Ominous Onomastics

Symbolic Naming and Paronomasia
in Old Testament Prophecy

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Symbolic names and naming constituted an important part of what Nephi called "the manner of prophesying among the Jews" (2 Nephi 25:1). Recognizing how ancient Israelite prophecy and its fulfillment revolve around names and naming is indispensable to grasping the overarching messages of the prophets whose writings are preserved in the Hebrew Bible.

In this chapter I will describe how the Lord directed Hosea and Isaiah to bestow symbolic names on their children and how the meaning of those names took on thematic importance in the prophets' writings. These names become recurring symbols of divine justice and mercy—of divine destruction, gathering, and protection. Moreover, I will attempt to show that symbolic naming (including the giving of "new names") and onomastic punning—i.e., name exploitation[1] or giving an existing name new meaning—constitute salient

features of the prophecies of most of the written prophets, including Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Zephaniah, and Obadiah, among others.

Isaiah: "I and the Children Whom the Lord Hath Given Me"

The first mention of a symbolic name for the first of Isaiah's sons mentioned in the text comes in Isaiah 7:3: "Then said the Lord unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and *Shear-jashub* [*šě'ār yāšûb*] thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field" (emphasis added).[2] Two elements comprise the name Shear-jashub: the noun *šě'ār*, "remnant" and the third-person masculine imperfect verbal element *yāšûb* "[he/it] shall return," thus "a remnant shall return." The first part of the name, "remnant," emphasizes divine justice or judgment. The Lord will permit the consequences of Israel and Judah's covenant infidelity to overtake them and they will be largely destroyed, smitten, and scattered. However, the second part of the name emphasizes divine mercy: the opportunity for "repentance" or a "return." The Lord's covenant is thus not completely disannulled. Israel and Judah will have a remnant of the "ransomed" or "redeemed of the Lord" that eventually "*shall return* [*yěšûbûn*] and come with singing unto Zion" (Isaiah 35:10; 52:11).

The text of Isaiah does not give full expression to this symbol in prophecy until Isaiah 10:19–22, where he prophesies concerning a "remnant" of Israel that would survive the Assyrian exile and eventually "return":

> And *the rest* [*šě'ār, remnant*] of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them.
>
> And it shall come to pass in that day, that *the remnant* [*šě'ār*] of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob,

shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall
stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

 The remnant shall return [*šěʾār yāšûb*], even the *remnant*
[*šěʾār*] of Jacob, unto the mighty God.

 For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet
a remnant of them shall return [*šěʾār yāšûb*]: the consumption
decreed shall overflow with righteousness. (Isaiah 10:19–22)

Joseph Smith recognized the importance of the Shear-jashub
theme. In March 1838, he answered "certain questions on the writings
of Isaiah . . . at or near Far West, Missouri."[3] These answers were later
canonized in Doctrine and Covenants section 113. The final question
in this section pertained specifically to Isaiah 52:2: "What are we to
understand by Zion loosing herself from the bands of her neck; 2d
verse?" (D&C 113:9). Joseph's answer notably incorporated the mean-
ing of the name Shear-jashub and the prophecy of Isaiah 10:19–22:

> We are to understand that the scattered *remnants* are
> exhorted to *return* to the Lord from whence they have fallen;
> which if they do, the promise of the Lord is that he will speak
> to them, or give them revelation. See the 6th, 7th, and 8th
> verses. The bands of her neck are the curses of God upon her,
> or the *remnants* of Israel in their scattered condition among
> the Gentiles. (D&C 113:10)

Joseph Smith evidently interpreted "the captive daughter of Zion"
or "Zion" in terms of the "remnant" mentioned elsewhere in Isaiah
(see hereafter). Importantly, Isaiah 52:8, the last verse used in the
Prophet's explanation, employs the verb *šûb/yāšûb*: "for they shall
see eye to eye, *when the Lord shall bring again Zion* [*běšûb yhwh
ṣiyyôn*]." As John A. Oswalt notes, "The phrase 'the Lord's return-
ing of Zion' [*běšûb yhwh ṣiyyôn*] can be taken as either an objective
genitive or a subjective genitive: the Lord's returning of Zion or the

Lord's returning to Zion."[4] The KJV and the Book of Mormon both follow the former interpretation.

The Shear-jashub theme resurfaces in a prominent way in Isaiah 11, a text which Moroni recited to Joseph Smith three times during the night intervening between 21 and 22 September 1823 and once more the following morning.[5] Isaiah prophesied that Israel and Judah's "remnant" would be gathered from every part of the earth: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover *the remnant* [*šĕʾār*] *of his people, which shall be left* [*ʾăšer yiššāʾēr*] *from Assyria* [*mēʾaššûr*], and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea" (Isaiah 11:11; cf. v. 12). The language of Isaiah's prophecy not only plays on the name of his son Shear-jashub ("a remnant shall return"), but it describes in vivid terms the nature of the remnant's return. Isaiah declares that the Lord himself will be the agent that gathers Israel and Judah and causes their "return" or restoration, which is a major theme in prophets, the Book of Mormon, and, to an extent, the New Testament.

