
“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 34

Isaiah 34–35 provide a summary of Isaiah’s teachings about God’s sovereignty. Isaiah 34 shows a beautiful land turned to desert, demonstrating the results of rebellion against God. Isaiah 35 shows a desert turning into a garden and describes a highway of holiness, demonstrating the outcome of trust in the LORD.

Chapter 34 begins by inviting *all* the nations of the world to listen and pay attention because the LORD is angry, and he will totally destroy them. See Isaiah 24.

34:4. A scroll rolls itself up when not held open to read and is rolled up when the reading is complete. The image of the whole cosmos being shaken is repeated frequently in scripture. Note that the stars will fall and be dissolved like withered leaves and shriveled figs. A rolled-up scroll would be dark inside.

34:5. Idumea, or Edom, as it is rendered in the New Revised Standard Version, is used throughout the Bible in contrast to the righteous. See Doctrine and Covenants 1:36, where Idumea is defined as “the world.” God’s judgment continues as the metaphor of a sword that descends on Edom or Idumea, which have been totally destroyed.

34:6. The destruction of the wicked is compared to temple sacrifices, in which an animal is proxy for a man’s sins.

Jehovah’s sword is bathed in blood and covered with fat,
the blood of lambs and goats,
fat from the kidneys of rams.
For Jehovah has a sacrifice in Bozrah
and a great slaughter in Edom.

It will be a land drenched in blood and soaked with fat from sacrificial animals.

34:9. This verse describes Edom’s burning pitch and sulfur.

The land south of the Dead Sea has bubbled for centuries with black, blazing pitch—it is traditionally the land of Sodom and Gomorrah. The idea behind this is that its smoke will rise forever; from generation to generation, and it will lie desolate. No one will ever pass through it again.

34:11–17. These verses describe an empty place where desert creatures, including solitary owls, will reproduce. Then abruptly, verse 16 returns to the scroll image, the scroll of Jehovah, and how not one of these creatures will lack her mate. Is this describing metaphorically temple pairings? “For it is his mouth that has given the order and spirit that will gather them together.”

34:17.

He allots their portions for judgment.
His hand distributes them by measure.
They will possess it forever
And dwell there from generation to generation.

There is no break between chapters 34 and 35. These images together suggest that they will be glad, and the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus. They will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God (this could refer to seeing the splendor of latter-day temples).

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