

Section 113

Section 113 answers questions about passages of Isaiah (chapters 11 and 52). It was recorded in Joseph’s Scriptorium Book in 1838 after Joseph moved to Missouri, but Joseph had been thinking about the meaning of Isaiah 11 since 1823, when Moroni began teaching him.¹

Imagine being an obscure, poorly educated “boy of no consequence,” as Joseph described his teenage self (Joseph Smith—History 1:22). Seventeen-year-old Joseph prayed for forgiveness and an angel appeared. He started quoting and paraphrasing scripture: Malachi, Joel, Acts, and all of Isaiah 11, among others. He returned again and again that night and then again the next day, repeating Isaiah 11 each time, saying it was just about to be fulfilled.

That chapter invites readers to imagine a man named Jesse as a tree. Jesse is the father of the Israelite King David in the Old Testament. God promised David that the Messiah would occupy his throne forever (2 Samuel 7:13; Luke 1:32). Isaiah 11 is about the genealogy (families are often represented as trees) of the rightful king of Israel. It also says that someone related to Jesse and Ephraim will raise an ensign (a signal, a standard, a rally point) for the gathering of the Lord’s people in the latter days.

¹ “[Questions and Answers, between circa 16 and circa 29 March 1838—A \[D&C 113:1–6\]](#),” 17, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 25, 2020.

Now imagine that you are Joseph six years later, age 24, translating what's now 2 Nephi 21, the entire text of Isaiah 11. How much of it do you understand by now? Fast-forward to age 32. It has been 15 years since Moroni first quoted Isaiah 11 to you. You know what it means by now. It has been the story of your life. You have since seen the prophecies fulfilled, received the priesthood and its keys to gather the scattered remnants of Israel "to return them to the Lord from whence they have fallen," to be their revelator, and to bring again Zion (D&C 113:8–10).

It's not clear whether Joseph or someone else posed the question in D&C 113:1—*Who is the stem of Jesse, the tree trunk, spoken of in Isaiah 11?* The clear answer, however, is Jesus Christ. Scholars generally interpret that entire passage to refer to the same Messianic figure, but Joseph did not. Joseph had learned to see himself as the rod or branch that would grow out from the trunk, Jesus Christ. He said so cryptically rather than explicitly. But by age 32, if not at 17, Joseph knew what Moroni knew: Joseph was "a servant in the hands of Christ . . . on whom there is laid much power, . . . the priesthood, and the keys of the kingdom, for an ensign, and for the gathering" of the Lord's people in the latter days (D&C 113: 4, 6). Section 113 also answers Elias Higbee's questions about Isaiah 52, interpreting some of the symbolism in terms of D&C section 86 and what Joseph had learned by revelation about priesthood, Zion, and the gathering of Israel.

The Book of Mormon identified Joseph as a descendant of Joseph of Egypt (2 Nephi 3:6–16). When Joseph's father gave him a patriarchal blessing in 1834, it said:

I bless thee with the blessings of thy fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and even the blessings of thy father Joseph, the son of Jacob. Behold, he looked after his posterity in the last days, when they should be scattered and driven by the Gentiles, and wept before the Lord: he sought diligently to know from whence the son should come who should bring forth the word of the Lord, by which they might be enlightened, and brought back to the true fold, and his eyes beheld thee, my son: his heart rejoiced and his soul was satisfied.²

² "[Blessing from Joseph Smith Sr., 9 December 1834](#)," 3, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 25, 2020.

It is not clear exactly when Joseph understood himself to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies of a servant of Christ who would establish a gathering place for Israel and bring again Zion. The recording of section 113 in early 1838 testifies that these ideas were on his mind then. The Church was in upheaval. Joseph was trying to exercise the priesthood keys he had recently received to loose the scattered Israelites from the bands around their necks and bring them to Zion (D&C 110 and 113:8–10).