The same alliterative paronomasia (i.e., "playing on the sounds and meanings of words"[6]) is repeated for emphasis a few verses later: "And there shall be an highway for *the remnant* [*šĕʾār*] *of his people, which shall be left* [*ʾăšer yiššāʾēr*], *from Assyria* [*mēʾaššûr*]; *like* [*kaʾăšer*] as it was to *Israel* in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt" (Isaiah 11:16). In piling on the alliterative wordplay, Isaiah further transforms the name of his son, Shear-jashub, into a prophecy of a second exodus from a symbolic seven nations (including Assyria and Egypt) and the "isles of the sea" mentioned in verse 11.[7]

Isaiah 8 gives us a brief account of the birth and naming of Isaiah's son Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Isaiah informs us that the Lord commanded him to give his son this name, which means something like "to speed the spoil, he hastens the prey"[8] or as many modern

translators and commentaries render it, "the spoil speeds, the prey hastens" (*mahēr šālāl ḥāš baz*, Isaiah 8:1–3). In any case, this symbolic name foretells "imminent destruction." The Lord then states the first event that the name symbolizes: "For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the *spoil* [*šĕlal*] of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria" (Isaiah 8:1–4). The name thus constitutes a divine promise of the imminent destruction of Syria (with its capital, Damascus) and the northern kingdom of Israel (with its capital, Samaria) at the hands of the Assyrians.

As with the name Shear-jashub, Isaiah withholds further prophetic exploitation of Maher-shalal-hash-baz's name until Isaiah 10, where he abruptly returns to the themes of spoil and prey. In doing so, Isaiah describes the sinful conditions that he saw pervading Israelite and Judahite society: "Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; to turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows *may be their prey* [*may be their spoil*], and that they may rob [make a prey of] the fatherless!" (Isaiah 10:1–2). The KJV obscures the link between the verbs Isaiah uses and the name of his son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Israel and Judah have sped to the widow as their spoil and made orphans their prey—i.e., they have exploited their societies' most vulnerable people.

Consequently, the Lord will send a commensurate punishment upon Israel in the form of Assyria: "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, *to take the spoil* [*lišĕlōl šālāl*] *and to take the prey* [*lābōz baz*] *and to tread them down like the mire of the streets*" (Isaiah 10:5–6). The name Maher-shalal-hash-baz thus becomes a sign of Israel's enemies speeding to the spoil and hastening to their prey—i.e., of Israel's imminent destruction. Similar allusions to

Maher-shalal-hash-baz recur throughout Isaiah: "Thy tacklings are loosed; they could not well strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail: then is the prey of a great *spoil* divided; the lame take *the prey*" (Isaiah 33:23; see also 42:22).

One of the "sons" with symbolic names mentioned in Isaiah 7–10, the eighth-century BCE "Immanuel," may have been a son of Ahaz, a son of Isaiah, or the son of someone else. Isaiah 7:14 reports the birth of a "son" named Immanuel: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin [*hāʿalmâ*] shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." The name Immanuel transparently denotes "With us is God" or "God with us."

In view of this name's meaning, Matthew cites Isaiah 7:14 as a prophecy of Jesus Christ as Messiah (see Matthew 1:22–23). Matthew recognized that Jesus represented "God" (Yahweh) being "with us" (with the human family) in the flesh. Many Latter-day Saints have been content to simply read Isaiah 7:14 exclusively as a prophecy of Jesus Christ without considering the historical context of this prophecy described in Isaiah 7–10 or the prophecy's broader theological implications for the Davidic dynasty. Joseph Jensen suggests that the ʿalmâ "referred to is a wife of Ahaz, and the son to be born would be of a child of Ahaz; as such, he would be a guarantee of the continuation of the Davidic dynasty, to which perpetuity has been promised (2 Samuel 7) and from which great things had been expected."[9]

From a temporal standpoint, the Davidic dynasty ended with deposed kings Jehoiachin and his uncle Zedekiah in exile in Babylon. However, Matthew recognized that as a promise of divine protection for Judah and the Davidic dynasty, Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy inevitably pertained to the Messiah as David's descendant ("son of David") and thus to Jesus himself. Isaiah promised that Judah and the Davidic dynasty would not be destroyed: "And he [the king of Assyria, symbolized as the Euphrates] shall pass through Judah;

he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, *O Immanuel* [ʿ*immānû* ʾ*ēl*]" (Isaiah 8:8). Confederates Israel and Syria would not succeed in their attempt to end the Davidic dynasty: "Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for *God is with us* [ʿ*immānû* ʾ*ēl*]" (Isaiah 8:10).

The "us" in the name Immanuel evokes both the divine council "us" of Isaiah 6:8,[10] and the "us" mentioned in the birth of divine son of Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a child is born, unto us son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor [i.e., Wonderful Counselor], The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." These titles (or variations) are elsewhere used of the Lord himself,[11] suggesting that Isaiah envisioned a Messiah over an imperfect Davidic descendant (like Ahaz).

Isaiah's declaration "I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of Hosts" invites us to consider the function of Isaiah's own name in his prophecies. Recognizing that Isaiah's name means "The Lord is Salvation" helps us to appreciate the distinctive "salvation" motif that pervades the writings of Isaiah as a thematic wordplay on his own name: see Isaiah 12:2–3; 17:10; 25:9; 26:1; 30:15; 33:2, 6, 22; 35:4; 37:20, 35; 38:20; 43:12; 45:8, 17, 20, 22; 46:7, 13, 20; 47:13, 15; 49:6, 8, 25; 51:5–6, 8; 52:7, 10; 56:1; 59:1, 11, 16–17; 60:18; 61:10; 62:1, 11; 63:1, 5, 9; 64:5.

