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Since Cumorah: New Voices from the Dust, Epilogue: Since Qumran, Part XXII

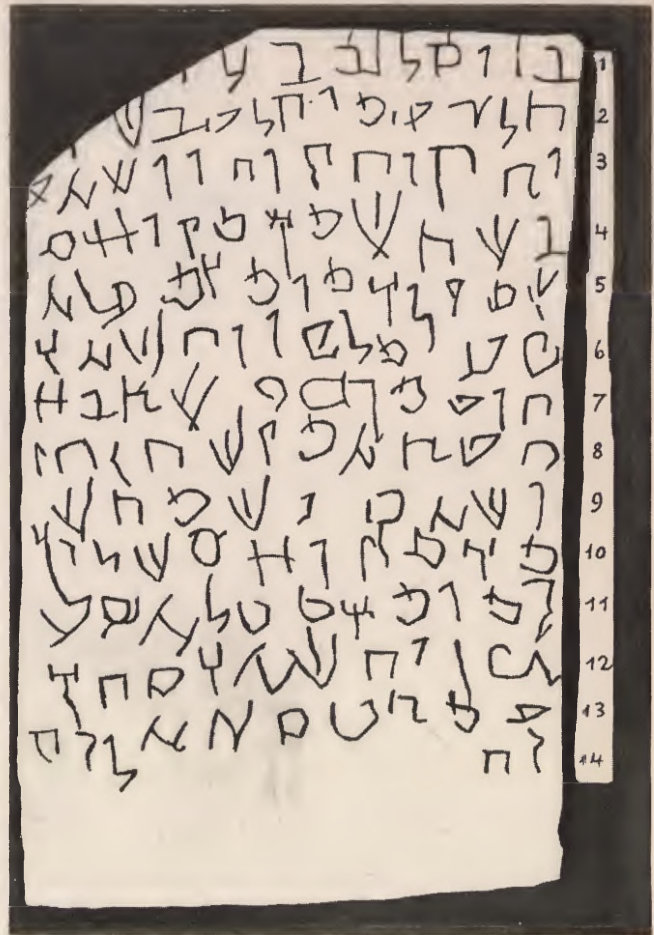
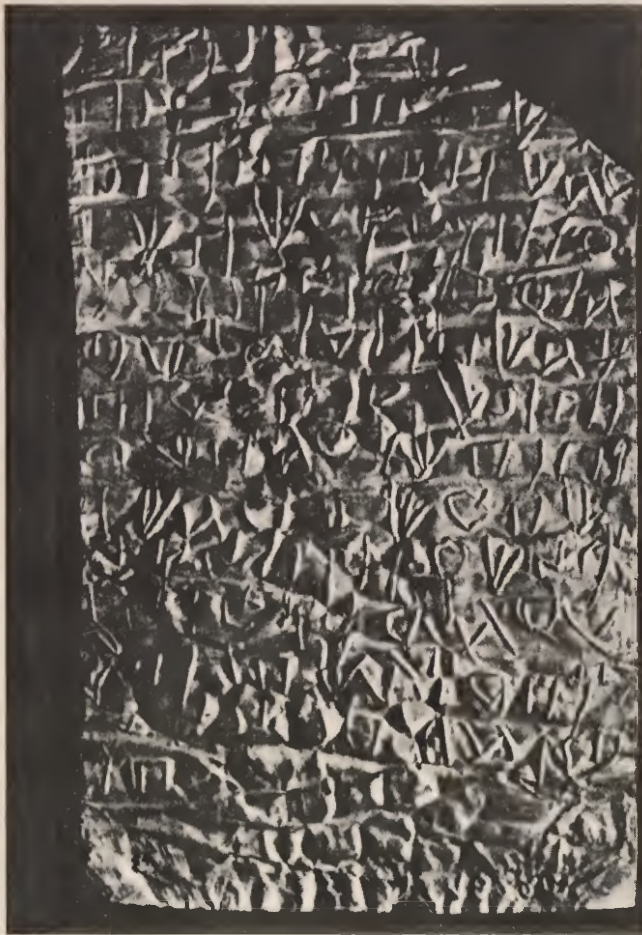
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Abstract: This series argues that the changing attitudes of biblical scholars toward basic questions about scripture allow room for claims made by the Book of Mormon. It discusses external evidences, the primitive church, Lehi, Zenos, the olive tree, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The twenty-second part begins to conclude the series.



SINCE CUMORAH

NEW VOICES FROM THE DUST

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EPILOGUE

SINCE QUMRAN

We have often noted of recent years that the whole tone of biblical scholarship has changed perceptibly since the discoveries of Qumran and Nag Hammadi.¹ For one thing, the type of correspondence we receive about the Book

of Mormon has changed surprisingly. For the first time scholars and clergymen both here and abroad are taking the Book of Mormon seriously. They don't intend to be taken in by it, but they are reading it. They are finding flaws in the edifice, to be sure, but now they wonder if there might not turn out to be an explanation

for those flaws, as there has for so much of the Book of Mormon that was once thought to be impossible or absurd.

