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“LET THE METAPHORS  
SPEAK TO YOU”

An LDS Commentary on Isaiah

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ANN N. MADSEN

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

## Isaiah 7–9

In these three chapters search for prophecies of the Savior.<sup>1</sup> Also note the references to Isaiah’s family. Finally, observe the second reference to a recurring concept: “yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.”

Isaiah 7 begins with an account of a war against Judah (the country) by Syria and Israel (the country) circa 734–732 BC. The names of people and places can be confusing. I suggest that you create a small chart with four columns for (1) Kingdom, (2) King, (3) Capital, and (4) “Also known as,” and then fill it in as you read.<sup>2</sup>

Judah (Also known as the southern Kingdom or simply Judah or the House of David.)

Syria (Also Known as Aram.)

Israel (Also known as The Northern Kingdom or Ephraim.)

You will soon grow accustomed to the changeable names of these countries, their capitals and kings as the story unfolds.

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<sup>1</sup> See Isaiah 9:6–7, for example.

<sup>2</sup> You can check it against the chart in Ann N. Madsen and Shon D. Hopkin, *Opening Isaiah: A Harmony* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2018), 24.

**7:2.** What do you picture? Two tiny countries joining forces to conquer Judah? How does Judah's king react? Do his people feel the same? It looks hopeless but what happens?

The LORD Jehovah appears to Isaiah and sends him to meet King Ahaz, the king of Judah, with a message.

**7:4, 7.** Only these two “smoking firebrands” (torches that are about to be extinguished) have threatened Judah and each mention of them is almost sarcastic. The “only” added to the names of their kings reflects their powerlessness.

The reason for the war was to place a puppet king on the throne of Judah, named Tabeal, who would join Israel and Syria in their rebellion against the larger Assyrian forces descending on them from the north.

The following scriptures are particularly interesting as “layer-cake” prophecies, referring to more than one fulfillment at different times. Ahaz brazenly refuses to ask for a sign when Isaiah invites him, which disgusts Isaiah since he is a messenger from the LORD. A sign is given concerning a young virgin.

**7:14.**

1. At the time of Ahaz, a young, unmarried girl (“Almah”) bears a son. (“Almah” is literally a young, unmarried girl, who in that culture would need to be a virgin).
2. The New Testament, Matthew 1:23, applies this prophecy to the birth of Jesus. Both interpretations apply. Thus, this is one example of a layer-cake prophecy because it applies to two events, each in another time and place.
3. The next few verses describe this child who would know enough to reject wrong and choose the right (we would assume that to be about eight years old).

**7:16–18.** Thus, Isaiah gives a time when they will no longer need to worry about Ephraim and Syria because they will be laid waste by Assyria.

**7:17.** But then Jehovah explains that the king of Assyria will also come to them and uses the metaphor of flies and bees to represent Egypt and Assyria who will come and “settle in the steep ravines and in the crevices in the rocks.” And refers to the king of Assyria as “a razor from beyond the river to shave your head and the hair of your legs and to take off your beards also,” which denotes slavery.

**7:22.** This verse predicts that “all who remain in the land will eat curds and honey,” which means they are poor and must go to the woods for hollow logs and rocks where wild honey is found. They would also eat curds and milk from a cow or a goat.

**7:24–25.** This passage speaks of the hungry people going into this barren land with bows and arrows and “all the hills once cultivated by the hoe will be so no longer. They will become places where cattle are turned loose and sheep run.”

**8:1.** “Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz” means “quick to the plunder and swift to the spoil.” Plunder and spoil describe what was carried back by a conquering army.

**8:3; Hebrew *neviah*.** Isaiah refers to his wife as a prophetess. Miriam, the sister of Moses (Exodus 15:20), and Deborah (Judges 4:4) are other biblical women referred to as *neviah*.

Then Isaiah “obediently” goes into his wife (the prophetess), and the son that is born to them is to be named “Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.” And again, the two nations that Judah is not to fear, symbolized by Damascus and Samaria, “will be carried off by the king of Assyria before their son knows how to say, ‘my mother, my father.’”

