



UNIT 1

UNDERSTANDING ISAIAH

The Lord commanded the ancient Nephite people that they should search Isaiah's words diligently, for he spoke regarding all things related to the house of Israel. Studying Isaiah is challenging, but the rewards for your diligent study are well worth your effort.



SECTION 1: SEARCH THESE THINGS DILIGENTLY

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.

~ *Jesus (3 Nephi 23:1)*

The Lord said Isaiah spoke concerning all thing related to the house of Israel (see 3 Nephi 23). The book of Isaiah is layered with symbolism, themes, ideas, and hidden messages. Yet each of those parts are built upon a foundation of core doctrines. As you read Isaiah’s message, you will deepen your understanding as you remember these cornerstones of Isaiah’s work: 1) the central role of Jesus Christ in the salvation of the people of God, 2) the doctrines of Christ found in Isaiah’s prophecy, 3) the promise of the Lord to fulfill his covenant to restore the house of Israel, and 4) the story of your personal journey through Isaiah’s prophecy—this story is about you and your journey!

#1—JESUS CHRIST: CENTERPIECE OF THE PROPHETS



Everything Isaiah wrote revolves around the covenant between Jehovah and his people. And Jesus Christ—Jehovah—is Isaiah’s central message. “Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness,” Isaiah wrote in behalf of the Lord. “Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth” (Isaiah 51:1, 4-5). Isaiah’s message is simply a call for the children of God to return to him.

All prophets center their messages around Jesus Christ. He is the centerpiece because he alone can save us. It is in finding him that we find salvation. In ancient America, the prophet Nephi highlighted this point when he wrote, “For the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not; for by denying him ye also deny the prophets and the law.” This point was so important in his mind that he repeated it a second time. “And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the Holy One of Israel” (2 Nephi 25:28-29).

SCRIPTURE REVIEW

- Psalms 145
- Psalms 146
- Isaiah 12
- Isaiah 61:16-20
- Isaiah 43:10-13
- Isaiah 45:22-25
- Isaiah 53:1-9
- Isaiah 61:1-3
- Acts 4:8-12
- 2 Nephi 6:4
- 2 Nephi 11
- 2 Nephi 25:20, 23-29
- Mosiah 4:4-12
- Alma 34:1-16
- Helaman 5:9-12

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. How have you made Jesus Christ the centerpiece of your study and focus?
2. What steps will you take to keep him at the center of your worship and life?
3. How will you make your study of Isaiah centered upon Jesus Christ?
4. How does Isaiah's prophesy of Christ and how do his prophecies help you better come to understand the Lord?

NOTES



#2—THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

The doctrine of Christ is simple yet profound at the same time. It's simplicity is outlined repeatedly in scripture. Jesus told the ancient Nephite disciples that "whosoever will hearken unto my words and repenteth and is baptized, the same shall be saved. Search the prophets, for many there be that testify of these things," (3 Nephi 23:5). How could it be simpler than that? Yet the application of this simple truth can be quite daunting. It's the endurance after entering into that covenant that can be challenging. Not simply to endure, but endure in love. "Press forward with a steadfastness in Christ," the prophet Nephi urges, "having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men" (2 Nephi 31:20).

All true prophets testify of the doctrines of Christ. Isaiah is no different. In studying Isaiah, it is easy to get distracted by all the symbolism, chiasmus, and prophecies of destruction. Yet strung throughout his writings are simple truths of the gospel of Christ. The underlying message in Isaiah is the covenant promise God gives to the children of Israel and the hope that message brings. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1).

