
“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 3

Isaiah 3 continues the LORD's expressions of disfavor with Jerusalem and Judah. He will take away both "stay and staff" simply meaning that He is removing His support from them, specifically the whole staff of bread and the whole stay of water (according to the King James Version and 2 Nephi 13:1). This results in a siege as practiced in ancient warfare; without access to food and water, a city cannot survive.

3:3. This list describes the upper class who are carried away by those who have conquered them. Judah's enemies will deport these people not only so they can serve them but also to avoid rebellion in the newly subdued land. These deportations leave only the poor to govern the land, including women and children, which the next verses explain.

3:5. Have you ever experienced anything like that or read accounts of it in the news? Isaiah 3:6 cites a specific case where being more prosperous—having a coat—qualifies a person to lead. How many of the politicians we read about today are extremely prosperous? The incident ends with the nominated man with a coat giving his reasons for not wishing to serve.

3:8–9. The Book of Mormon and Dead Sea Scrolls both add *and* in these verses.

Ponder here Alma's question in Alma 5:14 as he teaches in Zarahemla.

Have ye spiritually been born of God?

Have ye received His image in your *countenances*?

Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

One might conclude from these verses that our very countenance will be a living witness for or against us. Even now, our eyes either shine from a light within or they don't. We recognize the light in others, especially as that light grows brighter in those discovering the truth. The light is palpable and discernible to all we interact with.

Christ explained it this way in John 8:12: "I am the *light* of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the *light* of life."

Remember studying the invitation after the temple references in Isaiah 2:5?

O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the *light* of the LORD.

Note also Doctrine and Covenants 138:24, where President Joseph F. Smith describes the righteous in the spirit world on bended knee who "rejoiced in their redemption."

Their countenances shone, and the radiance from the presence of the LORD rested upon them, and they sang praises to his holy name.

In other words, people will be known both by their fruits, but also by the light of their countenances.

Isaiah delights in juxtaposing opposites in this way, so watch for this practice as you read.

The next section from Isaiah 3:16 to 4:4 is a scathing description of haughty, wealthy women of the time, dressed to attract attention, many wearing the tingling ankle bracelets associated with guards keeping track of women in a harem. The NIV describes the scene, which is used as a symbol of the vanity of *both* the men and women of Jerusalem.

The NIV renders Isaiah 3:16 this way: "The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, strutting along with swaying hips, with ornaments jingling on their ankles."

As Isaiah continues, he paints a picture of what will happen to these women in another lengthy example of juxtaposed opposites. The wealthy woman, perhaps a princess, is contrasted with a slave girl with none of the trappings of the rich. Instead, she is bald, branded, dressed in torn sack cloth, and half naked. This is a familiar metaphor that we see on our TVs today as homeless women are juxtaposed with the very rich who glitter with diamonds and gold jewelry and have closets bulging with many "changeable suits of apparel."

3:24.

Instead of fragrance [perfume], there will be a stench
Instead of a sash, a rope,
Instead of well-dressed hair, baldness.
Instead of fine clothing, sackcloth
Instead of beauty, branding. (New International Version)

This is clearly the image of a rich woman, perhaps a princess, reduced to being a and forced into servitude. She who, in the past, had many to serve her, is now being forced to serve others.

We learn details about the culture of the day in these lines and those that surround them. Slave's heads were often shaved, thus the reference to "baldness." Slaves' clothing was made of a coarse cloth made of black goat's hair which was thick and rough, used for sacks and also worn by mourners and those wishing to repent. It is often referred to in connection with slaves and mourning and is part of the common biblical phrase "sackcloth and ashes."¹

What of "instead of beauty, branding?" This is similar to our branding of cattle to declare ownership, which would again declare this woman with shaven head and a mark burned on her to be a slave owned by a certain master.

The description of Jerusalem's downfall continues in Isaiah 3:25–26.

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¹ Douglas Estes, "Sackcloth," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).