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An Objection to the Book of Mormon Answered

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Abstract: This article is an answer to the criticism that certain chapters of Isaiah were written after Lehi's departure from Jerusalem and thus could not have been included in the Book of Mormon.

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AN OBJECTION TO THE BOOK OF MORMON ANSWERED.

*The Difficulty of Passages from Isaiah being quoted by Nephite
Writers, that Modern Bible Criticism (Higher Criticism)
Holds were not Written until the Time of the
Babylonian Captivity—586-538 B. C.,
and not Written by Isaiah at All.*

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It is held that Isaiah's historical period—the period of his ministry—runs through the reigns of four kings of Judah—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Some extend his ministry over into the reign of Manasseh, by whose edict, it is said, he was sawn asunder. In any event Isaiah would be a very aged man at the reign of Hezekiah, 698 B. C.; and he would have been between eighty and ninety at the accession of Manasseh. So that it is safe to say that his life ended soon after the close of Hezekiah's reign. Now if it be true that the latter part of the Book of Isaiah, from chapter forty to chapter sixty-six, inclusive, was not written until and during the Babylonian captivity, 586-538 B. C.—as is assumed by modern criticism—then of course the Prophet Isaiah did not write that part of the book which bears his name as author.

Again: If it be true that these chapters 40-66 were not written until and during the Babylonian captivity, then Lehi could not have taken that part of the book of Isaiah with him into the wilderness and subsequently brought it with him to America, where

his son Nephi copied passages and whole chapters into the record he engraved upon plates called the plates of Nephi,* since Lehi left Jerusalem 600 years B. C.

The difficulty presented by the higher criticism is obvious; *viz.*, if Joseph Smith is representing the first Nephi as transcribing into his Nephite records passages and whole chapters purporting to have been written by Isaiah, when as a matter of fact those chapters were not written until a hundred and twenty-five or a hundred and fifty years after Isaiah's death; and not until fifty years after Lehi's colony had departed from Jerusalem; then Joseph Smith is representing Nephi as doing that which is impossible, and throws the whole Book of Mormon under suspicion of being fraudulent. This, therefore, becomes a very interesting as well as a very important objection; and many among the higher critics will say a fatal one. Here it can only be treated in outline; it is undoubtedly worthy of exhaustive analysis.

The Book of Isaiah divides into two parts: first, chapters 1-39, universally allowed to be the work of the Prophet Isaiah, whose ministry extended through the reigns of the four kings mentioned in Isaiah 1: 1; second, chapters 40-66, written by an unknown author, nearly one hundred and fifty or two hundred years after Isaiah, sometimes called Isaiah II. It is claimed that these chapters, 40-66, "form a continuous prophecy, dealing throughout with a common theme, *viz.*, Israel's restoration from exile in Babylon. * * * Jerusalem and the temple have been for long in ruins—'the old waste places;' Israel is in exile."† It is to these conditions that the unknown prophet addresses himself. His object is to awaken faith in the certainty of an approaching restoration.

Three independent lines of argument are said to establish this theory of the authorship of chapters 40-66, in the Book of Isaiah:

1. The internal evidence supplied by the prophecy itself points to this period [time of the captivity] as that at which it was written. It alludes repeatedly to Jerusalem as ruined and deserted; to the sufferings which the Jews have

* Isaiah chap. 48 is found in I Nephi, chap. 20; Isaiah, 49, I Nephi, 21; Isaiah 50, in II Nephi, 7; Isaiah 51, in II Nephi, 8; Isaiah 53, in Mosiah, 14; Isaiah 52: 9, 10, in III Nephi, 18-20; Isaiah, 54, in III Nephi, 22.

† Driver's *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*—Isaiah, p. 230.

experienced, or are experiencing, at the hands of the Chaldeans; to the prospect of return, which, as the prophet speaks, is imminent. Those whom the prophet addresses, and, moreover, addresses in person—arguing with them, appealing to them, striving to win their assent by his warm and impassioned rhetoric—are not the men of Jerusalem, contemporaries of Ahaz and Hezekiah, or even of Manasseh; they are the exiles in Babylonia. Judged by the analogy of prophecy, this constitutes the strongest possible presumption that the author actually lived in the period which he thus describes, and is not merely (as has been supposed) Isaiah immersed in spirit in the future, and holding converse, as it were, with the generations yet unborn. Such an immersion in the future would be not only without parallel in the Old Testament, it would be contrary to the nature of prophecy. The prophet speaks always, in the first instance, to his own contemporaries: the message which he brings is intimately related with the circumstances of his time: his promises and predictions, however far they reach into the future, nevertheless rest upon the basis of the history of his own age, and correspond to the needs which are then felt. The prophet never abandons his own historical position, but speaks from it.*

