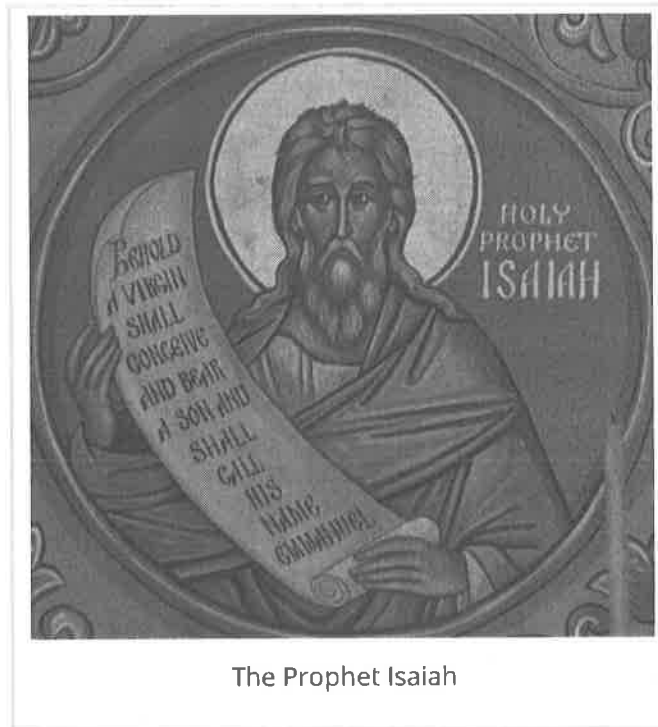


The Truthfulness of Deutero-Isaiah: A Response to Kent Jackson (part 2)

by David Bokovoy | May 18, 2016 | Featured | 1 comment



The Prophet Isaiah

Mormonism began as such a radical, non-traditional Christian movement, it's strange now that evangelical scholars are showing Latter-day Saints how to appropriate critical scholarship; but they are. In recent years, many evangelical scholars (who have in the past, typically approached the Bible far more conservatively than Latter-day Saints) have come to accept the consensus that Isaiah 40-66 is not a prophecy given by the historical Isaiah. For example, in his recent work, Kenton Sparks informs his readers that "a sober and serious reading of Isaiah will easily suggest to readers that large portions of this prophetic collection were not written by an eighth-century prophet whose name was Isaiah" (*God's Word In Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship*, p. 108).

Note the word “easily.”

We might wonder how is it possible that Sparks can write to an evangelical audience and express such confidence in the accuracy of the mainstream scholarly perspective concerning Deutero-Isaiah. Perhaps it is because the evidence for the mainstream view is so compelling. And this evidence simply has to be accommodated for by people of faith, including Latter-day Saints. While there are many compelling reasons for the mainstream view, I'll discuss four.

1. Inviolability of Jerusalem

The historical Isaiah prophesied in Jerusalem during the second half of the eighth century BCE. His prophetic call narrative (Isaiah 6) dates the experience to the year king Uzziah died, i.e. sometime during the 740's. At this time, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah were both in existence, although the north was destroyed by the Assyrians in the later part of Isaiah's prophetic career. As a result, the Assyrians are the only enemy mentioned in his oracles (7:17, 20; 8:4, 7; 10:5,12; the prophecy against Babylon in chapter 13 is a later addition). During Isaiah's ministry, the Babylonians had not yet become a significant world power. For Isaiah, it was Assyria that Yahweh had chosen as “the rod of his anger” to afflict the covenant people for their wickedness (10:5).

Even though Isaiah predicated judgment against his people, he held fast to a view scholars refer to as “the inviolability of Jerusalem.” Isaiah believed that Jerusalem was a sacred place that could not be annihilated by its enemies. This view is expressed in Is. 31:5-9:

(Is. 31:5) Like the birds that fly, even so will the LORD of Hosts shield Jerusalem, shielding and (31:5) Like the birds that fly, even so will the Lord of Hosts shield Jerusalem and saving, protecting and rescuing. . . (8) Then Assyria shall fall, Not by the sword of man; A sword not of humans shall devour him. He shall shrivel before the sword, And his young men pine away. (9) His rock shall melt with terror, And his officers shall collapse from weakness — Declares the LORD, who has a fire in Zion, Who has an oven in Jerusalem.

