

# ZARAHEMLA RECORD



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## Search The Words of Isaiah

by David Lamb

In Third Nephi 10:27 Jesus gives a commandment to study the writings of the prophet Isaiah.

"Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently, for great are the words of Isaiah."

In Second Nephi 11:1-3, 8, Nephi comments on the fact that Isaiah's writings are difficult to understand unless one is familiar with things of a Hebraic nature.

Now I, Nephi, do speak somewhat concerning the words which I have written, which have been spoken by the mouth of Isaiah.

*For behold, Isaiah spake many things which were hard for my people to understand,*

*For they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews.*

For I, Nephi, have not taught them many things concerning the manner of the Jews . . . .

And I know that the Jews do understand the things of the prophets, *And there is none other people that understand the things of the prophets which were spoken unto the Jews, like unto them,*

*Save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews* [emphasis added].

When we make a cursory comparison of the commandment of Jesus with the words of Nephi, we are faced with what appears to be a dilemma. While Jesus is telling us to study the writings of Isaiah, Nephi is telling us that we will not be able to understand the message. Is this a dilemma? The answer, of course, is no. Close examination of these two scriptures reveal that they are in agreement.

Nephi advises that the words of Isaiah cannot be understood unless the reader is familiar with things of a Hebraic nature. The words of Jesus complement this idea as our Lord admonishes us to "search" the words of Isaiah.

To search not only means to read thoroughly, but also means to conduct a painstaking investigation or examination in an effort to uncover elements which are concealed.

Both Jesus and Nephi give us a clue to understanding the writings of Isaiah—become familiar with things of a Hebraic nature. Both Jesus and Nephi admonish us to investigate the Hebrew world; study the customs, the geography, the history, the imagery and manner of thought. Only by becoming immersed in the culture can we grasp the messages of Isaiah and the other prophets.

Verses of scripture which other-

wise are seemingly straightforward can be enhanced and their meaning greatly expanded when we apply an understanding of Hebrew culture and imagery. A beautiful example of this is found in the first chapter of Isaiah.

As the book of Isaiah opens, we find the prophet calling the people of Judah to repentance, pleading with them to forsake their sinful ways and return to the Lord their God. In verse 18, Isaiah uses beautiful Hebraic poetry and imagery in assuring the people that God will truly forgive them and wash away their sins if they will repent.

"Come now and let us reason together," saith the Lord;

"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;  
Though they be red like *crimson*, they shall be as wool [emphasis added] . . ."

While the meaning of verse 18 is clear, a new layer of understanding can be gained by "searching" certain aspects of ancient Near Eastern culture and Hebrew imagery. The Hebrew word for "crimson" is *tola*, and has a twofold meaning. The primary meaning refers to a "worm." The secondary meaning applies to the color crimson itself.

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. . . that they (the remnant of the house of Israel) may know the covenants of the Lord . . .



# Are You Listless?

## A New Revelation About The Book of Mormon

There are two puns in this title. The first one is "Are You Listless?" because the subject deals with a form of Hebrew poetry called lists. If you are listless in the normal sense you are indifferent or apathetic. If you are listless in the sense of this article then you do not know about Hebrew poetry lists; and if you do not know about Hebrew poetry lists then you do not know about Hebrew poetry; and if you do not know about Hebrew poetry then you do not know about the Hebrew nature of the Book of Mormon; and if you do not know about the Hebrew nature of the Book of Mormon then you have missed a great part of what the Lord has been doing for the Book of Mormon in the last few years; and if you have missed all that then you may very well be spiritually listless due to lack of nourishment. The revelation about lists promises to provide much nourishment to Book of Mormon believers.

The second pun is the word "revelation" because the revelation about lists comes from a study of the Book of Revelation entitled *In Search of The Biblical Order* by J. M. Cascione. This book is copyrighted in 1987, therefore, the revelation about lists is fairly new. What the author discovered was that:

1. The book of Revelation is a Hebrew book and not a Greek book.
2. The book of Revelation is full of Hebrew poetry lists.
3. Every book of the Bible has Hebrew poetry lists.
4. The length of the list determines the subject matter.