SCRIPTURE REVIEW

- Leviticus 19:17-18
- Deuteronomy 6:1-9
- Isaiah 53
- Isaiah 55
- Isaiah 56:1-8
- 1 Nephi 19:8-10
- 2 Nephi 31
- Alma 32:21-43
- Matthew 22:35-40
- Mark 12:28-31
- John 14:5-27
- John 17:1-8
- 3 Nephi 11:29-40
- 3 Nephi 23:1-5
- Helaman 5:12
- Moroni 10:31-33



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. What is the doctrine of Christ?
2. What does the doctrine of Christ mean to you?
3. How could "searching the prophets" help you understand the gospel of Christ?
4. How can you keep the plain and simple truths of the gospel of Christ in your heart and mind while studying Isaiah?
5. What aspects of the Gospel of Christ do you find in Isaiah's writings?

NOTES



#3—FULFILLING THE COVENANT

Isaiah’s writings are not just prophecies of things to come, or stories of ancient events that happened long ago. The core message Isaiah delivers to us is a covenant promise and curse. It is a message about and to the covenant people anciently and in our day. It is a beautiful story of Jehovah’s promise to heal and restore his children. The Lord prophesied that when the words of Isaiah were fulfilled, then would the Lord’s covenant promise be fulfilled (see 3 Nephi 20:11-13).

That covenant promise relates to the gathering and reestablishing of the house of Israel. It was given long before the descendants of Abraham were even scattered. Yet God’s covenant promises hold true even to our day. Since most of us have the blood of Israel in our veins, the covenant promises belong as much to us as our ancient ancestors. Though it has been thousands of years, in God’s timing it is but a short time. “For my name’s sake will I defer mine anger...” the Lord says. “For my own sake will I do it.... I will not give my glory to another” (Isaiah 47:9, 11).

SCRIPTURE REVIEW

- Moses 7:60-69
- Abraham 2:8-11
- Isaiah 6:9-12
- Isaiah 35
- Isaiah 49:13-23
- Isaiah 54
- Isaiah 60
- 1 Nephi 19:14-17
- 1 Nephi 22:8-12
- 2 Nephi 6
- 2 Nephi 9:1-3
- 3 Nephi 20:11-13



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Why did the Lord give a specific commandment to search diligently the words of Isaiah?
2. What is the covenant promise the Lord promises to fulfill?
3. What may your role be in helping fulfill this covenant promise?

NOTES



#4—YOUR PERSONAL JOURNEY



Much of the symbolism within Isaiah’s book relates to an individual’s spiritual progression. Different items, places, or people represent a person’s or nation’s spiritual ascent toward God or descent away from him. This idea will be discussed further in later sections of this study guide, but it is important to note that this spiritual journey is not about someone else or some ancient people. Isaiah’s entire prophecy creates one simple end-time story of your nation, your people, and you individually.

Though his narrative may seem geared toward the nations and people of the world, each aspect of the story can be personally tied to you and your spiritual journey to the Lord. The way he does this is through symbolism. Animals, people, places, stones, elements, tools, vegetation, and many other things represent individuals or their characteristics. When Isaiah says, “For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stone, iron,” (Isaiah 60:17) he is talking about elevating individuals on a covenant path toward God. Gold and silver are more refined than iron and brass; iron and brass are more refined than wood and stone. These types of symbols are found throughout his book, and many of them are stories about you!

As you read Isaiah’s message, pay attention to the symbols that may represent individuals or individual characteristics. There is so much depth to his writings, that a cursory reading will give you superficial information. You must study his book to truly grasp the underlying symbolic threads. For example, comparing the use of various names or places will open to your eyes a thematic journey that these symbols make in Isaiah’s end-day prophecy. If you look at how Isaiah references Judah, Jerusalem, and Zion, you will realize each represent not only a nation or place, but a spiritual journey. Again, that journey is yours.

Likewise, you can look at how Isaiah characterizes different trees, stones, or animals and watch how those symbolic characteristics may represent your path or may typify those around you. In Isaiah’s writings, trees are symbolic of people and forests would hence be groups of people, or nations and cities. Search how Isaiah uses various trees throughout his writings and you will identify characteristics of individuals in your nation, church, and society. The same is true for precious stones versus river stones as well as kosher versus non-kosher animals. Each symbolize a personal path, and each help to point out your personal story.