Beyond the symbolic names of Isaiah and the children named in Isaiah 7–10, the theme of giving of new names prevails throughout the Book of Isaiah. This is particularly true near the end of the book. The Lord promises even those traditionally excluded from the temple,[12] such as eunuchs (emasculated males) and the children of foreigners, a "place [*yād*; literally, "hand" or monument] and a name even better than of sons and daughters," even "an everlasting name" in the temple (Isaiah 56:5). The temple would "be called an house of prayer for all

people" and Zion herself would be crowned and receive "*a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name*" (Isaiah 62:2–3). The "new name" is really several "new names":

> Thou shalt no more be termed *Forsaken* [ʿăzûbâ, or "divorced"]; neither shall thy land any more be termed *Desolate* [šĕmāmâ]: but thou shalt be called *Hephzi-bah* [ḥepṣî-bāh = "my delight is in her"], and thy land *Beulah* [bĕʿûlâ = "married"]: for the Lord *delighteth in thee*, and thy land *shall be married* [tibbāʿēl].
>
> For as a young man *marrieth* [yibʿal] a virgin, so shall thy sons *marry* [yibʿālûk] thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee (Isaiah 62:4-5).

The "new names" mentioned and explained here work a lot like the name reversal in the Book of Hosea discussed hereafter in that names that were previously symbols of divine justice are renovated into symbols of divine mercy. Names that describe a felicitous covenant "marriage" relationship (an at-*one*-ment) replace names that describe a broken covenant and the consequences of covenant violations. Moreover, the wordplay on Beulah/bāʿal recalls Israel and Judah's illicit Baal worship (cf. the wordplay on Ishi/Baali in Hosea below). Thus, the description of the land as faithfully "married" to Yahweh uses irony to maximum effect.

Two final "new names" mentioned a few verses later drive at the same effect: "Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, *thy salvation* [yišʿēk] cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord: and thou shalt be called, *Sought out* [dĕrûšâ], *A city not forsaken* [lōʾ neʿĕzābâ]" (Isaiah 62:11–12). Besides offering two additional "new names" that evince the Lord's atoning Israel to himself in mercy, this prophecy also hints at the one who will bring about this reversal. The word yišaʿ ("salvation") hints at the name Isaiah[13] and is the same

salvation mentioned in Isaiah 63:1–2 with its puns on ʾĕdôm in terms of ʾādôm ("red") and other winepress images.

Jeremiah and the "Righteous Branch"

The Book of Jeremiah also features the re-motivation or symbolic transformation of several names. Through punning, he gives the name Tekoa (těqôaʿ, Amos's hometown [Amos 1:1]) new meaning as a symbol of impending disaster using the images of "blowing" (tiqʿû) a trumpet of alarm (Jeremiah 6:1), the "pitching" (tāqʿû) of shepherds' tents (Jeremiah 6:3), and the "disjoining" (tēqaʿ) of the Lord's covenant relationship with Judah (Jeremiah 6:6).[14]

Jeremiah's prophecies, however, ultimately hold out hope for the salvation of Israel through a Davidic scion or a "righteous branch."[15] Since Jeremiah's "branch" prophecies testify of a Messiah, they are arguably the most important in the corpus of his writings:

Jeremiah 23:5–6	Jeremiah 33:15–17
Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a *righteous Branch* [ṣemaḥ ṣaddîq] and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and *justice* [ṣĕdāqâ] in the earth.	In those days, and at that time, *will I cause the Branch of righteousness* [ṣemaḥ ṣĕdāqâ] *to grow up* [ʾaṣmîaḥ] unto David; and he shall execute judgment and *righteousness* [ṣĕdāqâ] in the land.
In his days Judah *shall be saved* [tiwwāšaʿ] and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, *THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS* [yhwh ṣidqēnû].	In those days *shall* Judah *be saved* [tiwwāšaʿ], and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, *The Lord our righteousness* [yhwh ṣidqēnû]. For thus saith the Lord; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel.

On one level, the wordplay on forms of *ṣdq* and the name-title *yhwh ṣidqēnû* echo the name of Zedekiah ("The Lord is Righteousness"), the last regnant king of Judah who was dethroned and exiled to Babylon, but pointing forward to the future Davidic Messiah whose reign would be *actually* be characterized by total "righteousness" (cf. D&C 121:36–46).

In temporal terms, the Davidic dynasty ceased as a political entity with the exile of Jehoiachin and later his uncle Zedekiah to Babylon. Neither Jehoiachin, his son Shealtiel, nor his grandson Zerubbabel reigned as king over Judah, let alone over the whole "the house of Israel." Thus, this prophecy remained to be fulfilled by a future Davidic descendant. In the years after the exile, Zechariah picks up Jeremiah's prophecy of the "branch" ("I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH," Zechariah 3:8) as a discreet way of prophesying of a Davidic restoration, this during a time of Persian hegemony.

Another dramatic example of symbolic renaming occurs after Pashur, a priest and one of the chief temple authorities, has Jeremiah beaten for his prophecies against Jerusalem:

> And it came to pass on the morrow, that Pashur [Pashhur] brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then said Jeremiah unto him, The Lord hath not called thy name Pashur, but *Magor-missabib* [*māgôr-missābîb*, "terror roundabout"].
>
> For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will make thee *a terror* [*māgôr*] to thyself, and to all thy friends: and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and thine eyes shall behold *it*: and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive into Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword. (Jeremiah 20:3–4)

For his treatment of Jeremiah, Pashur receives a name that constitutes a vivid prediction of his fate and the fate of his associates prior to Judah's final exile to Babylon. Jeremiah's subsequent lament alludes

again to this symbolic name: "For I heard the defaming of many, *fear on every side* [*māgôr-missābîb*] Report, *say they*, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, *saying*, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him" (Jeremiah 20:10).

