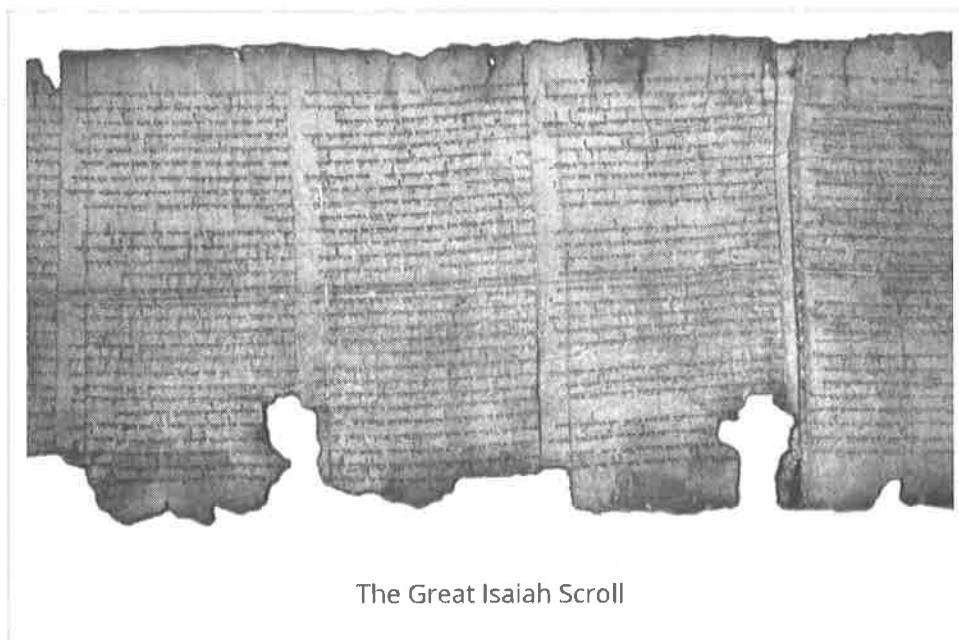


The Truthfulness of Deutero-Isaiah: A Response to Kent Jackson (part 1)

by David Bokovoy | May 17, 2016 | Featured | 3 comments



The Great Isaiah Scroll

Biblical scholarship can be an exciting, yet challenging pursuit for people of faith. For Latter-day Saints, the insights critical scholars have gained concerning the historical development of biblical sources can sometimes prove especially troubling—though as I explained in the book *Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis-Deuteronomy*, they need not be. It's really all a matter of perspective and a willingness to shift our traditional paradigms to accommodate for new truths.

One of the most insightful perspectives held by mainstream biblical scholars involves the historical development of the book of Isaiah. Since the 20th century, all mainstream scholars have held the position that chapters 40-66 were written after the Jewish exile into Babylon (c.a. 586 BCE). Scholars typically identify the exilic material in 40-55 by the title Deutero-Isaiah, and the post-exilic material in 56-66 by the title Trito-Isaiah (though these works may have been written by multiple

authors). This means, of course, that the second half of the book of Isaiah was not written by the historical Isaiah, a prophet who lived in Jerusalem during the eighth century BCE. For Latter-day Saints, this presents a direct challenge for traditionally held paradigms concerning the Book of Mormon, since some of this material is not only attributed to Isaiah, it has had a significant impact upon the Book of Mormon. If mainstream scholars are correct then this material would not have been available to Lehi's family as something they could have taken with them to America.

BYU religion professor Dr. Kent Jackson, an accomplished scholar, has provided the latest apologetic attempt to address this challenge. His essay, "Isaiah in the Book of Mormon" appears in the new 2016 publication *A Reason For Faith: Navigating LDS Doctrine and Church History*. The book was put together by Laura Hales, an LDS mom seeking answers for her children. Laura deserves considerable credit for organizing LDS scholars in an effort to present challenging information to Latter-day Saints in a way that helps preserve religious faith. And while I also applaud Dr. Jackson for his efforts at addressing this topic, I have some serious concerns with his essay. I feel a need to share with my LDS community these concerns. I believe that Latter-day Saints should remain open to the observations of mainstream scholars and be willing to seek new ways of understanding their scriptural texts in accordance with modern insights.

I'm concerned, however, that Jackson's well-meaning essay may paint Latter-day Saints into a corner when he argues:

"The [Isaiah] passages Lehi and his sons quoted in the Book of Mormon must be dated before their departure, and those revelations were identified then to be the writings of Isaiah, decades before 'Second' Isaiah was supposed to have been written. This is the most important piece of evidence for Isaiah's authorship of later chapters" (p. 75).