**8:4.** Although Isaiah had warned Ahaz to avoid alliances with other nations, he chose to make a treaty with mighty Assyria to protect Judah from the Israelite and Syrian coalition. This treaty with Assyria apparently protected Judah from Assyrian conquest later.<sup>3</sup>

**8:6.** These are waters from the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley that flowed through a tunnel built by Hezekiah to assure his people a water supply in case of siege. The water was collected in a pool that would known in New Testament times as the pool of Siloam (Greek for Shiloah).

**8:7.** Assyria is symbolized by the mighty Euphrates River, contrasted in these verses with the much smaller waters of Shiloah.

**8:9.** In the NIV, it reads, “Prepare for battle, and be shattered . . . for God is with us.”

**8:10.** In Hebrew, “Immanuel” means “God is with us.”

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<sup>3</sup> This is described in 2 Kings 16:5–9.

**8:12.** The Joseph Smith Translation reads, “Say ye not, a confederacy, to all [. . .] to whom this people shall say, a confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid.”

**8:13.** “Sanctify Jehovah of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” “Fear” in Hebrew is translated “deep awe” or “reverence” in English. “Dread” indicates trembling, either in fear or in awe.

**8:16.** The LORD commands that his warning message be written so that it can be remembered. The scroll on which he has written would then be rolled up and sealed.

**8:18.** Isaiah whose name means *Jehovah saves*, and two of his sons, Shear-jashub, whose name means *a remnant shall return*, and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, whose name means *quick to the plunder and swift to the spoil*, all represent prophecies.

**9:1.** Zebulun and Naphtali were located in the Galilee region, where Jesus would be born. They were often in turmoil because the Way of the Sea (*via Maris*), one of the two main highways connecting Mesopotamia and Egypt, passed through them and was used when kings of the ancient Near East went to war. The other highway, the Way of the Kings, turned inland through the valley of Megiddo before continuing south.

**9:2.** The great light will be further discussed in 9:6. The verses between 2 and 6 may refer to the Atonement and introduce us to the famous verses that Handel chose for his Messiah. The chapter continues discussing the pride of Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria.

**9:4.** Verse 4 refers to “the day of Midian’s defeat” as described in Judges 7:19–23. The word “shattered” fits perfectly with this defeat of the Midianites. Gideon’s three hundred men shattered pottery jars, which concealed lighted lamps, causing the Midianites to think they were surrounded by a larger army.

**9:6.** Note that there is no comma between “wonderful” and “counselor”—“wonderful” is an adjective to “counselor.” We generally assume there is a pause there because there is a pause between the words in Handel’s *Messiah*, but Handel was fitting the words to his music.

**9:7.** Note again the pairing of “justice” and “righteousness.” “From that time on and *forever*” assures us that the LORD Almighty will be successful. The “zeal” of the LORD (Hebrew, *gin’ah*) means “ardor” or “strong desire.”

**9:11.** Verse 11 discusses how the LORD has strengthened Israel’s enemies, the Arameans from the East, and Philistines from the West who have “devoured Israel with open mouth.”

**9:12.** Watch for Isaiah’s frequent repetition of this phrase, which appears here for the second of five times.

**9:14–15.** These verses explain who will be cut off from Israel. Verse 15 explains that “the elders and prominent men are the head. The prophets who teach lies are the tail.”

**9:17.** Note *everyone* is ungodly and wicked, *every* mouth speaks vileness (see the reference to “unclean lips” in Isaiah 6). This is the third of five times we hear “yet for all this his anger is not turned away but his hand is stretched out still.”

**9:18.** A precise description of wickedness burning like fire, which consumes briars and thorns.

**9:19–20.** The land will be “scorched.” See also Isaiah 1:31: “The mighty man will become tinder, and his work a spark, and then both will burn together with no one to quench the fire.” It also states, “No one will spare his brother. On the right they will devour but still be hungry. On the left they will eat but not be satisfied.” The metaphor is eating: “devour,” “hungry,” “eat,” and “feed.” The verse expands our knowledge of the consequence of sin; it never satisfies. Note the poetic parallel.

The chapter ends with the fourth repetition of “yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.”

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