

# The Impossible Text in the Book of Mormon

## An Analysis of the Deutero-Isaiah Anachronism



Biblical scholarship has revealed **evidence** within the Book of Mormon that fundamentally **challenges** its claim of **ancient origins**. This presentation examines one of the most conclusive examples—a “**smoking gun**” **anachronism** that cannot be reconciled with the book’s timeline.

# The Book of Mormon's Foundational Claim

The Book of Mormon presents itself as a historical record of people who left Jerusalem around 600 BCE.

- Led by the prophet Lehi, they brought with them a record called the “Brass Plates.”
- These plates contained the Hebrew scriptures, including the writings of the prophet Isaiah.
- Therefore, any biblical text in the Book of Mormon must have existed and been available in Jerusalem ***before 600 BCE.***



**c. 600 BCE**

# The Unraveling Thread: “Second Isaiah”

Over 22 chapters of Isaiah are quoted in the Book of Mormon. However, for more than a century, biblical scholars have reached a firm consensus: the book of Isaiah was not written by a single author.

**Isaiah (or “First Isaiah”):** Chapters 1-39. Written by the historical prophet Isaiah in the 8th century BCE.

**Deutero-Isaiah (or “Second Isaiah”):** Chapters 40-55. Written by an anonymous author during the Babylonian Exile (~540 BCE).

**Trito-Isaiah (or “Third Isaiah”):** Chapters 56-66. Written by other authors after the exile.



The Book of Mormon quotes extensively from Deutero-Isaiah, a text composed **after** Lehi’s family had already left Jerusalem.

# An Undisputed Scholarly Consensus

“ Since the 20th century, all mainstream scholars have held the position that chapters 40 through 66 were written after the Jewish exile into Babylon, which took place about 586 BC... 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. ”

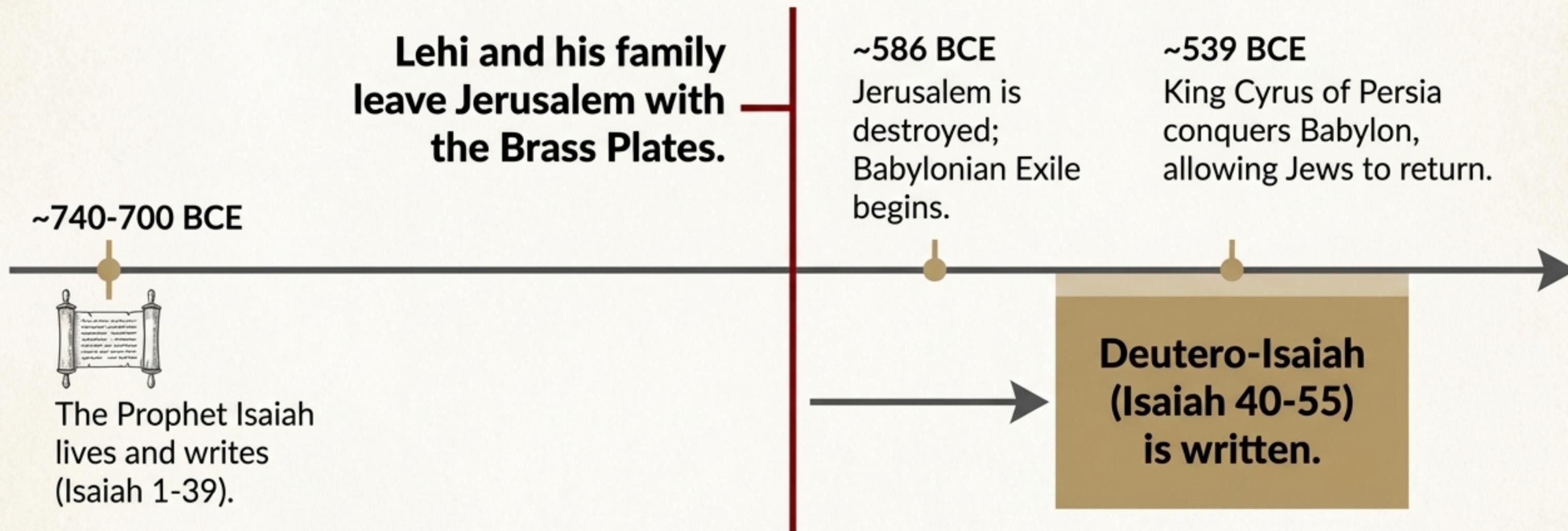
- Dr. David Bokovoy, PhD,  
Brandeis University



---

This is not a matter of debate among historians and biblical scholars;  
it is a foundational concept in modern biblical criticism.