In other words, the most important evidence Jackson can produce to counter the scholarly consensus concerning Deutero-Isaiah is the Book of Mormon itself. But to be honest, I'm not sure how effective this apologetic approach will ultimately prove to people struggling with their faith over issues such as the attestation of Deutero-Isaiah in the Book of Mormon. Moreover, Jackson's essay gives readers the impression that all LDS scholars reject the mainstream consensus when he writes:

"Latter-day Saint scholars agree that the observations presented above [regarding the structure of the book of Isaiah] for the most part, represent accurately the change in tone that begins in Isaiah 40. Scholars who believe in the essential unity of the book acknowledge the changes, but they do not see them as grounds for denying the material in chapters 40–66 to Isaiah son of Amoz. If the Book of Mormon did not quote from

'Second' Isaiah, the discussion of authorship would have little meaning for Latter-day Saints; it would not matter to us either way. But because there is material after chapter 39 in the Book of Mormon, the issue is important" (p. 73).

For the record, I am a Latter-day Saint, and I find the evidence that Isaiah 40-55 is exilic material written by later authors rather than the historical Isaiah irrefutable. I love and appreciate Dr. Jackson. But I'm afraid a poorly articulated apologetic argument can do precisely what the book is trying to help solve—a crisis of faith. Latter-day Saint students who read Jackson's article and believe that they have all the facts concerning this topic will be sorely discouraged when they take a college-level course on the Bible, or enter into a conversation with a person who understands the Deutero-Isaiah issue. I therefore feel a personal need to respond.

I will present a two part essay that explains my concerns. I appreciate the fact that Dr. Jackson's essay was written as a basic, general response to the Deutero-Isaiah challenge for a lay audience. Yet in reading the piece, I was left wondering how much exposure Dr. Jackson himself has actually had to the scholarship on this topic. For example, he writes:

"It is important to note that the vast majority of Isaiah is written in poetry, and Hebrew poetry has sufficient flexibility to allow an author a wide range of literary options. In fact, the literary variations within chapters 1-35 are such that if one wanted to, one could argue for multiple authors in that section alone" (p. 74).

This is a surprising statement. It seems to suggest that Jackson is unfamiliar with the way historical critics assess the book of Isaiah. He also makes this same mistake earlier in the essay when he asserts that the "most common system" for dividing Isaiah is to attribute Isaiah 1-39 (minus the insert from 2 Kings in chapters 36-39) to the historical Isaiah son of Amoz, ca. 740-700 BCE (p. 72). The fact of the matter is that the mainstream scholarly consensus holds that there ARE multiple authors attested in Isaiah 1-39. Chapters 24-27 form a distinct literary section that scholars refer to as the "Little Apocalypse." This material shares a variety of features in common with later apocalyptic works best represented in the Hebrew Bible by the book of Daniel. Many scholars date this unit to the Persian or even Hellenistic time period. Most scholars believe that Isaiah 1 was composed as a late, single speech designed to serve as an introduction to either chapters 1-33 or else the final form of the book. Much of chapters 36-39 was taken from the narrative in 2 Kings and added to the book (a point that Jackson accepts), and chapters 34-35 are also later historical material added to the work. So the fact is mainstream biblical scholars actually DO argue for the attestation of multiple authors for Isaiah 1-39. Uncovering these units is an important part of historical criticism.

Another example that calls into question Jackson's familiarity with recent scholarship can be seen in his assertion concerning ancient manuscripts:

"From the outset, it must be made clear that multiple-authorship theories for the book of Isaiah have no support from any ancient manuscripts or traditions" (p. 71-72).

There are two problems with this argument:

1. It's not correct. The Great Isaiah Scroll (the most complete Qumran scroll of Isaiah) leaves a three line space at the bottom of a column at the end of chapter 33. Scribal practice suggests that this most likely reflects a scribal recognition of a major division in the book. This is quite meaningful, since chapters 34-35 share much in common with 24-27 (the so-called "Little Apocalypse") and Isaiah 40-55. None of this material stems from the eighth century Isaiah. Instead, it was written during and after the Babylonian conquest. Hence, the Qumran scroll marks the division that many scholars believe ends the book of Isaiah proper. To assert, therefore, that we do not have ANY evidence from any ancient manuscripts that supports the way scholars attribute sections of Isaiah to multiple authors is simply incorrect. We have the Great Isaiah Scroll.

2. Even if Jackson was correct, his argument wouldn't matter. The earliest Isaiah manuscript is the Great Isaiah Scroll, and it dates to approximately 125 BCE. That is some four hundred years after the material in Deutero-Isaiah was written. So even if Jackson was correct on this point this argument would carry no significance whatsoever for assessing the growth and development of the book of Isaiah.