Isaiah's belief concerning Jerusalem makes sense in light of his view concerning the significance of Yahweh's temple and its future role in the eschaton (Isaiah 2). It also makes sense in light of promises that we see concerning Jerusalem and the royal Davidic monarchy in other parts of the Hebrew Bible:

(Psalm 2:1) Why do nations assemble, and peoples plot vain things; (2) kings of the earth take their stand, and regents intrigue together against the LORD and against His anointed? . . . (5) Then He speaks to them in anger, terrifying them in His rage, (6) 'But I

have installed My king on Zion, My holy mountain!’ (7) Let me tell of the decree: the LORD said to me, ‘You are My son, I have fathered you this day. (8) Ask it of Me, and I will make the nations your domain; your estate, the limits of the earth. (9) You can smash them with an iron mace, shatter them like potter’s ware.’”

This belief in the sanctity of Zion is in reality quite ancient. Even before the Davidic acquisition of Jerusalem there existed a belief that Mount Zion was the mountain of God (Zion theology), the home of El, the high god of the Jebusites who occupied the region. Later, Judeans came to believe that Yahweh promised David an eternal house and Jerusalem was its location (2 Samuel 7). Isaiah believed in these promises. He believed in the “inviolability of Jerusalem.”

In contrast to this perspective, Isaiah 40 begins as a message of comfort to the Judean people since Jerusalem had been destroyed. But this was not something that the historical Isaiah believed would happen. Surely, if his theology switched so drastically we would expect some sort of statement that explained how he came to know that his earlier oracles were incorrect. In reality, chapters 40-66 never speak of the Babylonian period as a distant future reality, as if someone were prophesying about it. Instead, the Babylonian period is described as the present, historical condition. Isaiah 1-39 concludes with a focus on Hezekiah’s day, while chapter 40 presents an abrupt transition to the exilic community in the sixth century. The evidence is clear: the historical Isaiah of the earlier period would not have believed that this comfort was necessary since Jerusalem from his perspective was God’s holy city that would never be destroyed.

2. The Influence of Jeremiah, Lamentations and Other Postexilic Writings

The material in Deutero-Isaiah was highly influenced by the book of Jeremiah, a prophet who lived after the time period of the historical Isaiah. Many examples of Jeremiah’s influence on this material could be cited, but the following is especially helpful. Jeremiah presents the Lord’s judgment against the kingdom of Judah in the following manner:

“I noted: Because Rebel Israel had committed adultery, I cast her off and handed her a bill of divorce; yet her sister, Faithless Judah, was not afraid — she too went and whored” (Jer 2:8).

The author of Isaiah 50:1 knew this text and in his message of comfort to the exilic community he specifically reversed this judgment:

“Thus said the LORD: Where is the bill of divorce of your mother whom I dismissed? And which of My creditors was it To whom I sold you off? You were only sold off for your sins,

and your mother dismissed for your crimes.”

Based only upon this example, it could be argued, of course, that it is just as likely that Jeremiah was influenced in his choice of words by the historical Isaiah as that Deutero-Isaiah knew Jeremiah. It is clear, however, that Jeremiah didn't know the material in Deutero-Isaiah. During the sixth century, the prophet Jeremiah entered into a heated debate with other Judean prophets concerning the fate of Jerusalem because they, like the historical Isaiah, believed in the inviolability of Jerusalem. In opposition to this view, Jeremiah went to the Jerusalem temple and prophesied that the Babylonians would destroy the city if the people did not repent (Jer 26). The account states:

“The priests, the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speak these words in the house of the Lord. But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the Lord had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, ‘You must die! Why do you prophesy in the Lord’s name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?’” (vv. 7-9).

These are the same people who would have preserved and had access to the book of Isaiah. Why didn't they know that Isaiah had provided a detailed prophecy that supported Jeremiah's claims—the material in Isaiah 40-66? Perhaps even more telling, if the book of Isaiah existed in any form with its prophecies concerning the exile and restoration of the doomed city then Jeremiah would have had prophetic material that he could have used to support his own prophecy.

