

*Understanding Isaiah*, by Donald W. Parry, Jay A. Parry, and Tina M. Peterson (Deseret Book, 1998)

The title of this recent Isaiah commentary is inviting. Who does not long to understand Isaiah? The opening words of the introduction describe the predicament: “Most of us know that we have been commanded to diligently search the words of Isaiah. And most of us agree that that is a hard thing to do” (1). The authors offer tools and suggestions to ease the task. The first-time reader of Isaiah, the seasoned scholar, and all students in between will find aid and comfort here as they seek to understand Isaiah.

The format of the book is particularly helpful and user friendly. How to utilize this format is explained in the first six pages of the 659-page volume. A chapter in the book corresponds to each chapter in Isaiah. Each chapter begins with a focus paragraph or two to help readers in “likening Isaiah unto ourselves” by relating themes of particular chapters to specific challenges people face today. This approach welcomes the reader into the chapter with some notion of its content. Of course, the notion is the authors’ interpretation, but this is the stuff of which commentaries are made. Isaiah’s poetry is so heavily symbolic that authors have difficulty standing back and allowing readers conjure their own images, allowing the metaphor speak to each individual on a personal level. The temptation to simplify is always present, especially when there are so many levels of meaning to be plumbed; defining one may close the door to others waiting in the wings. The Isaiah text is printed in Hebrew poetic form: short poetic lines enable the reader to discern the symbolic parallelism that is obscured when the text is printed in prose as it is in our King James Bible.

The book also provides several short appendices, one of which lists quotes and paraphrases of Isaiah found in the Book of Mormon and another providing a brief

discussion of Isaiah’s poetry and Hebrew poetic form. Unfortunately, this latter appendix is insufficient for serious students. Also, sprinkled throughout are quotes from modern LDS leaders. Most of these references help the reader with present-day applications but not with textual analysis. These comments by modern pastoral shepherds liken Isaiah’s rich messianic vision to our time.

The expressed goal of the authors, to give the reader tools to overcome difficulty in understanding Isaiah, is best met in the historical notes and linguistic help in defining Hebrew words and phrases. Gathering this material and placing it in close proximity to the verses themselves has done all students of Isaiah a great service. The authors’ purpose was not to produce a book that should be read from cover to cover but rather to create one to be used more as a reference tool. It meets this purpose admirably.

—Ann N. Madsen

---

*C. S. Lewis: The Man and His Message*, edited by Andrew C. Skinner and Robert L. Millet (Bookcraft, 1999)

*C. S. Lewis: The Man and His Message* presents eleven of the fourteen addresses given at the December 1998 Brigham Young University conference commemorating the hundredth anniversary of C. S. Lewis’s birth. These strong and diverse essays are valuable for both newcomers and confirmed Lewis enthusiasts.

The point of *The Man and His Message* is explicitly “not to canonize C. S. Lewis, but to appreciate him” (157), and the authors carefully avoid “contorting” him into a Latter-day Saint (4). They spend little time comparing Lewis’s thought and LDS doctrine, yet the connections between Lewis and the restored gospel are constantly implied, and several essayists argue that Lewis, despite his lack of prophetic authority, can serve Latter-day

Saints as a source of insight and as an example of Christian discipleship.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell's essay sets the tone of the volume by emphasizing that Lewis's value for Latter-day Saints lies in his Christian discipleship rather than in his doctrinal writings. Several contributors take a similar approach: Terrence D. Olson examines self-deception and its impact on family, Brent L. Top movingly discusses affliction, Andrew C. Skinner writes on temptation, and Daniel K. Judd powerfully addresses the predicament of self-love and the way—by offering ourselves to Christ—we can become our true selves. Also relevant to daily discipleship, but set in a firm doctrinal context, is Robert L. Millet's masterful essay on the "transformation of human nature." Millet comments on passages from Lewis about the need for personal change and the hope Christ offers us of becoming like Him.

Other essays cover less familiar ground, such as John S. Tanner's brilliant essay comparing Lewis's and Milton's depiction of the "psychology of temptation" and Paul E. Kerry's discussion of Lewis's important but relatively unfamiliar writings from the 1930s. Another unusual and stimulating essay is Brent D. Slife's discussion of Lewis's move from viewing truth as abstract and passive to viewing it as personal, concrete, and active, as embodied in Jesus Christ.

Understandably, the book pays little attention to Lewis as a literary critic, scholar, or imaginative writer. Though some of his fiction is discussed, the essays contain only brief references to *The Chronicles of Narnia* and none at all to *Till We Have Faces*, which Lewis considered his best work of fiction and which has profound relevance to his thought on discipleship and personal transformation. Most quoted and referred to are Lewis's autobiographical and theological works and those imaginative works, such as *Screwtape Letters* and *The Great Divorce*, that are most transparently theological.

Despite a few errors—"comic sadist" on page 165 should read "cosmic sadist"; George MacDonald, whom Lewis never met, is described as Lewis's "old friend and mentor" (132); and Ransom, a philologist in Lewis's science fiction trilogy, is called a "scientist" (43)—the essays generally display a solid understanding of Lewis's life and thought. At their best, they give penetrating expression to Lewis's central ideas and introduce readers to new and stimulating avenues of exploration. Even more importantly, by connecting his insights with the daily realities of gospel living, the book presents Lewis as a source of encouragement and practical help.

—Bruce W. Young