Lastly, Jeremiah employed *Atbash*, a "cryptic code system" or method of symbolic naming wherein "the initial letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*aleph*) [is substituted] with that of the last letter (*tav*). The second letter of the alphabet (*beth*) is replaced by the letter second from the end (*shin*)"[16]—thus Atbash ("*AThBaSh*"). Using this system, Jeremiah renames Babel (*b-b-l*) "Sheshach" (š-š-k) and the Chaldeans (*k-ś-d-y-m*) are rebranded *leb qamay*, "[in] the midst [heart] of them that rise up against me" (Jeremiah 25:26; Jeremiah 51:1, 41).[17] These symbolic names constitute symbols of the Lord's justice overtaking the Babylonians—symbols encoded in such a way so as to mask the meaning from everyone except the initiated, which represents a different type of symbolic naming from the other types of symbolic naming discussed here.

Ezekiel: Yahweh's "Wives"

In Ezekiel 23, Ezekiel describes two symbolic wives of Yahweh in alternating segments.[18] Ezekiel gives us their names and those whom the "wives" symbolically represent: "And the names of them were Aholah the elder, and Aholibah her sister: and they were mine, and they bare sons and daughters. Thus were their names; Samaria is Aholah, and Jerusalem Aholibah" (Ezekiel 23:4). The names, however, constitute symbols in their own right—both with temple significance: Aholah (or Oholah) suggests the meaning "her [cult] tent" or "her tabernacle." The name Aholibah (or Oholibah) suggests the meaning "my [cult] tent is her" or "my tabernacle is in her."

In fact, Ezekiel's symbolic names for these "wives" deliberately recall the building of the tabernacle, the portable temple used by the

Israelites in the wilderness as described in the Book of Exodus. In Ezekiel 16, the prophet describes the Lord's "covenant" marriage (v. 8) to, and ritual purification of, Jerusalem ("Aholibah") in terms that resemble temple rites as well as the "clothing" of the wilderness tabernacle: "Then washed I thee with water; yea, I throughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk" (Ezekiel 16:8–10).

In Ezekiel's description of the ritual clothing of Aholibah it is hard to miss the intended connection to "clothing" of the "tent of meeting" in the ancient tabernacle structure: "And thou shalt make a covering for *the tent* [ʾōhel] of rams' skins dyed red, and *a covering above of badgers' skins*" (Exodus 26:14; see also the "fine linen" and "badger skins" of Exodus 25:4–5). Moreover, the names Aholah and Aholibah recall one of the names of the chief tabernacle builders, Aholiab ("Father is my tent," see Exodus 31:6–7; 35:34; 36:1–2; 38:23).

Hosea and His Symbolically Named Children

The Book of Hosea chronicles how the Lord commanded the prophet Hosea to marry Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, a woman characterized by *zĕnûnîm*—a term usually rendered "whoredoms" or "harlotries." Hosea's marriage to Gomer constitutes a lucid symbol of the Lord's covenant "marriage" to the land/people of Israel ("the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord," Hosea 1:2).[19] Gomer's *zĕnûnîm*, together with the emphatic, tautological (repetitious) use of the verb *zānâ* (*zānōh tizneh*), represent Israel's repeated cultic unfaithfulness to the Lord throughout its history. Hosea, moreover, was to have "children of whoredoms [*yaldê zĕnûnîm*]" with Gomer symbolizing Israel's nearly constant apostasy from Yahweh (Hosea 1:2; 2:4).

Hosea's first child is a son, and the Lord commands Hosea to give him a specific name: "And the Lord said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of *Jezreel* upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of *Israel* in the valley of *Jezreel*" (Hosea 1:4–5). Jezreel is, of course, the name of the Jezreel valley, the scene or vicinity of several important events in ninth-century Israelite history (see, e.g., 1 Kings 21:23; 2 Kings 9:10, 30, 36–37). The Lord thus makes Jezreel a symbol of Israel's "sowing" or "scattering." Later, however, he makes it a symbol of the Lord's mercy: "and they shall hear *Jezreel* [*yizrĕʿēl*]. And *I will sow her* [*ûzĕraʿtî*] unto me in the earth" (Hosea 2:22–23 [MT 2:24–25]).

Hosea and Gomer's next child is a daughter, and the Lord again commands the bestowal of a symbolic name: "And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And God said unto him, Call her name *Lo-ruhamah* [*lōʾ ruḥāmâ*]: for *I will no more have mercy* [*lōʾ ʾôsîp ʿôd ʾăraḥēm*] *upon the house of Israel*; but I will utterly take them away" (Hosea 1:6). This stern prophecy is somewhat mollified by a promise of mercy toward the southern kingdom of Judah: "But *I will have mercy* [*ʾăraḥēm*] upon the house of Judah, *and will save them* [*wĕhôšaʿtîm*] by the Lord their God, and *will not save them* by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen" (Hosea 1:6–7). The prophecy adds an allusive wordplay on the name Hosea (*hôšēaʿ*, "The Lord saves") when the Lord says, "[I] will save them [*wĕhôšaʿtîm*]" (cf. Hosea 13:4: "beside me there is no *Saviour* [*môšîaʿ*]").

Hosea and Gomer's third child is a second son for whom the Lord again mandates the giving of a symbolic name: "Now when she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son. Then said God, Call his name *Lo-ammi* [*lōʾ-ʿammî*, "not my people"]: for ye are *not my people* [*lōʾ ʿammî*], and *I will not be your* God [or, "I [am] not your *I am* [*ʾehyeh*]]" (Hosea 1:9).