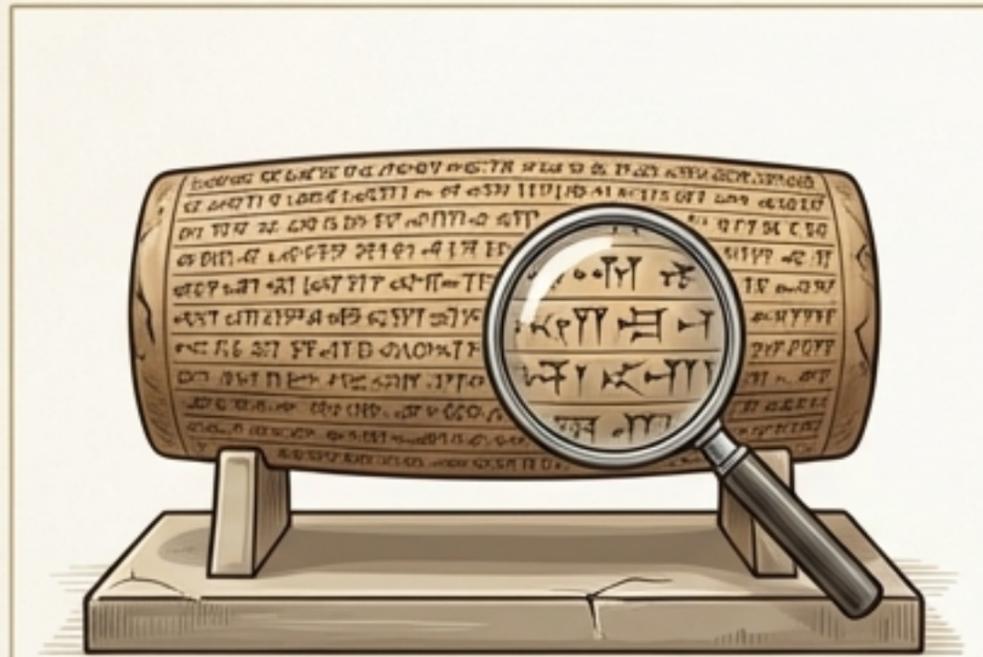
# The Timeline Makes the Problem Inescapable



Lehi could not have possessed a text that would not be written for another 60 years.

# How Scholars Know: Converging Lines of Evidence

The conclusion of multiple authorship for Isaiah is based on distinct “fingerprints” left in the text itself. Scholars analyze three primary areas:



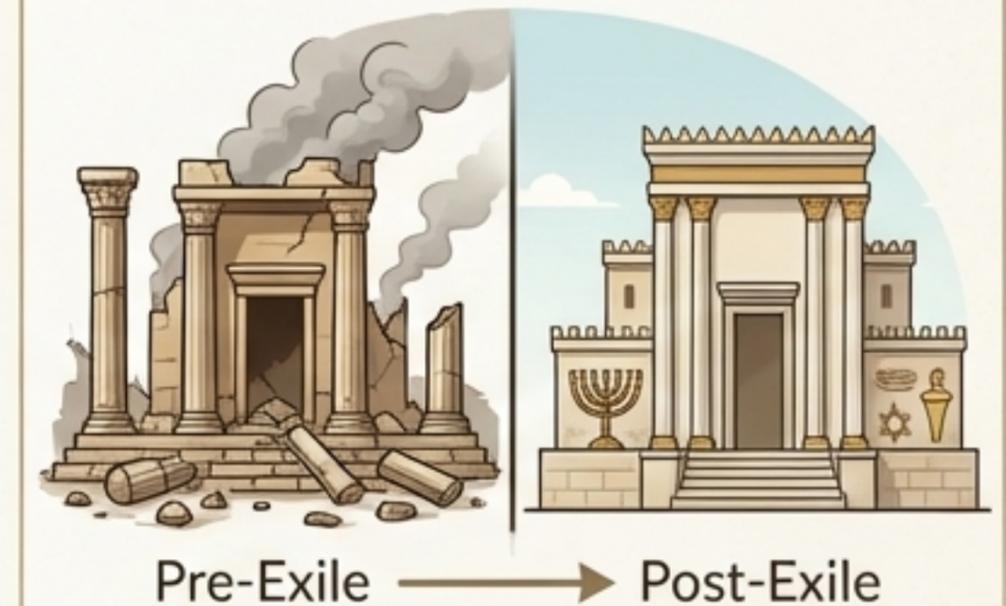
## Historical Context

The text describes events and figures an 8th-century author could not have known.



## Linguistic Patterns

The language, style, and vocabulary shift dramatically after chapter 39.



## Theological Perspective

The core message and worldview change from pre-exile to post-exile realities.

# Evidence 1: The Historical “Smoking Gun”

Isaiah 45:1 explicitly names **Cyrus**, the Persian king who conquered Babylon in 539 BCE.

The text speaks of Cyrus and the liberation of the Jews not as a distant, vague prophecy, but as a present or recent event. The specificity of naming a king who **lived 150 years after** the historical Isaiah **indicates the author was writing after the fact.**



The **Cyrus Cylinder** (discovered 1879) provides historical context for this period, confirming the events Deutero-Isaiah describes. The text of Deutero-Isaiah serves as a polemic against Babylonian gods, directly engaging with the historical situation of its time.

# Evidence 2: Linguistic and Thematic Fingerprints

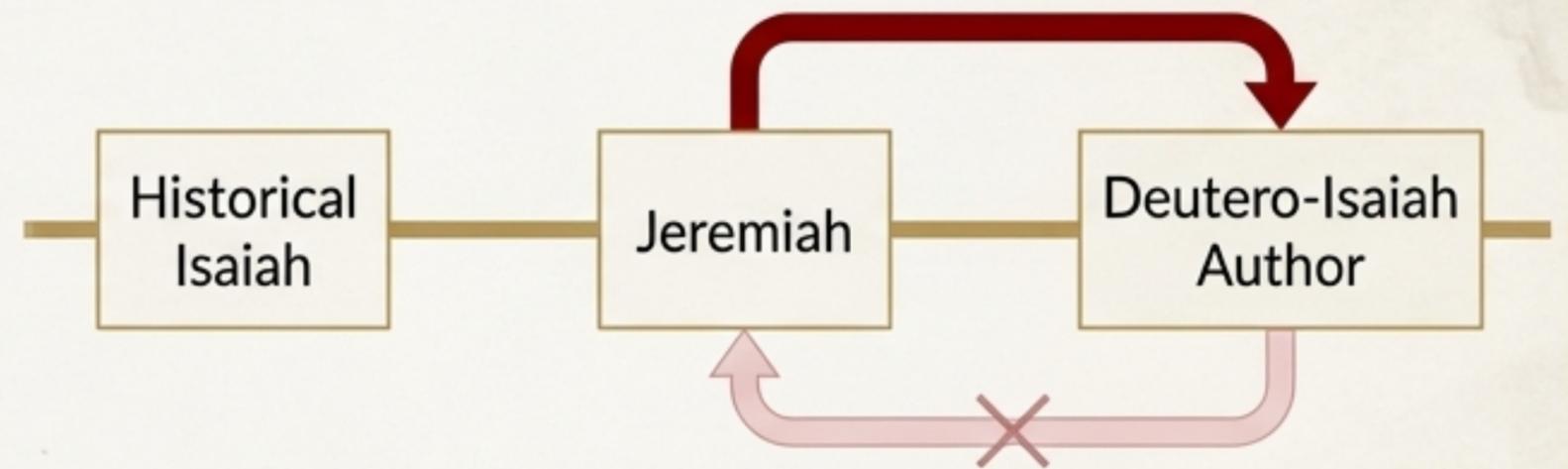
## Language Shift



**Aramaic Influence:** Isaiah 40-66 contains heavy Aramaic influence, reflecting a time when Jews were speaking Aramaic during and after the exile. This influence is absent in Isaiah 1-39.