For example, a prize howler for years was the gold plates—until gold, silver, and bronze inscribed plates began to turn up on ancient sites: the latest are “three gold plaques inscribed in Etruscan and

For ninety years scholars were baffled by the language on this gold plate from Sicily, thinking it to be pre-Greek. But in 1964 it was identified as Hebrew. The experts had insisted on reading the wrong side of the plate! Inked copy is at right.

Punic" found in 1964 near an ancient shrine in Italy. They "go back to ca. 500 B.C.," and the language and characters of the Punic script are close to those of the Phoenician homeland on Le-

hi's front door step.² It is only quite recently that the writing on the gold plate of Comiso in Sicily has been recognized as Hebrew; though the plate has been known since 1876, the writing was always thought by the experts to be the pre-Greek native "Sikan" language.³ It is things like this that give us pause.

In view of newly discovered insights into the nature of ancient scriptures, it is getting harder and harder to find really serious objections to the Book of Mormon, and today there is a tendency to fall back on the one point of attack that seems to have held up in the past, the so-called Isaiah question. Since this has been in capable hands in the past, we have directed our attention elsewhere; but constant prodding from non-Mormons who are not just attacking the Book of Mormon but apparently really want to know, combined with some very recent and important studies that put things in a new and surprising light, constrain us to undertake a brief discussion of this important point.

The Book of Mormon Explains Isaiah. Away back in the 12th century Ibn Ezra, a Jewish scholar, declared that chapters 40 to 66 of Isaiah seemed to form a literary unity, distinct in style and content from the rest of the book. To explain this, it was assumed that this part of the book was written not

by Isaiah but by another person and at another time, presumably some 200 years later.

Since 1789 this hypothetical author has been referred to as the Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah. But once the dual authorship of Isaiah was generally accepted, it soon became apparent that there was no need to stop at two Isaiahs. By applying exactly the same reasoning that split the original Isaiah in two, it was possible to break up the two main sections into a number of separate packages, each of which in turn readily yielded to the fragmentation process to produce scores of independent compositions, all going under the name of Isaiah.⁴ First, chapters 40-66 broke up into separate books, 40-55 being by one author and 56-66 by another, duly labelled Tritio-Isaiah. Chapters 36-39 were recognized as a separate book on the grounds of their resemblance to 2 Kings 18:13-20:19.

The earlier Isaiah, chapters 1-35, became a swarm of separate sayings glued together, according to one school, from a large number of smaller or medium-sized collections and, according to another school, gathered as minor additions to a central main work. Some scholars agreed that chapters 1-12 and 13-23 represented separate collections, though each had his own theory as to how, when, where, and by whom such collections were made.⁵ There is no point to going into the subject in detail. Typical is the present dating of the so-called Tritio-Isaiah, which is variously placed in the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th centuries B.C.⁶

The most recent survey of the whole Isaiah problem reaches the conclusion that because of its "very long and complicated prehistory" it will "never be possible to achieve a completely satisfying and thoroughly convincing analysis" of the

original book of Isaiah.⁷

But our concern is not with the unity of Isaiah but with the dating of the Deutero-Isaiah, since the charge against the Book of Mormon is that it quotes from that work, which did not exist at the time Lehi left Jerusalem. The dating of Deutero-Isaiah rests on three things: (1) the mention of Cyrus (44:28), who lived 200 years after Isaiah and long after Lehi, (2) the threats against Babylon (47:1, 48:14), which became the oppressor of Judah after the days of Isaiah, and (3) the general language and setting of the text which suggest a historical background commonly associated with a later period than that of Isaiah.⁸

The late date of Deutero-Isaiah is one of those things that has been taken for granted by everybody for years, so that today it would be hard to find a scholar who could really explain it and impossible to find one who could prove it. The Isaiah question belongs pre-eminently to that "large part of the questions about the history and prehistory of the Old Testament" which, as J. A. Soggin has recently noted, "were formulated at a time when men possessed a different concept of historical study and a much smaller knowledge of the ancient East" than they do today.⁹ Until recently, Soggin observes, biblical scholarship was dominated by "the dream of the completely objective investigator, or at least by the belief that such an ideal was attainable."¹⁰

But with the passing of authoritarian absolutes in scholarship, the interpretation of Isaiah has become increasingly fluid. Thus, Eissfeldt can now tell us that references to Cyrus or Babylon do not necessarily date the chapters or even the verses in which they appear, the passages being so typically "Isaiah" that the names may well

be later substitutions.¹¹ He notes that Isaiah always preached the restoration as well as the destruction of Jerusalem (he named his first child "The Returning Remnant!"), and that the threat and the promise go necessarily and inseparably together, so that the optimism of Deutero-Isaiah is no sign of separate authorship.¹² He notes that there has never been any agreement among the experts as to what are "characteristically Isaiah" thoughts and expressions,¹³ and that while one group of scholars sees carefully planned organization and development in the arrangement of the writings, another cannot detect the slightest trace of either.¹⁴ Finally he concludes with pointing out that there is a very close overall resemblance among all the chapters of Isaiah and that if there is no chapter that does not contain genuine utterances of the prophet, neither is there a chapter that does not contain unauthentic passages.¹⁵

The trouble with dating any part of Isaiah, as Eissfeldt points out, is that we have nothing really definite to go on; fixing dates or places with reference to "any religious or spiritual concepts is very uncertain. . . all we have to go by is general impressions, and we must be satisfied at best with mere possibilities."¹⁶

In the past, scholars have put great confidence in their ability to assign origins to documents on the evidence of the general language and setting of the text. A classic example is the impassioned utterance of Isaiah against the wicked nations, plainly the cry of an afflicted people to be avenged on their enemies, plainly an eschatological yearning that breathes the spirit of the Exile, which therefore must have been written during the Exile and by one of the exiles, long after Isaiah's day. And so we can identify Deutero-Isaiah.