Jeremiah was from a priestly family. He was active in Jerusalem (Judah's primary scribal and archival center) during the seventh and early sixth centuries BCE. Surely he would have known of the amazing prophecies of Isaiah, which would have been preserved and transmitted by Judean scribes for well over a century if these prophecies existed. Jeremiah was well-educated. We know that he knew a form of Deuteronomy. If any of the second half of Isaiah had existed during Jeremiah's day, why didn't he cite this material as evidence that Judah would be defeated by Babylon, go into captivity, and eventually be delivered by the Persian king Cyrus? Jeremiah knew the book of Isaiah or at least some of the oracles attributed to Isaiah (compare Isaiah 5:1-4/Jeremiah 2:21), but he shows no sign of having known Isaiah 40-66, which would have significantly helped his cause. If he had known it, then surely he would have used it the way Abinadi did in the Book of Mormon.

Therefore, if the authors of Isaiah 40-66 knew Jeremiah but Jeremiah shows no signs of knowing this material, it is clear that the material in Deutero-Isaiah was written after Jeremiah.

But the writings of Jeremiah are not the only biblical material known to Deutero-Isaiah. Deutero-Isaiah was also familiar with the book of Lamentations, which contains exilic poems that mourn the destruction of Jerusalem. And Deutero-Isaiah did the same thing with Lamentations it did with Jeremiah. It intentionally reversed the theme that opens the work. Concerning the kingdom of Judah, Lamentation 1:2-3 reads:

"Bitterly she weeps in the night, Her cheek wet with tears. There is none to comfort her. ... Judah has gone into exile Because of misery and harsh oppression."

This same lament appears as a central theme in the first two chapters: "With none to comfort her" (1:9,17) "Far from me is any comforter" (1:16) "There was none to comfort me" (1:21) "What can I match with you to comfort you" (2:13).

The authors of the material in Deutero-Isaiah used this motif from Lamentations as a central theme throughout their work. In fact, chapter 40 opens up as a direct response to this lament: "Comfort, comfort, My people!" (40:1). And this is only one of many connections between the two literary works. Consider the fact that Isaiah 62:6-7 replaces the sad song sung by the walls of Jerusalem in Lamentation 2:18-19 with a joyous hymn:

"Their heart cried out to the Lord. O wall of Fair Zion, Shed tears like a torrent Day and night! Give yourself no respite, Your eyes no rest. Arise, cry out in the night At the beginning of the watches, Pour out your heart like water In the presence of the Lord! Lift up your hands to Him For the life of your infants, Who faint for hunger At every street corner" (Lam 2:18-19).

"Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen, Who shall never be silent By day or by night. O you, the LORD's remembrancers, Take no rest and give no rest to Him, Until He establish Jerusalem And make her renowned on earth" (Isaiah 62:6-7).

Yet Lamentations isn't the only poetic material known to the authors of Isaiah 40-66. These authors also show awareness of postexilic psalms, including Psalm 107 (a text that shows signs of late biblical Hebrew). Verses 1-2 probably influenced Isaiah 62:12, but what's even more telling, Deutero-Isaiah actually cites Psalm 107:35:

"He turns the wilderness into pools, Parched land into springs" (Ps 107:35)

"I will turn the wilderness into pools, Parched lands into springs" (Is 41:18)

3. Aramaic Influence

Unlike what we find in the first half of the book of Isaiah, Aramaic has heavily

influenced the language in Isaiah 40-66. Not only does this fact provide compelling proof that the material in 40-66 was written by other authors, it shows that these authors were living in a time when Jews were speaking Aramaic. Aramaic became the international language used by the Assyrians to govern their empire in the eighth century. But Jews living in Jerusalem during the time of the historical Isaiah spoke Hebrew. This explains why Hezekiah's envoy pleaded with the Assyrians to make terms in Aramaic so that the people listening would not understand what was said (2 Kings 18). It also explains why we do not see any Aramaic influence in the material connected with the historical Isaiah.

All of this changed, however, in the exile after 586 BCE. Aramaic became the language spoken by the Jews. This is why the current Hebrew Bible uses the Aramaic square script instead of the original Paleo-Hebrew alphabet. This explains why the book of Esther appears in Aramaic, and why the postexilic book of Daniel contains Aramaic chapters. It also explains why there is a strong Aramaic influence on the material in Isaiah 40-66. I'll simply present two examples (though many, many more could be provided).

In Aramaic, the term *'orach* carries the meaning "shackle." In Hebrew, the word means "path." Notice how the word appears in Isaiah 41:3:

"He pursues them, he goes on unscathed; No shackle ('orach) is placed on his feet."

Now, witness how the word is used in the first half of the book via the famous oracle in Isaiah 2:3:

"And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths ('orach): for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."

