

Book of Mormon's Bible language ----code words in the scriptures, LeGrand Baker

I have tried to think of an example where the same language that is used by all of the scriptures comes together to create an explanation of all the rest. I think Isaiah 61 is as good an example as I can find. If some of what I write below seems simplistic to you, I apologize. If it seems incorrect, please remember what I am writing is only my personal opinion.

I begin with D&C 138:42

And Isaiah, who declared by prophecy that the Redeemer was anointed to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound, were also there.

President Joseph F. Smith is quoting from Isaiah 61:1. The important thing is not the quote, but the context in which he is quoting it. This is his account of the revelation he received about salvation from the dead. By quoting the Isaiah chapter in that context, he tells us that the captives are those who are in spirit prison who are awaiting an opportunity to receive the ordinances of the gospel. Our knowing that teaches us more about the meaning of that Isaiah chapter than is known by all the great Isaiah scholars who do not have that key.

The first two verses of that chapter read:

1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;(Isaiah 61:1-2)

In the Old Testament (and in D&C 93: 51) when a time or an ordinance is acceptable before the Lord, it means that is done in righteousness—*zedek*. That is: with the right authority, saying the right words, doing the right actions, in the right place, and dressed the right way. So in this context, if one is to “proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” to those who are dead, one is announcing to them that the ordinances performed in their behalf by the living are valid.

In some Bibles, “The day of vengeance” is translated “the day of judgement.” Both work. It means that for the dead, this will be their last time to accept the ordinances before the final judgement.

“Comfort” is the most important code word in the verse. It is used as a code word in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. I don't read either Greek or Hebrew, but I read scholars who do. Their consensus is that the Hebrew word translated comfort means the cessation of sorrow. But in Elizabethan English, comfort meant to empower (see OED). To comfort did not mean to receive a nice pat on the head and a warm blanket. It meant to bring about the cessation of sorrow by overcoming the source of the sorrow—empowerment—by rising beyond its reach, rather than just feeling better.

Before we continue, I must stop here and tell a bit of a story. In ancient Israel, when one was in mourning or severe repentance, one would sprinkle the ashes of a red heifer on one's head and dress in simple clothing during the time of sorrow. (sack cloth and ashes). The ashes were removed by a ceremonial washing. I have several statements from non-Mormon Bible scholars that say the reference in Isaiah 61 to replacing ashes with a beautiful hat (crown) in v. 3 necessarily presupposes such a ceremonial washing.

Verse 2 says they will be comforted/empowered. Verse 3 says how it will be done. The method is to make them a part of Zion—and the method of doing that is to use the same coronation ceremony that was used in ancient Egypt, ancient Israel, France until the revolution, and presently in England. Bible scholars identify v. 3 as the coronation ceremony, but they also write that they have no idea what it is doing there.

3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty [crown] for ashes [thus, the washing], the oil of joy for mourning [anointing], the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness [clothing]; that they might be called [new, royal king-name] trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.[Trees make fruit, fruit make seeds, seeds make trees, *ad infinitum*. Thus the new name is a combination of the idea of the Tree of Life and of the promise of eternal increase.]

Knowing that we can discover the meaning of Isaiah 40:1-2.

One more code word needs to be defined. I suspect many of the code words were not code words when Isaiah wrote them, but because we have lost their meaning they have become code words to us. “Double” is probably one of those. Example: Jacob had 12 sons. There were also 12 landed tribes in Israel. The tribe of Levi was scattered throughout the others and was not landed. Therefore there were 12 sons, minus Levi. That should have made 11 landed tribes, but there were 12. The reason is there was no tribe of Joseph. Joseph had the birthright and therefore got a double portion.

“The double” is a reference to the birthright blessing. In later verses of Isaiah 61, as here in these verses of Isaiah 40, “double” is a reference to the birthright—but not of land—rather to the priesthood birthright blessings of Abraham.

Isaiah 40:1-2 reads:

1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

“God” is Elohim; “ye” is plural. So Elohim is speaking to a group of people. Non-Mormon Bible scholars point out that Jehovah often speaks to people in this world, but when Elohim speaks in the Old Testament it is always only to members of the Council in Heaven. So in these verses we are privy to a conversation that took place in the beginning, at the Council:

Comfort [give coronation rites] ye [members of the Council], comfort ye my people [this is their assignment when they come to this world], saith your God [the Father].