Also, I'm afraid Jackson's essay sets readers up to believe that the primary reason scholars maintain that the historical Isaiah did not compose the material in Isaiah 40-66 is that critical scholars do not believe in prophecy:

"But the fundamental issue that underlies the idea of multiple authors within the book of Isaiah is not centered on biographical references or literary style. It is centered on this basic question: Can a prophet see beyond his own time? . . . Those who begin with the assumption that people cannot see beyond their own day must logically conclude that Isaiah could not have written those sections of the book that speak to a different historical setting than his own. In contrast, those who understand the true nature of revelation and prophetic foresight have no trouble with prophecies of future events" (pp. 74-75).

It is true that scholars who take a historical approach to the Bible cannot rely upon miracles to recreate what happened in the distant past. Miracles of course do happen, and religious people of faith are right to believe in such things, but we cannot use the tools of the historian's craft to verify that a miracle took place. And it

would be a miracle if a prophet in the 8th century BCE saw into the future and predicted the very name Cyrus, the man who would liberate the exilic community in 538 BCE.

By definition, a miracle is the least likely thing to have happened in the past, and the nature of the historian's craft is to identify the most likely thing that happened based upon the evidence. But it is misleading to suggest that scholars identify Isaiah 40-66 as a postexilic addition simply because they do not believe in prophecy. In reality, we have considerable evidence to support this position that Jackson's essay fails to address.

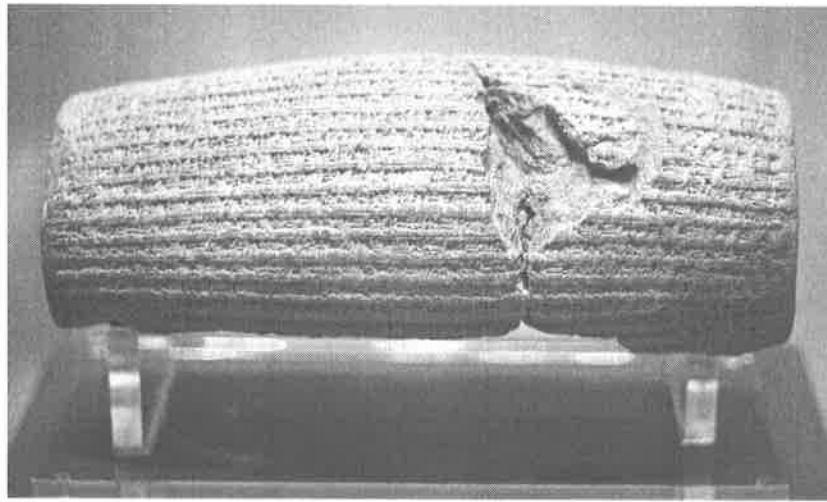
For example, the passage in Deutero-Isaiah that mentions Cyrus by name reads as follows:

(45:1) Thus said the LORD to Cyrus, His anointed one [“messiah”] Whose right hand He has grasped, Treading down nations before him, Ungirding the loins of kings, Opening doors before him And letting no gate stay shut: (2) I will march before you And level the hills that loom up; I will shatter doors of bronze And cut down iron bars. (3) I will give you treasures concealed in the dark And secret hoards — So that you may know that it is I the LORD, The God of Israel, who call you by name. (4) For the sake of My servant Jacob, Israel My chosen one, I call you by name, I hail you by title, though you have not known Me. (5) I am the LORD and there is none else; Beside Me, there is no god. I engird you, though you have not known Me.

This is a remarkable statement that points to a very specific historical person by name: Cyrus, the Persian king who would capture Babylon and liberate the Jews. In terms of history, the material makes no sense as pre-exilic prophecy (nor is it ever identified as such). To quote evangelical scholar Kenton Sparks concerning the manner:

“It strains the imagination to believe that Isaiah addressed these theological debates about a gentile messiah some one hundred and fifty years before they took place, and that his response to those debates was copied and recopied for many years by scribes—and read by audiences—who could not have made heads or tails out of Isaiah's rhetoric. It is more sensible to conclude that the prophet's words did not predict these debates so much as presupposes them” (God's Words in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriate of Critical Biblical Scholarship, pp. 106-7)

Scholars do not simply date this passage to the exilic era because they reject the possibility that the historical Isaiah could have correctly predicted this event. We have archeological evidence that shows that this material derives from the exilic era.