2. The argument derived from the historic function of prophecy is confirmed by the literary style of chs. 40-66, which is very different from that of Isaiah 1-39. Isaiah 1-39 shows strongly marked individualities of style: he is fond of particular images and phrases, many of which are used by no other writer of the Old Testament. Now in the chapters which contain evident allusions to the age of Isaiah himself, these expressions occur repeatedly; in the chapters which are without such allusions, and which thus authorize *prima facie* the inference that they belong to a different age, they are absent, and new images and phrases appear instead. This coincidence cannot be accidental. The subject of chs. 40-66 is not so different from that of Isaiah's prophecies (e. g.) against the Assyrians, as to necessitate a new phraseology and rhetorical form: the differences can only be reasonably explained by the supposition of a change of author.†

3. The theological ideas of chs. 40-66 (in so far as they are not of that fundamental kind common to the prophets generally) differ remarkably from those which appear, from chs. 1-39, to be distinctive of Isaiah. Thus, on the nature of God generally, the ideas expressed are much larger and fuller. Isaiah, for instance, depicts the majesty of Jehovah: in chs. 40-66 the prophet emphasizes his infinitude; he is the Creator, the Sustainer of the universe, the Life-Giver, the Author of history, the First and the Last, the Incomparable One. This is a real difference. And yet it cannot be argued that opportunities for such assertions of Jehovah's power and Godhead would not have presented themselves naturally to Isaiah whilst he was engaged in defying the armies of Assyria. But, in truth, chs. 40-66 show an advance upon Isaiah, not only in the substance of their theology, but also in the form in which it is presented; truths which are merely affirmed in Isaiah being here made the subject of reflection and argument.‡

* Driver's *Introduction*, pp. 336, 7.

† *Ibid.* p. 238.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 242.

These arguments when expressed in these general terms seem quite formidable; but they are much stronger in general statement than when one follows the advocates of them through all the references cited by them in support of the theory; for then one is impressed with the very heavy weights which the higher criticism hangs on very slender threads. As before remarked, however, I may not go beyond outline treatment of the matter here.

The first thing those of us who believe Isaiah to be the author of the whole book through so many ages accredited to him, both by Jews and Christians—the first thing we have a right to demand of these innovators is: If Isaiah the Prophet is not the author of the last twenty-seven chapters of the book that bears his name, who is the author? Confessedly chapters 40-66 of Isaiah are the most important part of the book. How is it that chapters 1-39 can be assigned an author, but the more important chapters 40-66 have to be assigned to an “unknown” author? Was knowledge in those antique times so imperfect that the author of such a remarkable production as Isaiah 40-66 could not be ascertained?

Second, there is no heading to this second division of Isaiah 40-66; and it is not true that this second part is unconnected with the first part. Allowing something to the spirit of prophecy in Isaiah, by which I mean a power to foresee events, which carries with it a power in the prophet to project himself into the midst of those things foreseen, and to speak from the midst of them as if they were present—as indeed they were to his consciousness—and there is an immediate connection between the two parts. Chapter 39 predicts the Babylonian captivity. Hezekiah has just been made to hear the word of the Lord—

Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord.

And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (Isaiah 39: 6-7).

In the opening chapter of the supposed second division of Isaiah, chapter 40, the prophet launches out upon that series of prophecies that treat, first, of the deliverance of Israel from this captivity, just spoken of, through Cyrus, king of Persia; and second, a

larger deliverance of Israel through the redemption brought to pass by the Christ. Because of this close and logical connection between the supposed divisions of the book, one is justified in holding that the inscription of chapter 1: 1 applies to the whole book, and implies that the author of the second part, 40-66, is as well author of the first part, 1-39. "Nor do the words 'concerning Judah and Jerusalem,'" says an eminent authority, "oppose the idea that the inscription applied to the whole; for whatever he [Isaiah] says against other nations, he says on account of their relation to Judah.*"

Third, the higher critics must deal with some facts of history before their claims can be allowed. According to Josephus, the Jews showed the prophecies of Isaiah (chaps. 44; 28; 45: 1-13) to Cyrus the king, to induce him to return the Jews to Jerusalem and order the building of the temple, upon which Cyrus issued the following decree:

Thus said Cyrus the king, Since God Almighty hath appointed me to be king of the habitable earth, I believe that he is that God which the nation of the Israelites worship, for indeed he foretold my name by the prophets, and that I should build him a house at Jerusalem, in the country of Judea.