2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished,

that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's [Jehovah's] hand double [birthright blessings of Abraham] for [in exchange for] all her sins.

Note, she received the birthright blessings “of the Lord’s HAND.” There is only one place in this world where that happens symbolically. So in these two short verses, Isaiah recounted that the Father had instructed the members of the Council to administer the coronation ordinances to the people so they could receive the birthright blessings “of the Lord’s hand.” Isaiah has just walked us through the temple.

The 23rd Psalm is another example of an encoded description of the temple services.

In one verse, “rod” is a scepter, the symbol of kingship; and the staff is a symbol of the shepherd, —a symbol of priesthood. The line reads: “thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” That is, “I am empowered (coronated) by the symbols of sacral kingship and priesthood.”

Now lets look at that imagery, as the Saviour used it in Third Nephi 20 where he rearranged the ideas in Isaiah 52 to create an important message.

30 And it shall come to pass that the time cometh, when the fulness of my gospel shall be preached unto them;

31 And they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name.

32 Then shall their watchmen lift up their voice, and with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye.

33 Then will the Father gather them together again, and give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance.

34 Then shall they break forth into joy—Sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Father hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

35 The Father hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of the Father; and the Father and I are one.

36 And then shall be brought to pass that which is written: Awake, awake again, and put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city, for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.

37 Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit down, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

38 For thus saith the Lord: Ye have sold yourselves for naught, and ye shall be redeemed without money.

39 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that my people shall know my name; yea, in that day

they shall know that I am he that doth speak.

40 And then shall they say: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings unto them, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings unto them of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion: Thy God reigneth!

41 And then shall a cry go forth: Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch not that which is unclean; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord. (3 Nephi 20:30-41)

Once again

30 And it shall come to pass that the time cometh, when the fulness [That shouldn't be a code word, but it becomes one if the reader doesn't understand it to mean precisely what it says: Fulness—everything. That presupposes the time will come when the people will have the temple services, eternal marriage, and everything else] of my gospel shall be preached unto them;

31 And they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name.

32 Then [“then” means “thereafter” or “in the following manner.” It works either way] shall their watchmen [those who are alert to danger] lift up their voice, and with the voice together shall they sing; [So the watchmen are singing in unison] for they shall see eye to eye. [that either means they all agree, or they are standing in a circle so they can see each other's faces—or both]

33 Then will the Father gather them together again, and give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance.

34 Then shall they break forth into joy—Sing together [again they sing in unison], ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Father hath comforted his people [comfort = to empower by the coronation ceremony. This is an example of our needing to know the Bible language in order to understand the impact of what Book of Mormon is saying], he hath redeemed Jerusalem. [In the Bof M, to redeem frequently means to bring one into the presence of God. (see: Helaman 14:15-17; 2 Nephi 1: 15, 2:1-4; Ether 3:13)

35 The Father hath made bare his holy arm [that can really happen, as it did with the brother of Jared, but the usual referent is symbolic, and that symbolism is only appropriate in one place] in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of the Father; and the Father and I are one.

36 And then shall be brought to pass that which is written: Awake, awake again [the same command given to Adam] , and put on thy strength [strength has the same connotation as comfort, only as the next words show, this time it is a reference to sacred clothing. A good place to discover its significance is Isaiah 61.], O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city, for henceforth there shall no more come into thee

the uncircumcised and the unclean.

37 Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit down [those actions imply movement. In 2 Kings 3:1-3 the Israelites stand to make covenants], O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

38 For thus saith the Lord: Ye have sold yourselves for naught, and ye shall be redeemed [purchased, ransomed] without money.

39 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that my people shall know my name [there is always a new name with a new covenant, so knowing the name is equivalent to knowing the covenant]; yea, in that day they shall know that I am he that doth speak.

40 And then shall they say: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings unto them, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings unto them of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion: Thy God reigneth! [Abinadi quoted this and teaches us what Isaiah meant. He said it was about kingship—that is, about being a child of God, therefore one who has the right to inherit]

41 And then shall a cry go forth: Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch not that which is unclean; [I'll mention that again.] go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord. (3 Nephi 20:30-41)

That statement by the Saviour is highly encoded, and most of the keys to the code come from the Old Testament.

With the understanding of those verses in the Book of Mormon in mind, one could go back to Isaiah 52 and reread it with much greater understanding.