A declaration of the full reversal of the symbolic names of judgment emerges at the end of Hosea 1 and the beginning of Hosea 2: "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered [cf. Abrahamic Covenant, seed, and 'Jezreel']; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, *Ye are not my people* [lōʾ-ʿammî], *there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God* [běnê ʾēl-ḥāy] or, "children of the living God"]" (Hosea 1:10 [MT 2:1]). The Lord states his intent to reaffirm a covenant relationship with scattered Israel, playing on the name Lo-ammi. In doing so, he uses kinship terminology that expresses a closer relationship than had existed previously: "sons of the living God" vs. "my people" or "my kin."

Hosea's prophecy then fully reverses the negative implications of all of the children's names. First, utilizing a play on Israel and Jezreel, the latter name changes from being a symbol of the Lord's scattering (sowing) Israel, into a symbol of gathering, resurrection, and renewal: "Then shall the children of Judah and the children of *Israel* be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of *Jezreel*" (Hosea 1:11). Moreover, the names Lo-ammi and Lo-ruhamah lose their lōʾ ("not") and become emphatic symbols of the Lord's covenant relationship with Israel and of his mercy: "Say ye unto your brethren, *Ammi* ['my people']; and to your sisters, *Ruhamah* ['shown mercy']" (Hosea 2:1).

Although the Lord states, "*I will not have mercy* [lōʾ ʾăraḥēm] upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms" (Hosea 2:4), again playing on Lo-ruhamah, the Lord allows mercy to temper justice. Eventually Israel's punishment is abrogated, as evident in the full reversal of the meaning of the names of Hosea's children: "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and *in*

mercies [raḥămîm]" (Hosea 2:19); "And *I will sow her* unto me in the earth; and *I will have mercy upon her* [riḥamtî] *that had not obtained mercy* [lōʾ ruḥāmâ]; and I will say to them which were *not my people* [lōʾ ʿammî], Thou art *my people* [ʿammî]; and they shall say, Thou art my God" (Hosea 2:22–23 [MT 23–24]). Hosea's subsequent prophecies thus change the name *lōʾ ruḥāmâ* from a sign of the Lord's disfavor and repudiation of his covenant into an emphatic reaffirmation of his covenant statement about his "mercy and longsuffering."[20]

Hosea additionally uses a marriage motif to describe the Lord's justice and mercy. The description of the Lord's marriage with Israel and the land, mirrored by that of Hosea and Gomer, begins with the language of divorce: "She is not my wife, neither am I her husband" (Hosea 2:2). After the consequences of sin catch up with Israel, there is eventual repentance: "I will go and return to *my first husband* [ʾîšî], for then was it better with me than now" (Hosea 2:7). Israel did not know that all which they had "prepared [or used] for Baal"—a divine title which means "husband" or "possessor"—really had its source in the Lord. Recognizing that both Hebrew *ʾîš* and *baʿal* both mean "husband" helps us appreciate Hosea's use of double entendre: "And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me *Ishi* [ʾîšî = my man/my husband]; and shalt call me no more *Baali* [my *baal*/my owner/my husband]. For I will take away the names of *Baalim* out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name" (Hosea 2:16–17).

Amos, Bethel, and the Exile of Gilgal

Like Hosea's, Amos's prophecies contains several outstanding examples of paronomasia (e.g., "summer fruit," and the "end" in Amos 8:1–2). One of the most important examples of Amos using paronomasia to change longstanding place names into symbols is his prophecy regarding Gilgal and Bethel: "But seek not Beth-el, nor enter into *Gilgal* [haggilgāl], and pass not to Beer-sheba: for *Gilgal* [haggilgāl] *shall*

surely go into captivity [gālōh yigleh], and Beth-el shall come to *nought* [*lĕʾāwen*]" (Amos 5:5). Amos reinterprets the name Gilgal in terms of the verb *gly/glh* = to "uncover," "reveal," or "go into exile." He also uses a pun on Beth-el in terms of nearby Beth-On (pejoratively Beth-aven, "house of evil"). Amos's use of the tautological infinitive (the infinitival form of the verb followed *gālâ* by its conjugated cognate form) adds emphasis to the connection he forges between "Gilgal" and "exile." Moshe Garsiel believes that the prophecy of Hosea 10:5, "The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of *Beth-aven*: for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the priests there of that *rejoiced* [*yāgîlû*; or, trembled] on it, for the *glory* thereof, because it is *departed* [*gālâ*; or, gone into exile] from it," constitutes an echo of Amos's wordplay[21] (cf. also 1 Samuel 4:21–22).

Joel and Judgment at Jehoshaphat

The prophet Joel utilizes the name Jehoshaphat (*yĕhô* + *šāpāṭ*, "the Lord has judged"), a name belonging to a ninth-century king of Judah, as a symbol of Yahweh's judgment upon the nations. Just as Judah and Jerusalem had historically been subject to almost-constant threats of and outright foreign conquest, events often taken as an expression of divine justice, now the nations will be subject thereto: "I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of *Jehoshaphat* [*yĕhôšāpāṭ*], and *will plead* [*wĕnišpaṭtî*] with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land" (Joel 3:2). Israel's *scattering* would not only be reversed (see Joel 3:1), but the nations themselves would be gathered for destruction. Joel emphasizes the thoroughgoing nature of this reversal: "Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of *Jehoshaphat* [*yĕhôšāpāṭ*] for there will I sit to *judge* [*lišpōṭ*] all the heathen round about" (Joel 3:12). This prophecy has often been understood as one similar to the Armageddon prophecy of Revelation 16:16.