This was known to Cyrus by his reading the book which Isaiah left behind his prophecies; for this prophet said, that God had spoken this to him in a secret vision: "My will is that Cyrus, whom I have appointed to be king over many and great nations, send back my people to their own land, and build my temple." This was foretold by Isaiah one hundred and forty years before the temple was demolished. Accordingly, when Cyrus read this, and admired the divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him, to fulfil what was so written.†

The above is confirmed also by Ezra 1: 2. Now the value of this exhibition of the word of the Lord to Cyrus grew out of the circumstance that it was a prophecy uttered by Isaiah one hundred and fifty years before it came to the knowledge of Cyrus. It was the fact that it was "fore-knowledge" that caused Cyrus to admire the divine power thus displayed; it was this that stirred him with the ambition to fulfil what was so written. Now either we must believe that the pious Jews, anxious to return to the land of their fathers, rebuild their temple, and resume the thread of their

* *Jamieson-Faussett-Brown Commentary*, Introduction to Isaiah.

† *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, chap. 1.

national existence, deceived by a wretched subterfuge the King of Persia, and induced him to make this proclamation by such means, or else they really exhibited to him the writings of Isaiah, and this real prophecy respecting himself, fraught with such mighty consequences to a people chosen of God to stand as his witness among the nations of the earth. I cannot think that this action, so important in the development of God's purposes respecting his people, was founded in fraud; nor do I believe such mighty results were brought about by disclosing the prognostications of some unknown contemporary whose "eye had marked Cyrus in the distance as the coming deliverer of his nation;" such cause would be inadequate to the results.

Again, Luke represents the Christ as reading a passage from this second division of Isaiah (chapt. 61: 1, 2), and reading it as coming from Isaiah; and also as being fulfilled in his own person:

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias (Isaiah). And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth (Luke 4: 16-22).

One can scarcely think of Jesus being mistaken in respect of the authorship of the Scripture from which he read, especially respecting a prophecy relating to himself. Furthermore, whoever wrote Isaiah 61: 1, 2, whether Isaiah, the admitted author of Isaiah chs. 1-39, or some other author a hundred and fifty or two hundred years later, and in the midst of the scenes of the Babylonian captivity, this much is true: he projected himself forward some several hundreds of years into the times of the beginning of the Christ's mission, (if we may believe the Christ when he applies

the prophecy to himself and proclaims the fulfilment of it in the happening of that day) speaks in the present tense, as if pleading with the men of his own day. So that if this power is admitted as being possessed by the supposed "unknown" author of chapters 40-66 it might as well be accorded to Isaiah as to him; and if that power be accorded to a prophetic writer, then all the difficulties conjured up by our modern critics, and to overcome which their theories were invoked, meet with easy solution.

As to the difference of literary style between the first and second division of Isaiah's book, urging as necessary the belief in different authors for the two parts, I am disposed to give considerable weight to such evidence, since I know how strong the tendency in expression towards individuation is; but those more competent to judge of that subject than I am, hold that of all the prophetic writers, Isaiah possesses the widest range of literary style, the largest richness in coloring and forms of expression. And this when the view of his style is confined to that part of his book of which all allow he is the author. As for example, the one author most assured that Isaiah did not write chs. 40-66 of the book that bears his name, the author of *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, speaking of Isaiah, and of course limiting his comment to the author of chs. 1-39, says:

Isaiah's poetical genius is superb. His characteristics are grandeur and beauty of conception, wealth of imagination, vividness of illustration, compressed energy and splendor of diction. * * * * Examples of picturesque and impressive imagery are indeed so abundant that selection is difficult. These may be instanced, however: the banner raised aloft upon the mountains; the restless roar of the sea; the waters rising with irresistible might; the forest consumed rapidly in the circling flames, or stripped of its foliage by an unseen hand; the raised way; the rushing of many waters; the storm driving or beating down all before it; the monster funeral pyre; Jehovah's hand "stretched out," or "swung," over the earth, and bearing consternation with it. Especially grand are the figures under which he conceives Jehovah as "rising up," being "exalted," or otherwise asserting his majesty against those who would treat it with disregard or disdain. * * * * The brilliancy and power of Isaiah's genius appear further in the sudden contrasts, and pointed antitheses and retorts, in which he delights.