These findings are of great importance to the Book of Mormon and to Book of Mormon believers as

the Lord is once again showing us that he is preparing the way for taking the Book of Mormon to the world under the endowment. By bringing forth new information about the ancient Hebrew nature of the Bible and the Book of Mormon the Lord is "growing together" the Bible and the Book of Mormon in preparation for restoring the covenants to the house of Israel (2 Nephi 2:20-23; see *Recent Book of Mormon Developments* vol 2, 1992:115) and the restoring of the covenants goes hand in hand with the endowment (1992:34-39).

What is probably the most important part of this study by Cascione is the discovery that the length of the list determines the subject matter. This discovery by Cascione is obviously of very recent date and for that reason we presume unknown prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830. This discovery will also be of help in our own personal study of the Book of Mormon as well as in missionary work. Cascione deals with lists of two, three, four, five, six, seven, ten and twelve items. The subject matter of each length list is taken from Cascione's book as are the examples from the Bible.

"Two" symbolizes the word of God in all its aspects, "how it is sent, communicated, confessed, witnessed, testified, described, received, believed and obeyed" (Cascione 1987:59).

If thy children will keep  
my covenant  
and my testimony  
that I shall teach them . . .

Psalm 132:12

. . . they preached  
the word  
and the truth

according to the  
spirit of prophecy  
and revelation . . . Alma 20:2

Notice in the Book of Mormon example that there are two lists of two referring to the word of God in one verse.

"Three" speaks about God, heaven, responses to God, like cursings or praise, and responses from God such as warnings, curses and blessings.

That they may know from the rising  
of the sun and from the west  
that there is none besides me.  
I am the Lord  
and there is none else. Isaiah 45:6

Being filled with great joy because of  
the resurrection of the dead  
according to the will  
and power  
and deliverance  
of Jesus Christ from the bands of  
death. Alma 2:21

"Four" refers to "mankind, human activity, earth, the creation or created things" (1987:3).

. . . and worship him  
that made heaven  
and earth  
and the sea  
and the fountains of waters.  
Revelation 14:7

Every  
nation,  
kindred,  
tongue,  
and people  
shall be blessed. 1 Nephi 5:27

A list of five "symbolically covers the gamut of human emotions and human experience" (1987:81). In



Revelation it is most often associated with suffering and tribulation. There are also some sets of five concerned with joy and happiness.

Wherefore laying aside  
all *malice*  
and all *guile*  
and *hypocrisies*  
and *envies*  
and all *evil speakings* 1 Peter 2:1

... most abominable above all other churches  
which *slayeth* the saints of God  
yea, and *tortureth* them  
and *bindeth* them down  
and *yoketh* them with a yoke of iron  
and *bringeth them down into captivity.* 1 Nephi 3:140

"Six symbolizes the process of creating or characterizes the nature of what is created, not the created thing itself" (1987:93). The negative side of six symbolizes destruction. God created the world in six days. The only thing Satan can do is destroy. Negative six symbolizes Satan. 666 is Satan's attempt to be God (three speaks about God).

And saying, Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed  
in fine *linen*  
and *purple*  
and *scarlet*  
and decked with *gold*  
and precious *stones*  
and *pearls!* Revelation 18:16

This example from Third Nephi 4:69 is an example of negative six, and in this case the subject matter of the list is given in the verse matching the subject in Cascione's book.

... death and destructions  
by *fire*  
and by *smoke*  
and by *tempests*  
and by *whirlwinds*  
and by *the opening of the earth*  
to receive them  
and *all these things* ...

Note that this is a list with a total

"and all these things." The total counts as part of the list making this a six-part list.