The key point to take away is to determine where you are along that spiritual path and how you may progress as you draw closer to the Lord. There are only two directions to go: forward or backward. Whatever your current trajectory, the path leading to the Lord is always accessible.

SCRIPTURE REVIEW

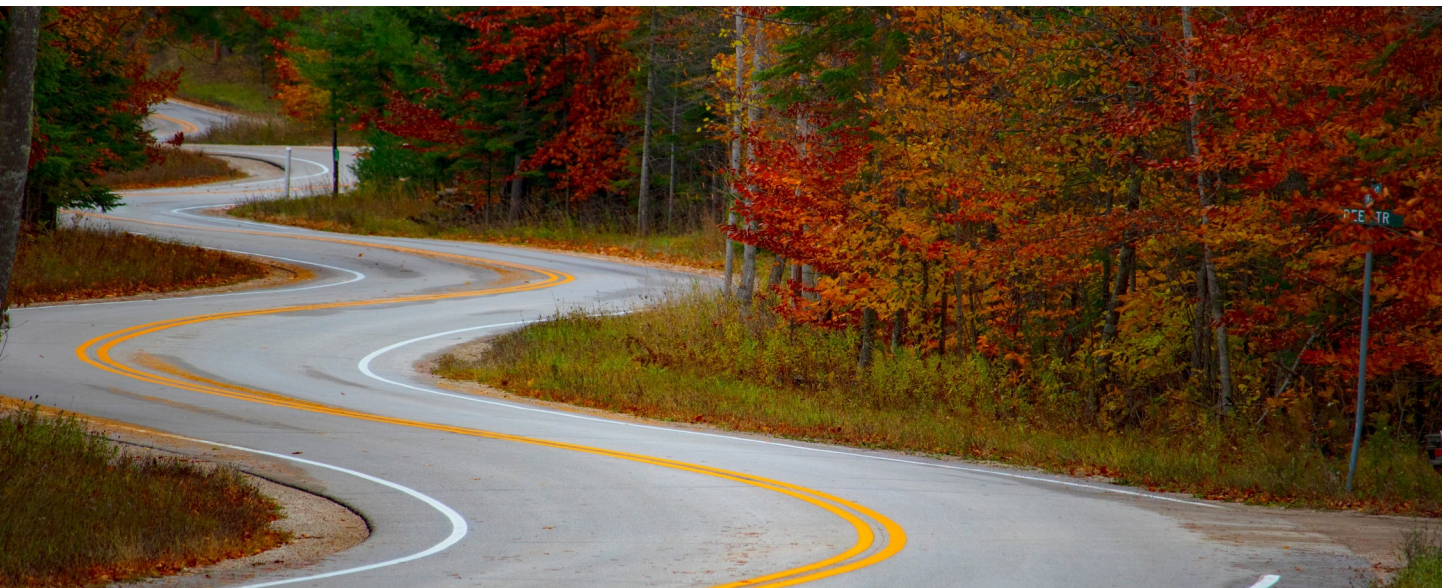
See if you can put yourself in the following scriptures

- Isaiah 1:2-4
- Isaiah 5:1-7
- Isaiah 5:11-22
- Isaiah 6:9-10
- Isaiah 26:1-4
- Isaiah 48:1-8
- Isaiah 51:7-8
- Isaiah 52:1-3, 11-12
- Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-7
- Isaiah 56:1-7
- Isaiah 58
- Isaiah 60:17

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. As you put yourself in Isaiah's narrative with the scriptures review section, what resonated with you?
2. Where are you on this spiritual continuum? If you need to make a course correction, what steps will you take to do so?
3. How does Isaiah's prophecy specifically relate to you?
4. How does that prophecy describe what is going on around you in the world today, particularly in your nation and in your church?

NOTES



SECTION 2: PRESERVING THE PRECIOUS THINGS

I do not write anything upon plates save it be that I think it be sacred.