Isaiah's literary style shows similar characteristics. It is chaste and dignified: the language is choice, but devoid of all artificiality or stiffness; every sentence is compact and forcible; the rhythm is stately; the periods are finely rounded; Isaiah indulges occasionally—in the manner of his people—in tone-painting, and

sometimes enforces his meaning by an effective assonance, but never to excess, or as a meretricious ornament. His style is never diffuse: even his longest discourses are not monotonous or prolix; he knows how to treat his subject fruitfully, and, as he moves along, to bring before his reader new and varied aspects of it; thus he seizes a number of salient points and presents each singly in a vivid picture.

* * * * No prophet has Isaiah's power either of conception or of expression; none has the same command of noble thoughts, or can present them in the same noble and attractive language.

Immerse such a writer as this into the spirit of the future, give him the theme of Israel's deliverance from Babylonian captivity, or the larger deliverance of Israel and the world from sin and death through the mission of the Christ; and what new coloring may he not give to his style? What greater depths of truth respecting God and man may he not sound, calling for new phraseology, new words and combinations to express the deeper knowledge of the enlarged "vision?" This I believe is what happened to the Prophet. He was so immersed; and his style under the inspiration of God rose to meet the new environment and the enlarged views given by the wider vision.

One of the most forceful passages on this subject that I have yet found is one written by Professor Daniel Smith Talcott, D. D., of the Theological Seminary, Bangor, Maine. He contributes the article on "Isaiah" to Hackett's edition of *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*, and in the course of his treatise, referring to the diversity of style between the two alleged parts of Isaiah, says:

The array of linguistic evidence in proof of a diversity of authorship, which has gradually grown within the last century into the formidable proportions in which it meets us in the pages of Knobel and others, rests very largely upon an assumption which none of these critics have the hardihood distinctly to vindicate, namely, that within the narrow compass of the Hebrew literature that has come down to us from any given period, we have the means for arriving at an accurate estimate of all the resources which the language at that time possessed. When we have eliminated from the list of words and phrases relied upon to prove a later date than the time of Isaiah, everything the value of which to the argument must stand or fall with this assumption, there remains absolutely nothing which may not be reasonably referred to the reign of Hezekiah. Indeed, considering all the circumstances of the times, it might justly have been expected that the traces of foreign influence upon the language would be far more conspicuous in a writing of this date than they actually are in the controverted portions.

It is to be remembered that the ministry of the prophet must have extended through a period, at the lowest calculation, of nearly fifty years; a period signal-

ized, especially during the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah, by constant and growing intercourse with foreign nations, thus involving continually new influences for the corruption of public morals and new dangers to the state, and making it incumbent upon him who had been divinely constituted at once the political adviser of the nation and its religious guide, to be habitually and intimately conversant among the people, so as to descry upon the instant every additional step taken in their downward course and the first approach of each new peril from abroad, and to be able to meet each successive phase of their necessities with forms of instruction, admonition, and warning, not only in their general purport, but in their very style and diction, accommodated to conditions hitherto unknown, and that were still perpetually changing.

Now when we take all this into the account, and then imagine to ourselves the prophet, toward the close of this long period, entering upon what was in some respects a novel kind of labor, and writing out with a special view to the benefit of a remote posterity, the suggestions of that mysterious *Theopneustia* to which his lips had been for so many years the channel of communication with his contemporaries, far from finding any difficulty in the diversities of style perceptible in the different portions of his prophecy, we shall only see fresh occasion to admire that native strength and grandeur of intellect, which have still left upon productions so widely remote from each other in the time and circumstances of their composition, so plain an impress of one and the same overmastering individuality. (Smith's *Bible Dictionary*, Vol. II, p. 1165.)

Believers in the Book of Mormon have no occasion of uneasiness because passages from the latter part of Isaiah's book are found transcribed into the Nephite record. The theories of modern critics have not destroyed the integrity and unity of the Book of Isaiah. And after the overwhelming evidences for the truth of the Book of Mormon are taken into account; and it is found that on the plates of Nephi there were transcripts from the latter part of Isaiah's writings, taken from a copy of his prophecies carried by a colony of Jews from Jerusalem to the western hemisphere, six hundred years before Christ—men will discern in this discovery new evidence for the Isaiah authorship of the whole book of Isaiah.

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KEY TO SUCCESS.

The key to success in any department of life is self-denial. Idleness, laziness, wastefulness, come from lack of it, while industry, promptitude, economy, thrift and a successful career are the results of it.