Micah of Moresheth:
"I Will Bring an Heir" and "Who Is a God like Thee?"

One of the most impressive clusters of paronomasia and onomastic exploitation in the Hebrew Bible occurs in Micah 1:1–16, near the beginning of the Book of Micah. Léo Laberge describes these verses as "the most difficult of the book."[22] The dire situation for Jerusalem (see Micah 1:8–9) and these southern cities, all besieged by the Assyrian king Sennacherib, suggests the dire situation in the kingdom of Judah overall.

First,[23] Micah makes Aphrah (or Beth-le-Aphrah) a symbol of mourning through the act of rolling herself (*hitpallāš[t]î*, a pun on "Philistines") in the dust (*ʾāpār*, v. 10). Dust was often connected with mourning in the Ancient Near East. Second, he makes Zaanan a symbol of impotence and ineptitude ("Zaanan came not forth," *lōʾ yaṣʾâ . . . ṣaʾănān*, v. 11). As James Luther Mays suggests, "that line means that Zanaan does not come forth to face the enemy because the struggle is hopeless, or because the city is destroyed already."[24] Third, Micah creates a pun on Maroth ("bitterness") in terms of good and evil (v. 12). Fourth, Lachish (*lākîš*) becomes a symbol of "swift steeds" (*lārekeš*) required for sudden escape (v. 13). Mays writes, "The line is an ironic cry of warning that teams should be harnessed and chariots made ready—for flight."[25] Fifth, Micah's hometown Moresheth (see Micah 1:1; Jeremiah 26:18) sounds like a word for "farewell gift" (cf. the "presents" in v. 14).[26] Sixth, Achzib (*ʾakzîb*) is made a symbol of a "lie[s]" (*ʾakzāb*) or undependable temporal things upon which we as carnal people tend to rely. Seventh and lastly, Mareshah is made a symbol of "the loss of an heir [*yōrēš*] [that] means the end of life's continuity, and [thus] no future."[27] These puns stand in stark contrast to the promise of a Messiah eventually "com[ing] forth" from "little" Bethlehem-Ephrathah (Micah 5:2).

Lastly, Micah 7:18 employs a wordplay on the name Micah as a sign of mercy: "*Who is a God like unto thee* [*mî ʾēl kāmôkā*], that

pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the rem-
nant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he
delighteth in mercy" (Micah 7:18). The name Micah is a hypocoristic
(shortened) form of the names Michael ("Who is like El [God]?") and
Michaiah ("Who is like the Lord"?). Here again, we see the prophet's
name constituting a part of the prophet's message: God, not least in
his mercy, is incomparable.

Zephaniah and the Philistine Cities

Zephaniah makes ominous symbols out of the names of "two of
the four Philistine cities, in announcement of the divine judgment
that will befall them."[28] He states, "For *Gaza* [ʿazzâ] *shall be forsaken*
[ʿăzûbâ], and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at
the noon day, and *Ekron* [ʿeqrôn] *shall be rooted up* [tēʿāqēr]" (Zepha-
niah 2:3–4). Regarding the rhetoric of this verse, Marvin A. Sweeney
suggests that "by capturing the ear of the audience in this fashion,
the verse better enables the speaker to make a lasting impression
on the audience and convey the message."[29] J. J. M. Roberts notes
that "Zephaniah emphasizes a common element in the fate of all
four cities: They are emptied of their Philistine inhabitants."[30] Just
as Isaiah prophesied that Jerusalem would no longer be called ʿăzûbâ
("forsaken," see above), Zephaniah prophesies that Gaza will bear
this name. As for Ekron, Zephaniah's use of the verb ʿqr ties its fate
to barrenness and childlessness.[31]

Lastly, Zephaniah again plays on or alludes to his own name
a few verses later in prophesying the destruction of Assyria and
Nineveh: "And he will stretch out his hand against *the north* [ṣāpôn],
and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry
like a wilderness" (Zephaniah 2:13). Zephaniah's name becomes a
sign of what the Lord will do to "the north"—namely, to the Assyrian
empire and its capital. The Babylonians destroy Nineveh in 612 BCE,
and the remnant of the Assyrian empire vanishes shortly thereafter.

Obadiah:
Edom and Esau—Their Destruction, Their Calamity

Obadiah, the shortest of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, evidences rich wordplay on Esau and Edom and at least one Edomite cities. Obadiah begins with a condemnation of Edom and its pride in terms of Sela ("rock," thus also known as Petra): "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the *rock* [*selaʿ*], whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord" (Obadiah 1:3–4). Sweeney calls Obadiah's use of *selaʿ* here "an obvious reference to the Edomite fortress city of Sela that was conquered by Amaziah and renamed Joktheel (2 Kings 14:7)."[32] We see this wordplay on *selaʿ* or *petra* in Psalm 137:7–9 ("Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against *the stones* [*selaʿ*]") and elsewhere.[33]

Obadiah's prophecy, as we have seen with other prophets, further employs a pun on his own name (*ʿōbēd*, "servant," + *yāh*, "the Lord" = "servant of the Lord") in terms of the partially homonymous verb *ʾbd*, which in its causative stem means "to destroy": "*Shall I* not in that day, saith the Lord, even *destroy* [*wĕhaʾăbadtî*] the wise men out of *Edom*, and understanding out of the mount of Esau?" (Obadiah 1:8). A similar wordplay occurs verses later: "Neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of *their destruction* [*ʾobdām*]" (Obadiah 1:12).