~ Nephi (1 Nephi 19:6)

When Nephi was commanded to make a second set of records, he did so not knowing what the Lord may have in store for those plates. What he did know was that he was to write only sacred things upon those second set of plates. He recorded, “I, Nephi, received a commandment that the ministry and the prophecies, the more plain and precious parts of them, should be written upon these plates; and that the things which were written should be kept for the instruction of my people, who should possess the land, and also for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord” (1 Nephi 19:3).

#1—THE PLAIN AND PRECIOUS THINGS

Nephi saw a vision of our day more than 2,600 years ago. He recorded much of his vision (see 1 Nephi 11-14), but he was prevented by the Lord from writing the full account of what he saw happen in the end times. He described how he saw that another man—John the Revelator—whom he was told “the Lord God had ordained...that he should write” the prophecy of the end-days (1 Nephi 14:25). Isaiah was clearly concerned about what he saw, but was unfortunately unable to relay that information to us, so he had to be creative.

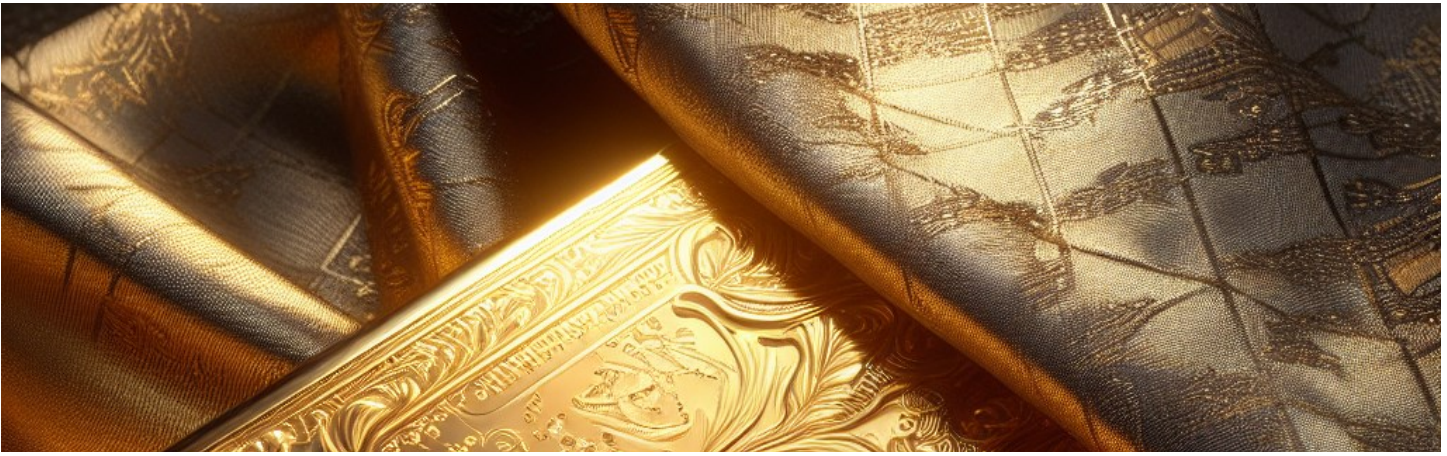
Years after that vision, Nephi filled both of his records with word-for-word transcriptions out of Isaiah’s writings from brass plates. He quoted more than 25% of Isaiah’s book, carefully hand-carved in golden sheets of metal. That is a lot of work. Why would he do such a thing? Nephi surely knew that Isaiah saw a similar vision to his own. Notice what Nephi chose to include and what he purposefully excluded in his own record; then read the commentary he gives.

Though Nephi could not write what he saw in his vision of our day, he could quote others who did. He would not have had John’s record, so instead, he quoted Isaiah’s. If you want to know what will happen in the end days, read Isaiah’s record.

