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"How Beautiful Upon the Mountains"

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“HOW BEAUTIFUL UPON THE MOUNTAINS”¹

*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him
that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that
bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth
salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!
(Isaiah 52:7 = Mosiah 12:21)*

Nearly 300 verses from the biblical book of Isaiah are cited in the Book of Mormon. Of these, the first portion of chapter 52 is the most frequently quoted. Thus, 1 Nephi 52:7 cites verse 7; 1 Nephi 22:10-11 cites verse 10; 2 Nephi 8:24-25 and Moroni 10:31 cite verses 1-2; Mosiah 12:21-25 cites verses 7-10; Mosiah 15:14-18, and 29-31 cite verses 7-10; 3 Nephi 16:18-10 and 20:32-35 cite verses 8-10; 3 Nephi 20:36-42, and 45 cite verses 1-3, 6-7, 11-12, 15; 3 Nephi 21:8 cites verse 15; and 3 Nephi 21:29 cites verses 11-12.

A BOOK OF MORMON EXPOSITION

During their interrogation of the prophet Abinadi, the priests of wicked king Noah asked him the meaning of the passage found in Isaiah 52:7-10 (Mosiah 12:20-25). Wanting to explain the importance of prophets and of the law of Moses, Abinadi delayed responding (Mosiah 13:3). When, at length, he gave his answer, he began by citing the great prophecy of the coming Savior from Isaiah 53 (Mosiah 14), then began to expound both that chapter and the passage from the preceding chapter about which

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the priests had asked their question.

Of particular interest is the fact that Abinadi's interpretation of Isaiah 52:7 corresponds to that found in other ancient documents (including the Dead Sea Scrolls) that were unknown in Joseph Smith's day. That passage, cited by Abinadi in Mosiah 12:21, reads, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation."

Abinadi's explanation of this verse is found in Mosiah 15:13-18, where he notes that the passage refers to both the prophets who have foreseen the coming of Christ and also "the founder of peace, yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people; yea, him who has granted salvation unto his people."

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This interpretation is strikingly similar to the one found in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, 11QMelchizedek (11Q13), column II, lines 15-19:

This is the day of [peace about which God] spoke [of old through the words of Isa]iah the prophet, who said: 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, of the mess[enger of good who announces salvation,] saying to Zion: "your God [reigns.]" Its interpretation: The mountains are the pro[phets . . .] And the messenger is [the ano]inted of the spirit about whom Dan[iel] spoke [. . . and the messenger of] good who announces salv[ation is the one about whom it is written that [he will send him] "to comfo[rt the afflicted, to watch over the afflicted ones of

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Zion.”]²

The latter portion of the text is actually from Isaiah 61:2-3, and is the one that speaks about being anointed of the spirit (rather than Daniel, who wrote only about the Messiah or “anointed one” in Daniel 9:24-26). This is the passage that Jesus cited in reference to his messianic calling (Luke 4:18-19, see verses 17-21). The interpretation of the Isaiah passage in the Qumran scroll accords with Abinadi’s teachings. It also supports Jesus’ statement in 3 Nephi 20:39-40, in which he indicates that the prophecy in Isaiah 52:7 refers to him.

The concept of the prophets being represented by the mountains is paralleled by the rabbinic interpretation, found in several sources, of the expression “top of the hill” in Exodus 17:9, where “top” is said to refer to the patriarchs and “hill” to the matriarchs. Early Jewish Aramaic translations of the Bible reflect this idea. Thus, in *Targum Neofiti* and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* to Numbers 23:9 and Deuteronomy 33:15, the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) are compared to the mountains, while their wives (Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah) are compared to the hills. In medieval Jewish texts such as *Zohar* Exodus 58b and *Pesikta Rabbati* 33:4 Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are termed “the three mountains of the world.”

CONCLUSION

From this, we can see that the traditional Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 52:7, going back at least to the time of Christ when the Dead Sea Scrolls were written, agrees with the one given in the Book of Mormon by the prophet Abinadi.

² Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated* (2nd ed., Leiden: Brill, 1996), 140.