
“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 6

To understand the context of his inspired utterances, open Isaiah 6 and read the circumstances of his divine call to prophesy and let him communicate with you.

Then search Isaiah's own words in Isaiah 1 and prayerfully, slowly, study what he has for you there.

6:1–4. In Isaiah 6:1–4, Isaiah sees the LORD and volunteers to be sent as His prophet and messenger.

King Uzziah died circa 740 BC. Isaiah 6:1–4 describes the prophet's encounter with Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, sitting on the mercy seat, His throne, in the holy of holies of Solomon's temple. Two gigantic seraphim (Hebrew, "Burning ones" or "Beings of Light") were on either side of the mercy seat.

The Hebrew language does not include words for "more" or "most." Instead, Hebrew writers repeated the word they wished to emphasize, doubling or tripling the original word.

Repeating *holy* three times is the Hebrew way of emphasizing God's absolute holiness. In English it might have been translated as "most holy."

It is important to note that when LORD is printed in all caps it is a translation of *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*, the God of the Old Testament. When you see the name LORD, translate it in your mind as Jehovah, who will later become Jesus Christ.

One explanation of the many wings of the seraphim is suggested in Doctrine and Covenants 77:4, which discusses John’s vision at the end of the New Testament book called Revelation.

Q. What are we to understand by the eyes and *wings*, which the beasts had?

A. Their eyes are a representation of light and knowledge, that is, they are full of knowledge; and *their wings are a representation of power, to move, to act, etc.*

Since the setting for Isaiah’s vision is Solomon’s temple, the room would have been filled with smoke from the altar of incense at the foot of the stairs just below the holy of holies.

6:5–8. Isaiah knew that no unclean thing could survive the presence of God. He lamented that he was a man of “unclean lips” and said “I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips,” and “*mine eyes have seen the LORD.*”

As Latter-day Saints we have Joseph Smith’s account of the First Vision which is similar to Isaiah’s experience in Isaiah 6. Joseph saw the LORD, as Isaiah did. One meaning of “unclean lips” might have been that the people of Isaiah’s time were covenant breakers—they had professed belief but not lived it.

The burning stone from the altar of incense touching Isaiah’s lips and taking away his “iniquity,” purging and burning his sin away, might represent the infinite Atonement which permits each of us to have our sins purged by the Holy Ghost.

In Isaiah 6:8 Isaiah adds that he “heard the voice of the LORD,” asking “whom shall I send and who shall go for *us*?” And, unlike his “woe is me” earlier, he answered immediately, “Here am I, send me,” volunteering to deliver the LORD’s message. The Hebrew for “here am I” is *hinenni*, which means “behold me, here am I.” This is the expression a servant would use to address his king or master; these are also the words of Christ in the pre-existence when the plan of salvation was proposed (see Abraham 3:27). This plan included an atoning sacrifice, and these words were used by many other prophets when addressing the LORD. It is the Hebrew way of saying, “Thy will be done.” It is declaring the intention to act.

Both the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith Translation add a *they* before “understood not” and “perceived not” in 6:9:

Hear ye indeed, but *they* understood not.

See ye indeed, but *they* perceived not.

This emphasizes that people choose whether to understand or perceive. To further clarify, 6:10 in both the Septuagint and New Testament are descriptive rather than the imperative “make.”¹

The final verses of this chapter suggest a scattering, “and the LORD have removed men far away,” and a gathering, “but yet, there shall be a tenth, and they shall return.”

Thus, we begin to notice how Isaiah sees the larger plan and touches on it early in his writings.

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¹ For the New Testament example of this, see Matthew 13:13–17, which itself likely draws from the Septuagint.