through 2 Nephi 12–24 (a modified quotation of Isaiah 2–14)

I’m not asking that you read these thirteen chapters slowly, word-for-word in order to mark 100% reading for today’s homework, but at least skim through them and remind yourself what they talk about.

When Orson Pratt organized the Book of Mormon’s current chapter system, he lined up the chapter breaks in this quotation of Isaiah so that they match the chapter breaks found in the Bible. (FYI, the Bible’s chapter breaks are not ancient and only date back to the Middle Ages.) So in Elder Pratt’s system, 2 Nephi 12 quotes Isaiah 2, and 2 Nephi 13 quotes Isaiah 3, and so on. That divides this block of Isaiah into thirteen chapters total. The Book of Mormon’s original chapter breaks, however, reveal that Nephi organized the Isaiah material into only *three* sections.

Nephi’s chapter breaks	Modern chapter breaks	Isaiah chapters
2 Nephi VIII	2 Nephi 11–15	Isaiah 2–5
2 Nephi IX	2 Nephi 16–22	Isaiah 6–12
2 Nephi X	2 Nephi 23–24	Isaiah 13–14

If we assume that Nephi had a good reason for dividing up this block of Isaiah into three sections of unequal length, then looking at each section individually can clue us in to what sort of cohesion Nephi saw in each section, and then we can look at what each section contributes to the entire block. When we do that, we find that each section presents a central idea and that these ideas build on each other:

Nephi's chapters	Main story
2 Nephi VIII [modern 11–15]	Judah is wicked, and judgment and destruction are coming
2 Nephi IX [modern 16–22]	God will use the coming destruction to reduce Judah to a righteous remnant
2 Nephi X [modern 23–24]	Judah's enemies will eventually be destroyed, preparing the way for the righteous remnant's full redemption

3. Nephi's chapter breaks suggest he sees Isaiah 2–14 as a story being told in three parts. In the boxes below, summarize the main story in each section. (See the explanation above.)

Nephi's chapters	Main story
2 Nephi VIII [modern 11–15]	
2 Nephi IX [modern 16–22]	
2 Nephi X [modern 23–24]	

Lock these three stories in your brain, and you can immediately make more sense of these oftendreaded Isaiah chapters here in 2 Nephi. Many readers get lost in all the confusing details and fail to discern that there actually is a story being told. Even if you don't understand every detail, keeping the big picture in mind—these three stories—can help you not miss the forest for the trees.

2 Nephi 25:1–11

Nephi opens this section by explaining he is going to “speak somewhat concerning the words which I have written, which have been spoken by the mouth of Isaiah” (2 Nephi 25:1). As he has done before in 1 Nephi 15 and 1 Nephi 22, Nephi is going to *combine* his reading of Isaiah *with* the big vision he received in 1 Nephi 11–14, using one to shed light on the other. He's also going to draw upon his brother Jacob's insights as recorded in 2 Nephi 6–10 (which helps explain why Nephi gave you Jacob's speech in the first place).

4. As Nephi gives his prophecies of the future, what two major sources of information is he going to combine? (See the explanation above.)

Most of the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi 12–24 dealt with Isaiah’s own time and the threat of the Assyrian Empire. But in 2 Nephi 23–24 we also looked at the situation over a century later when the Babylonian Empire was the big threat. We also saw the Babylonians when Nephi quoted Isaiah 48–49 back in 1 Nephi 20–21. But even though Nephi’s Isaiah quotes jump back and forth between these two moments of crisis in Israel’s history, Nephi is aware of their parallels.

Main story	How this played out in the Assyrian period	How this played out in the Babylonian period
Judah is wicked, and judgment and destruction are coming	Judahites in the late eighth century BC are wicked. Prophets like Isaiah unsuccessfully warn kings like Ahaz to repent. God says He will punish them by sending the Assyrians to destroy the wicked.	Judahites in the early sixth century BC are wicked. Prophets like Jeremiah and Lehi unsuccessfully warn kings like Zedekiah to repent. God says He will punish them by sending the Babylonians to destroy the wicked.
God will use the coming destruction to reduce Judah to a righteous remnant	Under the leadership of Hezekiah, the righteous in Jerusalem survive the Assyrian assault.	Survivors of the Babylonian assault are carried captive into Babylon. They repent and call upon the Lord.
Judah’s enemies will eventually be destroyed, preparing the way for the remnant’s full redemption	The Lord smites Sennacherib’s army around Jerusalem, and the Assyrians return home. The ravaged Judahites rebuild. Later, the Assyrian Empire as a whole will collapse.	The Babylonian Empire collapses. The Persians allow the captive remnant in Babylon to return home and rebuild Jerusalem.

So, now we’ve seen the basic historical pattern, as Nephi understands it, and we’ve seen that Nephi has been quoting Isaiah chapters that deal with two times in Israelite history when that pattern played out, albeit with some situational differences between them. And you might have already guessed what Nephi’s going to do with this: if a pattern has played out twice already, why not more in the future? Combining the patterns he’s seen in Isaiah with the historical info from his big vision, Nephi is going to liken these Isaianic patterns to new situations.

Joseph M. Spencer, *The Vision of All: Twenty-five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi’s Record*, Contemporary Studies in Scripture (Salt Lake City: Kofford, 2016), 239–43.

This is a chapter from a book all about how Nephi uses Isaiah. To make it easier to understand, Dr. Spencer wrote this book in an informal style, as if he’s speaking to a class of students. Pay attention to the page numbers so you start and stop at the right places.