Cyrus Cylinder

In 1879, the Assyro-British archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam discovered the Cyrus Cylinder while excavating in the Middle East. The document was created sometime between 539-538 BCE. It is written in Akkadian, the language of the Babylonians. The text describes the failings of the Neo-Babylonian King Nabonidus, "an incompetent person" who "did away with the worship of Marduk," the chief god of Babylon. Written by the priests of Marduk, the document goes on to describe how the Babylonian god responded to Nabonidus:

Upon [hearing] their cries, the lord of the gods [Marduk] became furiously angry [and he left] their borders. . . Marduk [] turned [?] toward all the habitations that were abandoned and all the people of Sumer and Akkad ho had become corpses; [he was recon]ciled and had mercy [upon them]. He surveyed and looked throughout all the lands, searching for a righteous king whom he could support. He called out his name: Cyrus, king of Anshan; he proclaimed his name to be king over all [the world]. . . He [Marduk] ordered him to march to his city Babylon. . . He made him enter his city Babylon without fighting or battle; he saved Babylon from hardship. He delivered Nabonidus, the king who did not revere him, into his hands.

This text illuminates the historical context of the material in Deutero-Isaiah. Jews living in Babylon who continued to embrace their religion would have rejected the assertion that Marduk chose Cyrus as a deliverer. Hence, they developed a counter-theology to these specific claims, and that theology appears in Isaiah 45 where their god Yahweh, not Marduk, called Cyrus to his position. The phrase, "I call you by name" in Isaiah 45:4 directly matches the statement in the Cyrus Cylinder: "He [Marduk] called out his name: Cyrus, king of Anshan; he proclaimed his name." This connection illustrates that Isaiah 45 serves as a polemic against the claims made by those backing Marduk, the high-god of the Babylonians, in the Cyrus Cylinder.

In fact, this same polemical effort on the part of the authors of this material also appears in the so-called “radical monotheism” in passages such as Isaiah 44:9-20. This famous pericope specifically makes fun of the Mesopotamian worship that the exiled authors had witnessed by wrongfully suggesting that Mesopotamians believed their idols were literally the god Marduk.

Granted, in his essay Jackson seems to present his readers with the possibility that this specific material is late since it’s not mentioned in the Book of Mormon, but it’s wrong to leave LDS readers with the impression that scholars date Isaiah 40-66 the way they do simply because critical historians reject prophecy. We have actual archeological evidence that helps us to date this material that Jackson’s essay ignores. Moreover, as noted above, this polemic that belittles other gods and vindicates Israel’s deity Yahweh is one of the main themes that ties Isaiah 40-55 together as a literary unit.

Again, I sincerely appreciate the fact that Jackson seeks to expose LDS readers to the topic of Deutero-Isaiah and to provide them with an apologetic response that will help retain religious convictions. But it’s not simply the archeological evidence of the Cyrus Cylinder that Jackson’s essay ignores. The essay fails to consider any of the evidence that I believe provides the strongest case for the mainstream scholarly consensus concerning Isaiah 40-66.

Jackson’s essay wrongfully gives readers the impression that the mainstream consensus is determined solely by the fact that critical scholars reject prophecy and that there is a unique literary feel to 40-66 different from the rest of the book. He makes the assertion that Isaiah 40-66 is revelation, but the book of Isaiah itself never makes this claim. Therefore, Jackson’s reading of this material has less support than the critical stance. Ultimately, the reasons Jackson provides his readers for the mainstream consensus are not the primary issues that lead scholars to interpret Isaiah 40-66 as a postexilic addition. In the subsequent post, I will present the primary evidence concerning Deutero-Isaiah that I believe Jackson’s essay should have addressed and that those wishing to understand this challenging, yet exciting issue should take into consideration.

166

1



You may also like:

Dubbio del
Thomas

Hay reserva pero
dos iglesias
solamente

Common-Boden-
Unterschiedliche
Meinungen:
Neuzeitliche
Heilige und
zeitgenössische
Fragen

Proscribir la cruz

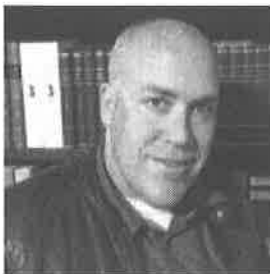
The Unintentional
Perpetuation of
Racial Prejudice by
the LDS Church

Vanha testamentti
- on parempi
kirjoja siell

El problema real
con "duda sus
dudas

37: Ask a Mormon
Sex Therapist Part
4

Share This Post! Because Sharing Really is Caring!



David Bokovoy

Dr. David Bokovoy holds a PhD in Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East and an MA in Jewish Studies from Brandeis University. He is currently an online professor in Bible and Jewish Studies at Utah State University. David has published articles in a variety of academic venues including The Journal of Biblical Literature, Vetus Testamentum, and Studies in the Bible and Antiquity.

All posts by David Bokovoy