SCRIPTURE REVIEW

- Isaiah 29:9-19
- 1 Nephi 14:18-30
- 1 Nephi 19:1-7
- 2 Nephi 6:3-4
- 2 Nephi 25
- Mormon 8:13-16, 23-25





QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- 1. Nephi had limited space on the second plates he created. Why did he copy so much of Isaiah’s text over when the records were already written elsewhere?
- 2. What truths were embedded in Isaiah’s writings that are so precious to Nephi?
- 3. What is Nephi trying to tell us through Isaiah’s writings and how does he interpret Isaiah’s prophecy?
- 4. Moroni’s message (see Mormon 8) is written specifically for us. Why would Moroni exhort us in that message to read from Isaiah’s book?

NOTES

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#2—LIKEN THE SCRIPTURES TO YOURSELF

Nephi truly understood the scriptures, and their application. When teaching his people, he said on multiple occasions he wanted to liken the scriptures to them. “And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words. For I will liken his words unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him” (2 Nephi 11:2).

SCRIPTURE REVIEW

- Isaiah 6:1-7
- Isaiah 51:1-3
- 1 Nephi 19:22-24
- 2 Nephi 6:1-5
- 2 Nephi 11

Nephi loved to liken Isaiah’s writings to his people because they were a remnant or offshoot from the house of Israel. “Look unto the rock when ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you” (Isaiah 51:1-2). The Lord urges us to look at the ancient and modern prophecies and apply them to ourselves.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Are you from the house of Israel? If so, what message does Isaiah have for you?
2. How will the Gentiles also benefit from the writings of Isaiah?
3. How can you “liken” Isaiah’s words to yourself?

NOTES



SECTION 3: ISAIAH THEN AND NOW

Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate....

~ Isaiah talking with Jehovah (Isaiah 6:11)

#1—A WARNING FOR OUR DAY

The Lord said that Isaiah spoke of all things concerning the house of Israel, and also concerning the Gentiles. One common theme from Nephi down to Moroni, nearly 1,000 years later, is repeated warnings that they—among many other prophets—had seen regarding our day. They recorded those warnings and counsel for us.

Moroni said, “Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you. Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:34-35).

Nephi prophesied that in the last days the words of Isaiah will be “of great worth” to us, “for in that day shall they understand them; wherefore, for their good have I written them.”

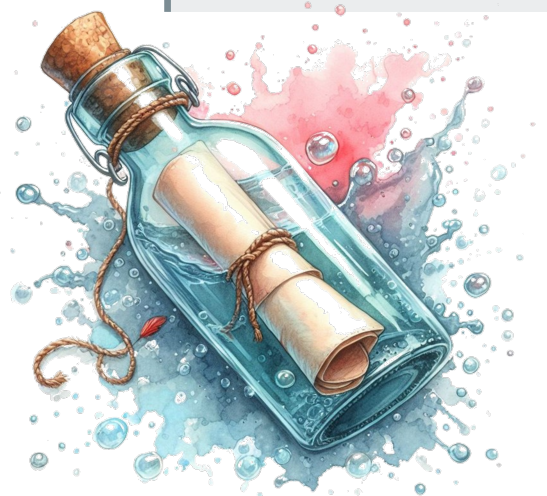
He continues to say, “As one generation hath been destroyed among the Jews because of iniquity, even so have they been destroyed from generation to generation according to their iniquities; and never hath any of them been destroyed save it were foretold them by the prophets of the Lord” (2 Nephi 25:8-9).

There have been ample prophecies from the beginning of time until now regarding the end-times, like personalized messages in a bottle sent to us. If we have not heeded those warning and prophecies, that is our own fault.

Isaiah’s writings are one of those forewarnings of what is to come. The Lord has clearly shown us the events that are about to happen and why they happen.

SCRIPTURE REVIEW

- Isaiah 1:1-4
- Isaiah 2:6-21
- Isaiah 5:1-7
- Isaiah 6:5-13
- Isaiah 34:1-10
- Isaiah 48-49
- 2 Nephi 6:8-18
- Matthew 24
- Mormon 8:23-41
- D&C 45:16-59



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. What are the warnings that Nephi, Moroni and others are giving us? How do they use Isaiah’s writing to do that?
2. What is the warning message Isaiah delivers to us? Is it different than those of other prophets?
3. How is does his ancient vision relate to the situations of our current day?



