

literal, historical meaning of scripture. Instead, they were more interested in producing creative reinterpretation that explained contemporary religious views. Developing out of this same religious environment, early Christian authors adopted and recontextualized prophetic material as messianic prophecies pointing to Jesus.

Another parallel to this process appears in the writings of the first century Jewish historian Josephus. In his twenty volumes of history titled *Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus created a new rewritten Bible of sorts by quoting portions of the Septuagint verbatim and then adding both new material and his own commentary directly to the account. This same time period saw Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, combine Jewish texts with Platonic philosophy. Through this effort, Philo created new religious material based on biblical sources.

This method of using biblical literature (including the prophets) can be seen as similar to the work Joseph Smith performed in creating a new expanded canon based upon the Bible—texts such as the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham. As theological expansions upon biblical material, Joseph Smith's scriptural works parallel an ancient literary pattern for revelatory text. This same type of genre is seen in later Jewish pseudepigrapha and Rabbinic midrash, as well as within the Bible itself. The term *midrash* refers to a method of interpreting biblical material that fills in literary and legal gaps featured in the biblical sources. Joseph Smith's work fits in well with the way earlier authors used prophetic texts as a springboard to create new religious literature, independent of original authorial intent and historical setting. For Latter-day Saints, a text such as the Book of Abraham, therefore, can be defined as inspired prophetic midrash.

#### ISAIAH AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

One of the most significant challenges for traditional LDS readings of prophetic material is the fact that this literature grew over time and was most likely not produced by the men whose names are connected with the biblical books. This is especially true for the composition of Isaiah. Since the twentieth century, virtually all mainstream scholars have held the position that Isaiah chapters 40–66 were written after the Jewish exile into Babylon (c. 586 BCE). This means that the historical Isaiah, a prophet who lived in Jerusalem during the eighth century BCE, did not write the second half of the book of Isaiah. For Latter-day Saints, this presents a direct challenge for traditionally

held paradigms concerning the Book of Mormon, since some of its material attributes these later chapters to Isaiah himself. If scholars are correct, then this material would not have been available to the Book of Mormon people because it was not written until after they had arrived in the New World. Its attestation in the Book of Mormon is therefore anachronistic.

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There are several compelling reasons scholars argue that Isaiah 40–66 is not a prophecy given by the historical Isaiah. Amongst other points, these factors include the following: (1) 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) Deutero-Isaiah provides a polemical response to the Cyrus Cylinder and mentions the Persian ruler by name; (3) the historical Isaiah of the eighth century 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; (4) the authors of 40–55 know the alter-prophetic work of Jeremiah, but Jeremiah shows no signs of knowing the Deutero-Isaiah prophecies; (5) the authors of 40–66 knew exilic and postexilic material including Lamentations; (6) Deutero-Isaiah shows signs of Aramaic and Post-Exilic Hebrew influence (but this same linguistic trace does not appear in the oracles of the historical Isaiah).<sup>17</sup>

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. Exactly how and why later scribes attached these oracles to those of an earlier prophet is unknown. Yet contemporary scholars are certain that 40–66 does not reflect the work of the eighth century Isaiah son of Amoz. LDS apologetic responses to this challenge typically approach the topic by focusing on the Book of Mormon as a revelatory work given through Joseph Smith.<sup>18</sup> In creating the Book of Mormon, Smith did not simply work his way line upon line through an ancient script carved into golden plates. The translation of the Book of Mormon was more likely a revelatory, creative experience similar to the adapta-

17. On issues of dating see, for example, discussion and bibliography in Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55* (AB 19A; New York: Doubleday, 2002); for a summary of the evidence for Deutero-Isaiah and its relationship to Mormonism, see David Bokovoy, "The Truthfulness of Deutero-Isaiah: A Response to Kent Jackson," Pt. 1 and 2; Rational Faiths, accessed November 12, 2021 at <https://rationalfaiths.com/truthfulness-deutero-isaiah-response-kent-jackson/> and <https://rationalfaiths.com/truthfulness-deutero-isaiah-response-kent-jackson-part-2/>.

18. See, for one example, Daniel T. Ellsworth, "Their Imperfect Best: Isaianic Authorship from an LDS Perspective," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 27 (2017): 1–27.

tion of scriptural sources seen in earlier biblical and post biblical traditions. Mormon scholars argue that Latter-day Saints should expect that the book would contain inspired prophetic, midrashic use of material known to Smith, including the material in Isaiah 40–66.<sup>19</sup>

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Latter-day Saints hold in high regard the prophetic tradition in the Bible—indeed, it is written into the foundations of the tradition. They believe that Joseph Smith and the church leaders who followed after him continue that same institution. There are certainly some general correspondences between these two traditions. These would include a belief in an ability for a human messenger to ascertain the will of deity, and then to offer an inspired oracle to help guide their respective communities. But unlike the LDS tradition, biblical prophets did not “hold priesthood” (to use LDS parlance) as a rule. They were not exclusively male, and typically speaking, biblical prophets were critics of those in authority, rather than individuals who held that authority themselves. These differences illustrate the importance of reading both biblical and LDS prophetic literature in its historical and social context.

19. David Bokovoy, “‘The Book Which Thou Shalt Write’: The Book of Moses as Prophetic Midrash,” in *The Expanded Canon: Perspectives on Mormonism and Scripture*, edited by Blair G. Van Dyke, Brian D. Birch, and Boyd J. Petersen (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2018), 121–42; and David Bokovoy, *Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis-Deuteronomy* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2014).