The name Edom is used twice and Esau seven times. In decrying Esau and Edom's national treachery against Judah, Obadiah plays on the name Edom (*ʾĕdôm*) three times in terms of the expression "their calamity": "Thou [Edom/*ʾĕdôm*] shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of *their calamity* [*ʾêdô*]; yea, thou shouldest not have looked on their affliction in the day of *their calamity* [*ʾêdô*], nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of *their*

calamity [ˈêdô]" (Obadiah 1:13). Obadiah effectively ties the name Edom to "calamity."

In consequence of Esau and Edom's treachery, Obadiah prophesies that their deeds will return to them in an emphatic pun on Esau: "For the day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen: *as thou hast done* [ˈāśîtā] *it shall be done unto thee* [yēˈāśeh lāk]: thy reward shall return upon thine own head" (Obadiah 1:15). *Thou* here refers to Esau and Edom. Obadiah thus directly juxtaposes the active perfect verb form in the second person (ˈśy/ˈśh) with the third-person masculine passive (ˈāśîtā yēˈāśeh lāk) to create this wordplay. Esau and Edom's punishment will be both commensurate and retributive.

Zechariah: Beauty and Bands

In addition to his iteration of Jeremiah's "branch" prophecy in Zechariah 3:8 (mentioned previously) and his paronomastic reinterpretation of Tyre [ṣōr] in terms of "strong hold [māṣôr]" (Zechariah 9:3), Zechariah records the use of symbolic naming in the prophetic object lesson of the Lord's two staves, though without wordplay: "And I took unto me two staves; the one I called *Beauty* [nōˈam, or sweetness], and the other I called *Bands* [ḥōbĕlîm, or bonds]; and I fed the flock" (Zechariah 11:7). The Lord then explains the symbolism of his staff, "Beauty": "And I took my staff, even *Beauty* [nōˈam], and cut it asunder, that I might break [disannul] my covenant which I had made with all the people[s]" (Zechariah 11:10). Aelred Cody suggests that this disannulled covenant may refer to the "covenant of peace" promised in Ezekiel 34:25 and especially in Ezekiel 37:26–28,[34] which comes at the end of Ezekiel's famed "sticks" prophecy.

Then Zechariah describes the breaking of the second staff, "Bands" or "Bonds": "Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even *Bands* [ḥōbĕlîm], that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel" (Zechariah 11:14). The name *ḥōbĕlîm/bands* symbolizes

"union" or "harmony."³⁵ Cody suggests that "the symbolism of a complete break between Judah and Israel is just the opposite of that in Ezek[iel] 37:15–19 of the two sticks joined," but this symbolism "is not explained here."³⁶ From a Latter-day Saint perspective, we understand that the "breaking" of the "bonds" between Israel and Judah was part of the Lord "breaking off" the natural branches in his scattering of Israel, a scattering that necessarily preceded the future merciful gathering of Israel foretold by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Book of Mormon prophets, among others.

Malachi: "My Messenger" or "My Angel"

The first line of the Book of Malachi reads, "The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi" (Malachi 1:1). The transparent meaning of Malachi is "my messenger" or "my angel" (see Malachi 2:7, 3:1). Malachi, excoriating the apostate Levites and priests, declared that the priest was "the messenger [malʾāk] of the Lord of Hosts" (Malachi 2:7). The description of the priest as a "messenger" or an "angel" is particularly significant given Malachi's focus on the priesthood and temple in his prophecies.

All of this background prepares us for Malachi's most important wordplay on his own name: "Behold, I will send *my messenger* [malʾākî], and he shall prepare the way before me: and *the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger* [malʾāk] *of the covenant*, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 3:1–2). The Savior's quotation of this same prophecy to the Nephites and Lamanites at the temple in Bountiful makes the onomastic connection even more explicit: "Thus said the Father unto *Malachi*—Behold, I will send *my messenger*, and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even *the messenger of the covenant*, whom ye delight in; behold, *he shall come*, saith the Lord of Hosts" (3 Nephi 24:1). The Lord Jesus Christ, whom they sought, had come suddenly to his

temple—and their temple—as a resurrected being and as the very messenger of the covenant to organize the church anew under the "new covenant" (the law of the gospel). His appearance under these circumstances must have made his citation of the scripture unspeakably powerful to those who heard it from the Lord's own mouth.

Malachi's prophecy was one of several Old Testament texts recited to Joseph Smith during the evening and through the morning of 21–22 September 1823 by an angel (see Joseph Smith—History 1:27–49). It was fulfilled anew in this last dispensation on 3 April 1836, as recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 110, when the Lord again—along with other angelic messengers, including Elijah—appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple.

Conclusion

Old Testament prophets regularly used wordplay and paronomasia in crafting their prophetic messages. Moreover, Isaiah and Hosea were commanded to give their children names symbolizing both the Lord's justice and mercy. Many of their prophecies thematically revolve around these names. Ezekiel extends Hosea and Isaiah's use of the marriage and atonement metaphor with symbolic names for Israel and Judah as Yahweh's wives, names that evoke temple imagery. Some of the symbolic names, like Jeremiah's (and Zechariah's) "branch," bespeak the coming of a Messiah. Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, Obadiah, and Malachi all employ wordplay on their own names. Isaiah's name, "the Lord is salvation," becomes a dominant theme in his writings.

In almost all of the prophets, we find instances of the symbolic naming or the use of wordplay to give existing names ominous new meaning. All of this suggests that understanding ancient Israelite names, name giving, and name exploitation is an important tool in understanding Old Testament writings and prophecy in particular.