NOTES

#2—TOOLS FOR UNDERSTANDING ISAIAH

Isaiah is not the easiest book to understand. Nephi said that even his people had difficulty understanding Isaiah even though Nephi was from Jerusalem, “for I, Nephi, have not taught them many things concerning the manner of the Jews.” He continued to say to his people, “The words of Isaiah are not plain unto you, nevertheless they are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy” (2 Nephi 25:4-5).

SCRIPTURE REVIEW

- Isaiah 29:11-18
- 2 Nephi 25:1-9
- 3 Nephi 20:10-12
- 3 Nephi 23:1-5

Isaiah lived around 2,800 years ago. There have been innumerable commentaries on his writings. Some people have made a lifetime work out of just 66 chapters of scripture. And still, after all these years, Isaiah’s writings are like a sealed book, which no one can truly understand (see Isaiah 29:11-12). Yet Isaiah prophesied that in the last days will “the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness” (Isaiah 29:18). Why would they see it in that day and not before? Because they will be filled with the spirit of prophecy. They will see the events unfolding before their eyes.

There are a lot of tips and tricks to understanding Isaiah’s prophecy. Below are a list of several tips and tools you can use to enhance your understanding of Isaiah. But remember, the number one tool you should seek is revelation, or the spirit of prophecy.



TIPS TO UNDERSTANDING ISAIAH

1. **Prepare Spiritually.** The writings of Isaiah are “plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy,” and each one of us has the capacity to gain that spirit of prophecy. God is no respecter of persons, meaning you ARE good enough and smart enough to understand Isaiah. But you cannot do it without God’s help. Revelation comes as you spiritual prepare to receive God’s word. Isaiah wrote the book by the power of God. You must have the power of God within you to truly understand it.
2. **Read Isaiah.** Rather than read *about* Isaiah or read others’ interpretations of Isaiah, read his words for yourself. That is where the real revelation will flow. You cannot come to know his works unless you put in the time to study his writings. You must read it more than once, and you can’t just read it like a novel. You have to study it! Get to know it!

3. **Be Open-Minded.** I come from a culture where I thought I knew what Isaiah was talking about. My church leaders told me what it meant based on what others told them. I quickly learned that I knew nothing about his prophecy, nor did they. Take everything you once knew and put it on a shelf. You cannot receive the revelation you need if you cannot open your heart and mind to new ideas and inspiration. Make your experience a prayerful one. Take everything to the Lord and be patient in understanding.
4. **Throw Out All the Commentaries.** Again, seek the spirit of prophecy. Let God be your commentator and your teacher. Don't fill your brain with what others think they know about Isaiah. There are some commentaries out there that have truth and desire for you to truly uncover Isaiah's writings for yourself. However, most commentaries are not based upon the spirit of revelation. They are biased, and contain information that will steer you into conformance with whatever narrative they are pushing. Truth is truth; it is not subject to what we want it to be or think it should be. Seek for truth, not what makes you or others feel comfortable.
5. **Study the 'Way of the Jews.'** This simply means that in order to understand what Isaiah is saying, you must first understand how he and the ancient Hebrew prophets wrote and what they knew. You cannot apply modern thinking to ancient writings. If you want to know what they said and believed, you have to know some things about their culture and history.
6. **Learn the Language of Symbolism.** Symbolism is very prominent in Isaiah's works. Nearly everything in Isaiah's book is symbolic. Symbolism can be found in the use of trees, animals, rocks, elements, directions, places, historical events, etc. And all of that symbolism tells a detailed story of what will happen in the end-days. Start to learn how Isaiah used symbolism to unlock his message to you. We will investigate many of the ways Isaiah uses symbolism throughout this study guide.
7. **Hebrew Poetry or Rhythm.** Learn how the prophets anciently wrote, understand their rhythm and pentameter. Study the patterns in which they wrote. Much of Isaiah's writings are in a form of poetry I call *parallelism*, which is a rhythmic poetic writing style that emphasizes certain words and links other words together. We will learn this study tool in a later section. Understanding this poetic structure will help you define terms and understand his thread of thought.
8. **Chiasmus.** This is another form of Hebrew poetry the ancient prophets regularly used. It is a form of comparing concepts within the writings in order to emphasize a point. There are many websites describing this writing style. We will learn this study tool in a later section. It is found within every work of scripture ancient to modern. Isaiah's entire book is one great chiasmus.
9. **Connect the Dots through Word-Links.** Another major aspects of Isaiah's prophecy I call *word-links*. This is where he takes various words throughout his book and links them together to create a narrative. He also defines some of his symbolism throughout his work by linking one word to another. We will learn this study tool in a later section. (Just a note: Isaiah wrote in Hebrew, so make sure you are linking Hebrew words, and not English words.)
10. **Traditions and Locations.** It is good to know some of the ancient traditions and basic geography of the ancient Israelites. Isaiah bases a lot of his writings on the nations and societies of his time. They play a major symbolic role in delivering Isaiah's message to us. If you don't know the cities, people, or traditions of his time, you will miss a lot of the nuance of his symbolism. We will cover only portions of ancient Hebrew traditions and geography in this study guide.
11. **History and Ancient Scripture.** Isaiah also relies heavily on stories and histories that pre-date him. He often takes material from the Psalms and other earlier prophets and interweaves them into his book. They embed deep understanding to those who know their scriptures.