The Saviour's words in 3 Nephi 20 also become a key to understanding some of the last words of Moroni:

28 I declare these things unto the fulfilling of the prophecies. And behold, they shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the everlasting God; and his word shall hiss forth from generation to generation.

29 And God shall show unto you, that that which I have written is true.

30 And again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing.

31 And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled. (Moroni 10:28-31)

Now lets examine that closely:

A prophet is one who speaks by the Holy Ghost, but he does not always speak about the future. In any case, his words are prophecy. So a prophecy is inspired truth, but not necessarily truth about the future. If one accepts that definition, and removes the necessity of speaking about the future from v. 28, then the rest falls easily into place.

28 I declare these things unto the fulfilling of the prophecies [truth spoken by the spirit]. And behold, they [the inspired truths] shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the everlasting God; [God is speaking. and if he is speaking, we are listening]

and his word shall hiss forth from generation to generation. [I wondered about “hiss” so I looked it up. It is the sound one makes when one whispers. God will whisper, and his word will be consistent from generation to generation.]

29 And God shall show unto you, that that which I have written is true. [God will *show* us the truth. If God is showing us, we are watching.]

So, God is speaking, we are listening; God is showing, we are watching.

30 And again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ [That may refer to the reality as in Ether 3, but it more likely refers to the symbolic, where one actually goes to the place where one can symbolically meet the Saviour],

and lay hold [one uses one’s hand to do that] upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing. [there will always be counterfeits]

31 And awake, and arise from the dust [you have heard that before] , O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments [sane as in 3 Nephi 20] O daughter of Zion;

Now I have to stop and tell you another story. These words are Moroni’s paraphrase of Isaiah, so the symbolism will be from Isaiah’s culture rather than from Moroni’s. In the deserts of the ancient Near East, when a man married, he gave his wife a tent. It was hers and her duty was to care for it. As the children came, it was her responsibility to weave additional flaps for the tent, so that it would become large enough to house the larger family. If one makes the tent bigger, then the stakes must be made stronger also, or the wind will blow it over. One may read the following as being about the modern LDS Church’s wards and stakes, But if one uses Isaiah as a referent, the following is about building a house: it is a promise of eternal families —“forever.”

and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled. (Moroni 10:28-31)

Here the Book of Mormon uses a paraphrase of Isaiah to make a reference to eternal marriage and eternal family, but one has to go to the Old Testament to recognize that. Moroni knew Joseph would translate this passage long before the church knew anything about eternal marriage. So he wrote it in code. His using the code served two purposes: (1) Because the pre-Nauvoo saints

wouldn't have understood a direct reference to celestial marriage, the code is used so the idea wouldn't scare off the early saints by presenting a foreign concept, and (2) so the Book can be used as a missionary tool without causing too much wonderment among those who read it for the first time. The key to the code isn't found in the Book of Mormon, but because the Book of Mormon retains the language of Isaiah, the key to the code can be found in the Bible.

There is another indirect reference to eternal marriage in the Book of Mormon, but that one also requires a knowledge of the Bible. Lets go back to Isaiah 61 and read the rest of the chapter.

After Isaiah reviewed the coronation ceremony, the scene changes and he discusses the vicarious work done by the living for the dead. In this part of the chapter he is speaking directly to the dead, so "you" are the dead, and "they, strangers, and alien" are words he uses to describe the living. Just who "they" are is clarified in v. 9: "And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed." So "they" are the children of Israel. "They" are also the living who do the temple work for the dead. Let me suggest to you how that chapter might be read

4 And they [the living] shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities [a "city" may be the buildings, or it may be the inhabitants, or both. It becomes apparent that in this context "city" refers to the people, because the next words are:], the desolations of many generations.

5 And strangers [the living] shall stand [one stands to make a covenant - 2 Kings 23, 1-4, and Psalm 82] and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien [the living] shall be your [the dead's] plowmen [in ancient Israel plowmen grew wheat which became bread] and your vinedressers.[vinedressers care for grape vines from which they harvest grapes to make wine.] So, as I understand it, "and feed your flocks" is clarified by this reference to bread and wine —the sacrament.