These characteristics constituted an important part of "the manner of prophesying among the Jews" (2 Nephi 25:1).

Notes

1. Throughout this article I will avoid the use of the unnecessarily pejorative term *folk etymology*, which has become nearly synonymous with "false etymology." The biblical writers used wordplay in order to give old names new meaning.
2. Throughout this article I will italicize certain names, words, and phrases to add emphasis. Unless noted otherwise, all further emphases are added by me.
3. See the heading to Doctrine and Covenants 113 (2013 edition).
4. See, for example, John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 369.
5. See Joseph Smith—History 1:29–49, especially v. 40.
6. Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd ed. (Berkley: University of California Press, 1991), 110.
7. In addition to Isaiah 10:19–22 and 11:10, 16, see Isaiah 28:15; 37:31–32; and 46:3.
8. Compare the footnote in the 2013 LDS edition of Isaiah 8:1, which has "to speed the spoil, he hastens the prey," to the 1979 footnote, "to speed to the spoil, he hasteneth the prey."
9. Joseph Jensen, "Immanuel," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:393.
10. The "us" in Isaiah 6:8 is widely understood to refer to the divine council. Compare the very similar language in Abraham 3:27, which unquestionably reflects a divine council situation.
11. *Counselor*: cf. "Man of Counsel" in Moses 7:35; cf. Jacob 4:10; Alma 37:12, 37; *Mighty*: see especially Isaiah 10:21; see also Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalms 24:8; Jeremiah 32:18; Nehemiah 9:32. Everlasting Father: cf. Christ as "Eternal Father" in the Book of Mormon (e.g., Alma 11:38–39;

Mosiah 15:4; 16:5, etc.); *Prince of Peace*: used typologically of Jesus Christ in reference to Melchizedek (JST, Genesis 14:33; Alma 13:18; cf. "king of peace" in JST, Genesis 14:36 and Hebrews 7:2) and in reference to Abraham 1:2. Cf. also Zechariah 9:9–10.

12. Deuteronomy 23:1–4 lists several classes of persons who were excluded from the cultic assembly (e.g., emasculated males, children born out of wedlock, and certain foreigners). 2 Samuel 5:6–8 gives an extra-Pentateuchal explanation for the later exclusion of "the lame and the blind" from the temple.

13. Later Christian interpreters would likely see an anticipation of the name Jesus (*yēšûaʿ*) as well. Cf., e.g., Matthew 1:21.

14. Jeremiah's oracle against Moab also makes negative symbols out of the names Heshbon and Madmen: "There shall be no more praise of Moab: in *Heshbon* [*ḥešbōn*] *they have devised* [*ḥāšbû*] evil against it; come, and let us cut it off from being a nation. Also *thou shalt be cut down* [*tiddōmî*], O *Madmen* [*madmēn*] the sword shall pursue thee" (Jeremiah 48:2).

15. 2 Nephi 3:5 shows that the "righteous branch" was associated with the Messiah, but could have broader connotations in the context of Israel's scattering and gathering (cf. Jacob 5).

16. William R. Brookman, "Athbash," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: A–C, Volume 1* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 341–42.

17. See Scott B. Noegel, "Atbash in Jeremiah and its Literary Significance: Part 1," *Jewish Biblical Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (1996): 82–89; idem, "Atbash in Jeremiah and Its Literary Significance: Part 2," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1996), 160–66; idem, "Atbash in Jeremiah and Its Literary Significance: Part 3," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1996): 247–50.

18. See Ezekiel 23:5–10 (Aholah); 23:11–21 (Aholibah); 23:22–35 (Aholah); 23:36–49 (both Aholah and Aholibah).

19. On the meaning of Hosea's marriage to Gomer, see Aaron P. Schade, "The Imagery of Hosea's Family and the Restoration of Israel," in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, The 38th Annual BYU Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2009), 233–49; Kent P. Jackson, "The Marriage of Hosea and Jehovah's Covenant with Israel,"

in *Isaiah and the Prophets: Inspired Voices from the Old Testament*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1984), 57–74.

20. Cf., e.g., Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Psalm 86:15; Alma 9:11, 26.

21. Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 200–201.

22. Léo Laberge, "Micah," *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 250. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* is hereafter cited as *NJBC*.

23. The initial wordplay on "Gath" in (*gat*) in terms of *taggîdû* ("tell ye") in Micah 1:10 may represent a textual corruption.

24. James Luther Mays, *Micah: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1976), 57.

25. Ibid., 58.

26. Ibid., 59. May cites *rāśâ* ("dowry") as a possible basis for the pun. Cf. Deuteronomy 22:23 (1 Kings 9:16).

27. Ibid.

28. Cf. J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 198.

29. Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets, Volume 1: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 513.

30. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 198.

31. Something similar seems to be at work in the fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy against Ahaziah, king of Judah. Ahaziah inquired of Baal-zebub, the version of the god Baal worshipped at Ekron, regarding his precarious health and subsequently died with "no son" (2 Kings 1:16–17).

32. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 289.

33. Garsiel (*Biblical Names*, 158–59) also sees this *sela'* wordplay in Isaiah 15:9–16:2; Jeremiah 48:28; 49:16; and Job 39:26-27. He also links these to Isaiah 2:21; 31:9; 33:16; 42:11.

34. Aelred Cody, "Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi," *NJBC*, 358.

35. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 287.

36. Cody, "Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi," *NJBC*, 358.