"When God (three) and man (four) meet, the result is always judgment (seven)" (1987:51). God either blesses in sevens or condemns in sevens. Cascione gives Revelation 7:9 as an example of this pattern. An example of this pattern in the Book of Mormon is:

... he manifesteth himself unto all they that believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost;  
Yea, unto every *nation*  
*kindred,*  
*tongue*  
and *people,*  
Working mighty *miracles,*  
*signs*  
and *wonders*  
among the children of men according to their faith.  
2 Nephi 11:78-79

Another example from the Book of Mormon is the famous reference found in Alma 14:103-104 which encourages us in our Book of Mormon work. If we do the first four things then God guarantees the last three things:

Yea, he that  
*repenteth*  
and *exerciseth faith*  
and *bringeth forth good works*  
and *prayeth continually without ceasing*  
unto such it is given to *know the mysteries of God*  
yea, unto such it shall be given to *reveal things which never have been revealed*  
yea, and it shall be given unto such to *bring thousands of souls to repentance* ...

"Ten"-part lists speak about completion. They form a complete description or total range of a particular subject. Cascione gives Revelation 2:2-3 as an example of a ten-part list. A Book of Mormon example is Moroni 10:10-12.

For behold, to one is given by the

Spirit of God that he may teach the word of *wisdom*;  
And to another that he may teach the word of *knowledge* by the same Spirit;  
And to another exceeding great *faith*;  
And to another the *gifts of healing* by the same Spirit.  
And again, to another that he may *work mighty miracles*;  
And again, to another that he may *prophesy* concerning all things;  
And again, to another the *beholding of angels and ministering spirits*;  
And again, to another all kinds of *tongues*;  
And again, to another the *interpretation* of languages and of divers kinds of tongues.  
And *all these gifts* comes by the Spirit of Christ ... Moroni 10:10-12

"Twelve"-part structures speak about the church. Cascione's example is in Revelation 7:4-8.

Alma 11:25 says "And the establishment of the church became general throughout the land ... ." This gives us the subject for the following twelve-part list found in Alma 11:29.

Now those priests which did go forth among the people did preach against  
all *lyings*  
and *deceivings*  
and *envyings*  
and *strifes*  
and *malice*  
and *revilings*  
and *stealing*,  
*robbing*,  
*plundering*,  
*murdering*,  
*committing adultery*  
and *all manner of lasciviousness* ...

Although this list is a negative list, if these things exist and are not checked, the church will die. By preaching against these things the priests built up the church.

Information like this as well as all the other recent Book of Mormon developments are not only given for our enjoyment and to strengthen our faith but are given to alert us that



The secondary meaning evolved because in the ancient Near East, a vivid scarlet or crimson dye was derived from a certain type of worm (*Coccus Ilicis*) which lived on the Kermes oak tree. When crushed and placed in hot water, this worm produced a brilliant crimson color which was permanent and colorfast. Thus the word *tola* became associated with the color crimson.

Isaiah's message uses beautiful Hebraic imagery to describe the power of God's insurmountable love and forgiveness for sinful mankind. Just as the ancient crimson dye produced an indelible stain upon the cloth, so our sins appear to be a permanent stain upon our lives, impossible to remove. Yet, through the cleansing power of Jesus Christ, the permanent stain of sin can be washed clean, allowing us to enter into the presence of God as spotless and pure as naturally white, undyed wool.

God's glorious declaration applies to us today, even as it did to the nation of Israel during Isaiah's day. God is calling us to repentance, assuring us that even though our sins are as red and seemingly permanent as the crimson dye of the *tola*, he is able to forgive our sin,

purify our hearts, and renew our lives through the atoning death and resurrection of his Only Begotten Son.

Isaiah 1:18 is an example of God's call to repentance and promise of total forgiveness, beautifully conveyed by Isaiah, and enhanced by application of Hebrew culture and imagery. Truly, the words of Third Nephi 10:27 are profound, "... search these things diligently, for great are the words of Isaiah" [emphasis added]. <sup>ZRF</sup>

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now is the time for us to exercise our stewardship over the Book of Mormon. May your association with the Book of Mormon never be listless again. <sup>ZRF</sup>

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1987 *In Search of the Biblical Order*. Biblion Publishing, Fairview Park, Ohio.

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