
“LET THE METAPHORS
SPEAK TO YOU”

An LDS Commentary on Isaiah

ANN N. MADSEN

Dedicated to those who live in the time about which Isaiah prophesied

Isaiah 14

14:1. The gathering of Israel in this verse logically follows the destruction of Babylon at the end of the preceding chapter [note “once again” which could mean a second time or perhaps even our time]. The Joseph Smith Translation of Isaiah 13:22 and 2 Nephi 23:22 connect Isaiah 13:22 and Isaiah 14:1. In 539 BC, Persia defeated Babylon and allowed the Jews, who had dwelt in various cities made up of slaves, to return home. “Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob” means that Gentiles will be grafted in. Compare Isaiah 66:20 and also Jacob 5.

14:2. In the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith Translation, “them” appears to refer to possession of lands of promise.

14:4. Verses 4–21 are known as the “Taunt Song” against Babylon. Pride and arrogance are personified by the ruler of Babylon, probably Nebuchadnezzar.

14:9. In verses 9–11, the scene moves from the earth to the spirits of the dead in the underworld (*she’ol*).

14:11. See NRSV translation. The king of Babylon is subject to the putrefying decay of death.

14:12. The imagery in verses 12–15 moves from the underworld to heaven, where the prideful king of Babylon, now described as Lucifer, “son of the morning” or “morning star,” desires to ascend higher than God. Lucifer literally means “the shining one.” The name Lucifer appears only once in the Bible in this verse (Isaiah 14:12). See also Luke 10:18. The imagery of verses 12–15 appears to be connected with the

premortal rebellion and fall of Satan. There is a natural transition in verse 12 where Nebuchadnezzar [the king of Babylon] was directly connected with Lucifer, who have each “been cast down” and whose focus was once to “lay low the nations!”

14:13. In the Canaanite religion, the gods met on Mount Cassius, or Mount Zaphon (Hebrew for “north”), in Syria. Lucifer is pictured in that setting as a rebellious member of the Canaanite divine council of gods.

14:16. Verses 16–21 return to the theme of Lucifer as an unburied corpse, a sign of disgrace in ancient Israel. Israel’s neighbors believed an unburied corpse caused the spirit to become a wanderer in the earth. These verses thus depict Lucifer as a powerless, unembodied spirit.

14:17. The king of Babylon refused to let his prisoners go, providing a parallel with Satan in 2 Nephi 9:8–11. Satan also refuses to give his captives their agency.

14:19. See NRSV translation. In the NIV, it reads, “But you are cast out of your tomb like a rejected branch.” This image appears to describe a dead corpse covered by other bodies of the dead.

14:21. The image of desolate Babylon returns. The names of the king and his descendants are forgotten. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:30–49 for a description of the destination of Satan and his followers or “offspring” in Outer Darkness.

14:23. See NRSV translation. “Bittern” = “hedgehog” (NSRV) or “owl” (NIV). “Besom” = “broom.”

14:24. Isaiah 14:34 begins a prophecy against Assyria. In antiquity, oaths were binding and were rarely broken. An oath sworn by God is incontrovertible. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:39–40.

14:25. Verses 24–27 move the prophecy of judgment from Babylon back to Assyria. In Isaiah 10:30, Assyria’s progress is halted at the Mount of Olives (at the village Nob), where Assyria is then hewn down or trodden under foot.

14:26. Like Babylon in Isaiah 13:11, Assyria apparently symbolizes the whole world.

14:27. See footnote for Isaiah 5:25, which describes the image of the outstretched hand.

14:29. Isaiah warns the Philistines that the weakening of the Assyrians prophesied in verses 24–27 will not eliminate them as oppressors. Although Assyria was momentarily distracted by Babylonian revolts,

a revived Assyria would defeat the Philistines in circa 711 BC. Babylon would later emerge as a world power and attack Philistia in circa 604 BC.

14:30. The poor of Judah will be safe, while the mighty ones of Philistia will fall by famine.

14:31. The ancient city gate symbolized the strength of the entire city. When the gate was compromised, the city was doomed. The Assyrians would come against the Philistines in response to their revolt in circa 711 BC. See Isaiah 20:1–6.

14:32. In the NIV, it reads, “What answer shall be given to the envoys of that nation? The LORD has established Zion, and in her his afflicted people will find refuge.” The Book of Mormon changes the plural “nations,” and this reading is similar to the Dead Sea Scrolls change to the plural “kings.”

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