Only in Deutero-Isaiah do we find this word used according to its Aramaic meaning of "shackle."

Here's another illustration: Isaiah 45:14 contains the line, "And Sabeans bearing tribute." Though in the past, this statement was often interpreted as "giant in stature," this now dated-reading does not fit the context. The term *midah* "tribute/tax" is in reality a loanword from Akkadian *mandattu* "tribute" via Aramaic. Significantly, we find the same exact nuance in other postexilic texts such as Ezra 4:20: "And tribute (*midah*), poll tax, and land tax," and Nehemiah 5:4: "We have borrowed money. . . to pay the king's tax (*midah*)."

Dozens of examples of the strong Aramaic influence on the material in Isaiah 40-66

could be provided. This presents compelling evidence that these oracles were composed during the postexilic era when Jews were speaking Aramaic.

4. Postexilic Hebrew

This is a complicated issue that is difficult to explain in a simple blog post. Suffice it to say that all languages evolve over time. The texts of the Hebrew Bible were composed over a thousand year period. Scholars can therefore date material based upon the type of Hebrew that appears in the text. Unlike what we encounter in the historical oracles of Isaiah, the material in Isaiah 40-66 contains many, many examples of Hebrew words and phrases that appear solely in the exilic and postexilic periods (or at minimum, are only sporadically attested in Classical Hebrew). It's difficult to explain these grammatical issues in a simple blog post. Just to provide one illustration of many, many examples that help date this material, Deutero-Isaiah features the root *byn* in the *hip'il* verbal structure as a transitive verb "to teach."

These types of observations help scholars date 40-66 to the exilic and postexilic eras. For a list of examples, I would recommend Shalom M. Paul's outstanding study, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary (The Eerdmans Critical Commentary)* published in 2012 (see especially pp. 43-44).

Conclusion

There are several compelling reasons for why Isaiah 40-66 is not a prophecy given by the historical Isaiah: 1. Deutero-Isaiah provides a polemical response to the Cyrus Cylinder (see post no 1). 2. Isaiah believed in the inviolability of Jerusalem and the authors of 40-66 present a message of comfort to the Judean exiles that directly counters Isaiah's theological conviction. 3. The authors of 40-55 know Jeremiah, but Jeremiah does not know these prophecies. 4. The authors of 40-66 knew exilic and postexilic material including Lamentations. 5. Deutero-Isaiah shows signs of Aramaic influence (but we don't see this in the oracles of the historical Isaiah). 6. Deutero-Isaiah shows signs of Post-Exilic Hebrew (but again, we don't see this in the oracles of the historical Isaiah).

Any one of these issues would be enough to convince biblical scholars that Isaiah 40-66 is postexilic material added to Isaiah proper. All of them together provide undeniable evidence for the scholarly consensus. Unfortunately, Jackson's essay fails to mention, yet alone address any of these points. Of course he does discuss and ultimately reject other reasons. (1) That First Isaiah mentions Isaiah son of Amoz and provides biographical material regarding him and others of his time whereas the material in Second and Third Isaiah makes no mention of his name, (2) That the historical setting of Second and Third Isaiah is different than First Isaiah, (3) That the

theological focus in 1-39 is judgment, whereas the focus in 40-66 is forgiveness and reconciliation, and (4) that the literary style of chapters 40-66 differs significantly from that of the earlier chapters. But when Jackson's points are added to the evidence I cited in this post, it is easy to understand why Duke University professor Marc Zvi Brettler can write: "Exactly how and why someone attached these oracles [40-66] to those of an earlier prophet is unknown, **scholars are certain**, however that 40-66 does not reflect the work of the eighth century Isaiah son of Amoz" (in *How to Read the Bible*, p. 201; emphasis added).

So what is a believing Latter-day Saint to do? Is there an effective apologetic approach given the weight of this evidence? I believe that there is (maybe are). I believe that an effective apologetic argument would state, "I do not know why there is postexilic material in the Book of Mormon, but I do know that I feel connected with God through the book. I therefore believe, even though I do not have an answer. "

Another way of approaching this topic would be for Latter-day Saints to recognize that the Book of Mormon is a revelatory work that comes to us through Joseph Smith. The prophet didn't sit down and work his way through ancient script line upon line. Shouldn't Latter-day Saints therefore expect that the work would contain inspired prophetic, midrashic use of material known to Joseph Smith, including the material in Isaiah 40-66?

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