He also integrates historical events into his writings. This is one of the most fascinating aspects of his work where he creates prophetic predictions based on previous historic events. I call this “Historical Precedence.” If you want to have a deeper understanding of the context of his writings, learn a little of the history of ancient Israel. Chances are, it is the history of your ancestors.

12. **Don't Take Quotes Out of Context.** Too often people have tried to understand Isaiah by snipping pieces here or there to fit their own perspectives or agendas. Isaiah's book is one complete prophecy filled with lots of redundancy. You cannot simply take one piece out and apply it to something happening in the world today or previously without understand what each piece means in a contextual whole. This will lead to misunderstanding and “wresting” the scriptures. Seek to know what is true. Don't try to create truth where there is none to fit your own theology or narrative.
13. **Realize There Are Multiple Fulfillments of Prophecy.** One thing you'll learn very quickly is that there is almost always at least two fulfillments of each of Isaiah's prophecies, if not more. After all, he was tasked with the assignment to prophesy to an ancient and a modern people at the same time. He had the profound ability to prophecy of multiple events with one statement.
14. **Be Patient.** If Isaiah was so easy to understand, then we would all be experts. You cannot come to understand his vast work by simply reading the text or a commentary. You MUST invest time and effort. And it will take time! But even cursory investment into Isaiah will have immense rewards for future understanding.
15. **Look for Isaiah in Other Scriptures.** Isaiah is one of the most quoted prophets in the scriptures. Of all the ancient Old Testament prophets, Jesus quoted Isaiah most often. Isaiah's words and concepts are found throughout the Old and New Testaments, as well as in the Book of Mormon and other modern revelations. As you find these references in other works, you will deepen your understanding of Isaiah as well as other prophets.
16. **Enjoy the Journey!** Don't think of Isaiah as just another thing you *have* to do. The prophecies of God are wonderful and glorious. They should incite joy and excitement, not drudgery. Enjoy your study, and don't worry about getting everything right. Just enjoy the journey!





QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. What are some of the tools you plan to use to understand what Isaiah is saying?
2. Are there some you are already familiar with? Are there some you would like to learn?
3. What tips and tricks can you use to learn the “manner of the Jews” as you read Isaiah’s writings?
4. What do you feel is the most important tool for you to use as you study Isaiah?

NOTES

UNIT NOTES