
“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 28

Wo to the northern kingdom, which is always at odds with the southern kingdom of Judah and her prophet Isaiah, who calls Ephraim “a fading flower” that has been a glorious wreath.

28:2. Verses 2 and 3 likely refer to Assyria, who “like a driving rain” and a “flooding downpour,” have become a tool in the hands of the LORD to conquer the northern kingdom, which happened in circa 701 BC.

28:5–6. In verses 5–6 the fading wreath of flowers, described in verses 1 and 3, is compared to a beautiful wreath that crowns the heads of the righteous remnant.

28:6. In our time, who are those who turn back the battle at the gate if it isn’t parents at the doors of their homes?

28:7–8. These verses describe how leaders, priests and prophets, are befuddled with wine and reel from beer and are no longer able to render just decisions. To emphasize this, the metaphor is “*All* the tables are covered with vomit and there is not a spot without filth.” Is this not a powerful metaphor? Picture it. Smell it.

28:9–10. In these verses the prophet bewails trying to teach those who ironically fail to give attention to his words. Like children, it becomes nonsense when they do not listen. What is the answer to the question that 28:9 asks? Who is he trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message?

28:10–11. See NRSV translation for verses 10–11. Second Nephi 28:30 teaches that the LORD will provide gospel truth line upon line, precept upon precept. Isaiah, however, is describing the opposite movement, from mature learning to childish language (see verse 11). This was possibly a nursery rhyme for children, using simple, childlike sounds. In Hebrew, it reads “tsav letsav, tsar letsav; qav leqav; ze’er sham ze’er sham.”

28:11. The failure of God’s people to understand the message (verse 9) will eventually lead to their conquest by a foreign people who speak with a foreign tongue.

28:13. Isaiah states that the word of the LORD was to them like childish talk. They would therefore fall backward like a toddling child.

28:14–19. These verses form a chiasm. Chiasmus is a form of Hebrew poetry that takes the shape of the letter *chi* (X). The focus of a chiasm is usually at the center (see verse 16: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, for a sure foundation”).

28:15. In verse 15 Jehovah describes their boast of having entered into a “covenant with death” and hell. They believe they are untouchable, hidden safely behind their lies.

28:16–17. Isaiah, as well as other ancient prophets, used architectural metaphors to teach of Christ. The cornerstone of a building or the keystone of an arch come readily to mind.

28:17. Justice is the measuring line; righteousness is the plumb line.

28:20. The image of a too-short bed and a too-narrow blanket perhaps reinforces the notion that lies never provide refuge.

28:21. Isaiah uses two stories to show God’s power: 2 Samuel 5:20 (Mount Perazim) and Joshua 10:11 (Valley of Gibeon).

28:22. After the destruction decreed against the whole land, compare Isaiah 24 and the summary of the devastation of the whole earth.

28:23–28. Isaiah changes focus to give the parable of the plowman, using farming imagery to show how God works with his children. This is similar to Jacob 5.

28:26. The LORD is the one who decides on the time and season, and we need to look to the LORD and pay attention. The harvest is the perfect metaphor; you don't keep planting when it's time to harvest, and you don't harvest when it's time to plant (Ecclesiastes 3).

28:29. God, who deals in this same way with his children, is the one who has inspired the plowman. All of us are moving at a different rate, so we can't judge each other. Only God can help us.

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