Nephi’s Summary of Isaiah 2–14

As he begins his “plain prophecy” in 2 Nephi 25:9–19, Nephi begins in vv. 9–11 by giving an original-context summary of Isaiah 2–14. Here’s a chart breaking down Dr. Spencer’s analysis:

Section	Isaiah’s main story	Nephi’s summary (2 Nephi 25:9–11)
2 Nephi VIII [11–15]	Judah is wicked, and judgment and destruction are coming	“And as one generation hath been destroyed among the Jews because of iniquity, even so have they been destroyed from generation to generation according to their iniquities.”
2 Nephi IX [16–22]	God will use the coming destruction to reduce Judah to a righteous remnant	“And never hath any of them been destroyed save it were foretold them by the prophets of the Lord.”
		<i>Nephi pauses his summary to liken Isaiah to his family’s situation and transition from the Assyrian chapters to the Babylonian chapters:</i> “Wherefore, it hath been told them [Judah] concerning the destruction which should come upon them, immediately after my father left Jerusalem; nevertheless, they hardened their hearts; and according to my prophecy they have been destroyed, save it be those which are carried away captive into Babylon. And now this I speak because of the spirit which is in me.”
2 Nephi X [23–24]	Judah’s enemies will eventually be destroyed, preparing the way for the remnant’s full redemption	“And notwithstanding they have been carried away they shall return again, and possess the land of Jerusalem; wherefore, they shall be restored again to the land of their inheritance.”

Nephi is giving a sweeping summary, combining the Assyrian and Babylonian accounts into one overarching narrative. Nephi’s summary here reinforces again that one of the main takeaway messages *he* sees in these Isaiah chapters is the idea that God’s judgments come upon the wicked, but only after prophets have been sent to give them warning. This is exactly the big Isaiah summary he gave us back in v. 3: “The judgments of God ... come ... according to the word which he hath [previously] spoken [through the prophets].”

5. Nephi gives us a “plain prophecy” about the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi 25:9–19. In the first subsection of that prophecy (2 Nephi 25:9–11), Nephi summarizes Isaiah 2–14. One of the main takeaway messages Nephi sees in these Isaiah chapters is the idea that God’s

judgments come upon the wicked, but only after what happens first? See especially 2 Nephi 25:3, 9.

2 Nephi 25:12–19

These verses contain the second half of Nephi’s “plain prophecy.”

Spencer, *Vision of All*, 243–47.

Nephi’s History of the Jews

As he continues his “plain prophecy” in 2 Nephi 25:9–19, Nephi proceeds in vv. 12–19 to liken Isaiah 2–14 to the future history of the Jews. Here’s a chart breaking down Dr. Spencer’s analysis:

Section	Isaiah’s main story	Nephi’s likening (2 Nephi 25:12–19)
2 Nephi VIII [11–15]	Judah is wicked, and judgment and destruction are coming	“But, behold, they shall have wars, and rumors of wars ... because of their iniquities, and the hardness of their hearts, and the stiffness of their necks” = <i>the conflicts during the time of the Persians, Greeks, and Romans</i>
2 Nephi IX-A [16–19]	God will use the coming destruction ...	“And when the day cometh that the Only Begotten of the Father ... shall manifest himself unto them in the flesh, behold, they will reject him.... Behold, they will crucify him... [And] behold, Jerusalem shall be destroyed again; ... wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered among all nations” = <i>after Jesus’s death, the Romans will destroy Jerusalem and drive the Jews out of Judea</i>
2 Nephi IX-B [20–22]	... to reduce Judah to a righteous remnant	“And after they have been scattered, and the Lord God hath scourged them by other nations for the space of many generations, ... they shall be persuaded to believe in Christ, the Son of God.... And the Lord will set his hand again the second time to restore his people from their lost and fallen state [Isaiah 11:11]. Wherefore, he will proceed to do a marvelous work and a wonder among the children of men [Isaiah 29:14]. Wherefore, he shall bring forth his words unto them, which words shall judge them at the last day” = <i>the Book of Mormon will convince the Jews of the true Messiah</i>

2 Nephi X [23–24]	Judah’s enemies will eventually be destroyed, preparing the way for the remnant’s full redemption	<i>Nephi doesn’t include this in his likening, but we could guess that had he extended his discussion he would liken the destruction of Babylon to the latter-day destruction of the wicked Gentiles who fight against the Jews</i>
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6. Nephi gives us a “plain prophecy” about the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi 25:9–19. In the second subsection of that prophecy (2 Nephi 25:12–19), Nephi likens Isaiah 2–14. Starting in his own time and continuing all the way to the last days, Nephi’s likening outlines the future history of what group of people?

7. Nephi gives us a “plain prophecy” about the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi 25:9–19. In the second subsection of that prophecy (2 Nephi 25:12–19), Nephi likens Isaiah 2–14. When Nephi predicts that the Jews “shall have wars, and rumors of wars,” what time periods is he referring to?

8. Nephi gives us a “plain prophecy” about the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi 25:9–19. In the second subsection of that prophecy (2 Nephi 25:12–19), Nephi likens Isaiah 2–14. When Nephi predicts that “Jerusalem shall be destroyed again” after the Messiah’s rejection, he explains that it won’t be Babylon doing the destroying this time because already by that time “Babylon shall be destroyed” as well. “Wherefore,” Nephi clarifies, “the Jews shall be scattered by other nations.” What nation, which did not even exist in Nephi’s day, destroyed Jerusalem and scattered the Jews?

9. Nephi gives us a “plain prophecy” about the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi 25:9–19. In the second subsection of that prophecy (2 Nephi 25:12–19), Nephi likens Isaiah 2–14. According to Nephi, after the Jews reject the Messiah and are scattered and scourged “by other nations for the space of many generations,” what “marvelous work and a wonder” will God do to convince them of the “true Messiah” and thereby “restore his people”?