But, as Eissfeldt now points out, there is no reason why the impreca-

tions against the nations should not have been uttered against the Assyrian army and empire in Isaiah's day, embracing as they did all the nations in their sinister host.¹⁷ Nor, as other scholars note, is there any reason why one must be an exile to write about the Exile; how far can we trust the insight of the experts when each can tell us that it is obvious to him that the Exile passages were written in Babylon (Volz), Palestine (Mowinkel), Egypt (Marti), or Lebanon (Duhm)?¹⁸

The most telling dichotomy between Isaiah and Deutero-Isaiah in time is the emphasis of the latter on the apocalypse of bliss—the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the holy city and temple, as against the grim apocalypse of woe that prevails in earlier Isaiah. But again, we are now being reminded that the two conceptions always form an indivisible whole in the thinking of Isaiah—you can't think of a gathering unless there has been a scattering and vice versa: they do not represent two different concepts of history at all, but one and the same doctrine that is basic to all the prophets and much older than Isaiah. This is a thing that is being increasingly emphasized today in the light of comparative studies which show that the idea of a cyclic concept of things, of alternate periods of suffering and defeat followed by victory and prosperity, is attested very early in the Egyptian and Babylonian literature and seems to have been a fundamental part of the ritual patterns of the ancient East from very early times.¹⁹

Because the eschatological and apocalyptic element dominates in the later apocrypha, it was long assumed to be a later religious development, but the comparative study of ancient ritual texts and monuments and their discovery in constantly increasing numbers is definitely changing the picture.¹⁹

(To Be Continued)

FOOTNOTES

¹See *The Improvement Era*, 68 (1965), (March 1965, pp. 210f, 213; April 1965, pp. 309ff, 328f, etc.), and our chapter entitled "The Return of the Prophets?" in *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962), pp. 258-272.

²G. Colonna, "The Sanctuary at Pyrgi in Etruria," *Archaeology*, 19 (Jan. 1966), p. 21.

³U. Schmoll, "Die hebräische Inschrift des Goldplättchens von Comiso," *Zeitschrift des deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 113 (1964), pp. 512-4.

⁴"The more the authorship of the Book of Isaiah has been investigated, the more complicated has the question appeared." Finally "there remained very few long passages of unchallenged authority. . . . It seemed that the entire book was best described as an anthology of the work of many writers . . . a confused amalgam of greater or smaller fragments from many sources." J. Eaton, in *Vetus Testamentum*, 9 (1960), pp. 138f.

⁵The process is described in the latest extensive survey of the problem, Otto Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (3rd ed., Tübingen: Mohr, 1964), pp. 408-412.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 460.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 413.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 408.

⁹J. A. Soggin, "Geschichte, Historie und Heilsgeschichte im Alten Testament," in *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 89 (1964), p. 724.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 723.

¹¹Eissfeldt, *op. cit.*, p. 420.

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 416, 424. Likewise, the hymns of praise and the satiric verses, though completely opposite in tone, belong together and do not indicate separate authorship, p. 457.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 431f and *passim*.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 452-3.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 461, 466.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 464-5.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 421.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 447.

¹⁹One of the most useful collections of texts on this subject is that of A. von Gall, *Basileia tou Theou* (Heidelberg, Winter, 1926). For a more recent survey, see our "Expanding Gospel," in *BYU Studies*, 7 (1966), pp. 3-27.

Bufs & Rebufs

(Continued from page 608)

member comes away disgusted and says, "That's the last time we are going there." But his money—his vote—is in the box office where it counts. The next week the theater plays a good family film that the family ignores while telling their friends how degrading movies are. Yes, many films are degrading, but there are still some that uplift and entertain.

May we comment on another item: We hope no church member is using the theater as cheap baby-sitting service. When one hires someone to care for his children, dependability is a requisite, and yet how careless are some people about the type of audiovisual influence to which they subject their children.

We are encouraged to know that church members are interested to the point that something will be done.

Mr. and Mrs. Daniel L. Stitt
Woodburn, Oregon

Rarotonga

Photographs on page 407 of the *May Improvement Era* are of Rarotonga as the picture captions indicate, rather than Tonga as the page heading indicates.

Patrick Daly Dalton

The president of the Tongan Mission is Patrick Daly Dalton rather than Patrick D. Daly, Jr., as reported on page 403 of the *May* issue of the *Era*.