6 But ye [the dead] shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God [the dead will receive the priesthood and priesthood responsibilities.]: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves. [that is, the dead will rejoice in the blessings provided by the living]

7 For [in exchange for] your [the dead's] shame ye shall have double [birthright blessings of Abraham]; and for [in exchange for] confusion they [the living] shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they [the living] shall possess the double [birthright blessings of Abraham] everlasting joy shall be unto them [the living].

8 For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering [Taking a cow to be sacrificed at the temple won't do any more, now it requires a broken heart and contrite spirit. 3 Nephi 9 tells us that is the sacrifice the Saviour accepts, and because he uses the words in Psalm 37 we can go to the Hebrew lexicon to discover what he meant]; and I will direct their work [the vicarious work done by the living] in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them [the living].

9 And their [living] seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring [living] among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed.

The next two verses are a hymn sung by the dead in thanks for the vicarious work done for them. The first is a celebration of their eternal marriage — one can know that because they are dressed in the right clothing.

10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

The next verse celebrates their promise of the resurrection:

11 For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. (Isaiah 61:1-11.)

Now, with that information, we can return back to the Book of Mormon, where the Beatitudes are written almost, but not quite, in the same words as they are in Matthew.

Another aside:

In Bible times, when the scriptures were not divided into chapters and verses, the way one would cite a scripture was to quote a bit of a chapter and assume the audience understood it as a reference to the whole. So in the synagogue at Nazareth, Luke mentions only a couple verses in Isaiah 58:6 and Isaiah 61:1 (Luke 4:16-19) and we are supposed to know that Jesus read the whole of each chapter. Paul does the same thing in the first chapter of Hebrews, quoting a whole series of short scriptures (mostly from Isaiah and the Psalms) that all talk about sacral kingship and priesthood. By so doing, Paul reminds his audience of those scriptures and their context and relates them to the Saviour's rights of kingship and priesthood.

The Saviour did the same thing when he spoke the Beatitudes. They are almost all snippets from Isaiah and the Psalms. It is reasonable to believe that the Saviour knew that his listeners in America knew the full context of the chapters he was citing. One of the Beatitudes is a paraphrase from Isaiah 61. It reads:

And again, blessed are all they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. (3 Nephi 12:4)

If one does not know Isaiah 61, then the Beatitude is a nice platitude, but little more. But if the Biblical pattern of the way one cites scriptures holds true here, then the Saviour had just summarized and called attention to Isaiah's entire prophecy about redemption for the dead.

The word "blessed" is a mistranslation (probably because the King James translators didn't believe the Saviour could possibly have intended to say what he really said), but because the Book of Mormon uses the same inadequate word, two things happen: (1) we can immediately

relate the Book of Mormon version of the Beatitudes to the Matthew version and compare them to discover the significant differences. (2) Because the Book of Mormon uses the New Testament word, we can go to the Greek to know what the Saviour was really teaching the Nephites.

I don't read Greek, but this is what two world-class Bible scholars said about it: It is from the *Anchor Bible, Matthew*, translation and notes by W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann (New York & London, Doubleday), commentary on Matthew 5.

Their translation reads: "Fortunate are those who mourn, for they shall be consoled."

Their footnote reads: "*Fortunate*. The word in Greek was used in classical time of the state of the gods in contrast to men. The usual English 'blessed' has more and more come to have liturgical or ecclesiastical overtones, and we have chosen 'fortunate' as being the best translation available to us."

In other words, they wouldn't translate it as "in the state of the gods" because they didn't believe Jesus could have really meant what he said, so they used fortunate instead. The "gods" are, of course, the noble and great ones—the members of the Council in Heaven (as in Abraham³, 4 and 5).

Given this information about the New Testament language, one may assume that in America the Saviour said:

In the state of the gods are those who mourn (the dead who long to have their bodies) for they shall be comforted (receive the coronation ordinances.)

In other words, in this Beatitude the Saviour is assuring his audience of the validity of vicarious work for the dead as is described in Isaiah 61.

Since the conclusion of Isaiah 61 is a celebration of eternal marriage, I suppose one may also assume that the Saviour's listeners understood that Beatitude to be also a reference to that doctrine of eternal families. also.

Thierry, this has turned out to be a much longer note than I expected. I hope you haven't found it too tedious. I have written it rather quickly, so it may be a bit hard to follow. Still, I hope it approaches its purpose of trying to show you an example of how the Bible language in the Book of Mormon helps clarify the meanings of words in the Bible as well as the words of the Book of Mormon.

My best to you
LeGrand