Why Did Jesus Mix Together Micah and Isaiah?


3 Nephi 20:25

The Know

On His second day among the Nephites, reported in 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5, Jesus quoted extensively from Micah and Isaiah, so much so that exactly half of the verses in the speech come from these prophets. These quotations often make the sermon difficult to follow. Yet these quotations stress the importance of covenants, which was exactly the principle Christ was teaching in what Victor Ludlow has called “The Father’s Covenant People Sermon.”

This assertion is borne out by the repetition of specific words and phrases. For example, in these two chapters alone, the word “covenant” appears 16 times, “the Father” appears 39 times, and “the people” appears 35 times, indicating that the discourse revolves emphatically around the Father’s covenant with his people, the house of Israel.

Jesus began the speech by mentioning that part of God fulfilling his covenant with Israel would be that Israel would be gathered and the descendants of Lehi would receive their inheritance in the Americas (3 Nephi 20:12–14). Jesus quoted from Micah 5:8–9, and 4:12–13, to explain the destruction that the covenant people will bring upon the Gentiles who reject that covenant (in vv. 15–20). He emphasizes that establishing His people in the New World was one way in which God would fulfill His covenant with Abraham and Jacob. God would bless the whole world, including the Gentiles, through His covenant people (vv. 21–29).

Christ used Isaiah 52:1–3, 6–15 in the same way. Christ said that when the people of the Old World accept Him and His new covenant, Christ will “give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance” (3 Nephi 20:31–33). Christ will bless them with the blessings of the covenant by freeing Jerusalem from slavery or “redeeming it.” Christ will do this by “making bare his holy arm,” or fighting, for Jerusalem, such that the entire earth will know that God has brought salvation to His people, liv-
ing up to His end of the covenant (20:34–35). Those who are not part of the covenant, who are metaphorically referred to as “the uncircumcised,” will not be able to enter Jerusalem (v. 36). Christ will fulfill His covenant to free the people from the symbolic slavery they have labored under, and Jehovah will be their king (vv. 37–40).

His people will restore the temple, complete with its “vessels,” and the “covenant which the Father hath covenanted with his people [will] be fulfilled” (3 Nephi 20:41–46). The Gentiles will then become part of the covenant, allowing them to bring the gospel to the descendants of Lehi, thus fulfilling the covenant with them as well (3 Nephi 21:1–7). Christ quoted Isaiah 52 to emphasize the work His servant will do to bring the covenant to the Gentiles (3 Nephi 21:8, 10). And concluded by commenting on Micah 5:8–15, showing the devastation that would fall on those Gentiles if they reject the covenant (21:12–22).

Even the structure of the speech connects it to covenants. This speech, like many others in the Book of Mormon, is chiastic, and in chiasms, the center point is often the most important. The central point of this sermon is the sign of God’s covenant with His people, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. This signifies that God’s covenant with His people is the main point of the speech. This structure and the centrality of covenants begins to make sense of the seemingly choppy use of Micah and Isaiah.

The chiasm is as follows:

3 Nephi 20–22 persuasively illustrates that covenants are central to God’s dealings with His people in all periods of time. Even after all that the Nephites had done, Christ reminded His people that His covenants are eternal, and that the Gentiles of the latter days would actively participate in those covenants.

In 3 Nephi 22:1–23:5, Christ then quoted Isaiah 54 to reassure His people of the everlasting nature of His covenant with them and to speak warmly of the many blessings that will be given to covenant keepers. He reminded them that “the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed” (3 Nephi 22:10).

For some, Christ’s covenants with His people in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon may seem buried in the remote past, with little application to people today. However, Christ reminded his people that His covenants are eternal, and that the Gentiles of the latter days would actively participate in those covenants.

As Jesus introduced Himself to the people gathered at the temple in Bountiful, he said, “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (3 Nephi 11:10). He drew significantly and purposefully from the
prophetic writings of Micah and Isaiah, Israelite prophets who had lived about a hundred years before the time of Lehi. Jesus used those prophecies to show the Nephites that some of these prophecies remained yet to be fulfilled. He expounded and contextualized these prophecies clearly and brilliantly. He assured these people that He, His Father, and his covenant people would work together to bring to pass the Father’s glorious work.

The Book of Mormon reminds all who read it of the reliability of God. The Nephites certainly knew that mortals fail. Governments come and go, people are sometimes “quick to do iniquity, and … slow to do good” (Helaman 12:4). But the righteous Nephites knew with assurance that they could always rely on Christ to keep His covenants with them, even when all else failed. Modern readers can confidently take the same solace from the Book of Mormon. No matter how long ago Christ made these covenants with His people, they still apply to people today. Christ always kept His covenants with the Nephites, and He will always keep His covenants with those of the new and everlasting covenant today.

**Further Reading**


**Notes**


2. Part of the difficulty in understanding simply comes from being part of a modern, rather than an ancient, audience. Most members of an ancient audience listening to this speech would likely have understood blessings and curses associated with covenants. See, for example, Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.


15. Not surprisingly, 3 Nephi 20:29 is very similar to Isaiah 52:12.