**Later Hebrew:** The Hebrew words and phrases used in the second half of Isaiah are characteristic of the exilic and post-exilic periods.

## Anachronistic Influence



The author of Deutero-Isaiah shows a clear awareness of the teachings of the prophet **Jeremiah**, who lived *after* the historical Isaiah.

Conversely, Jeremiah's own writings show no knowledge of the Deutero-Isaiah material. This one-way influence establishes a clear chronological order.

# Evidence 3: A Radical Shift in Theology and Tone

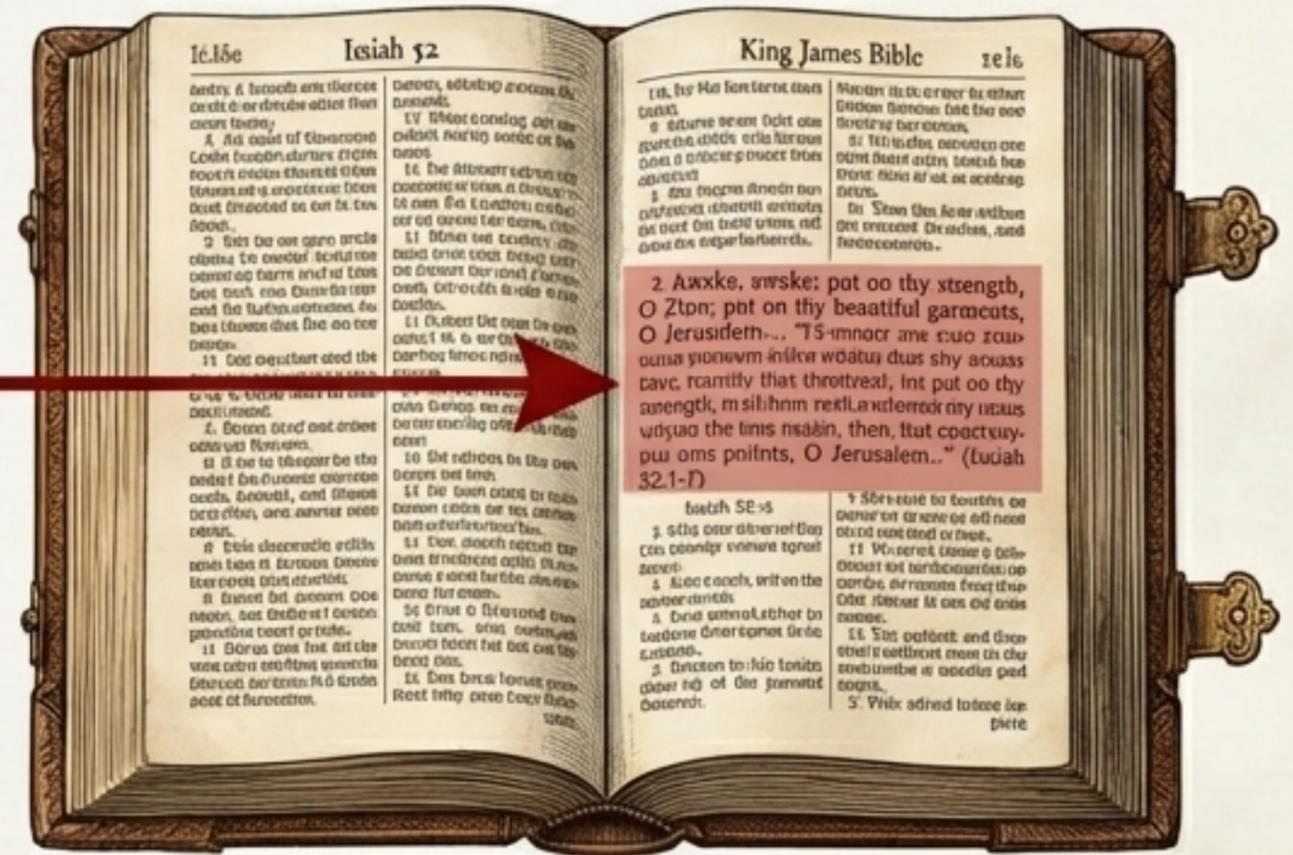
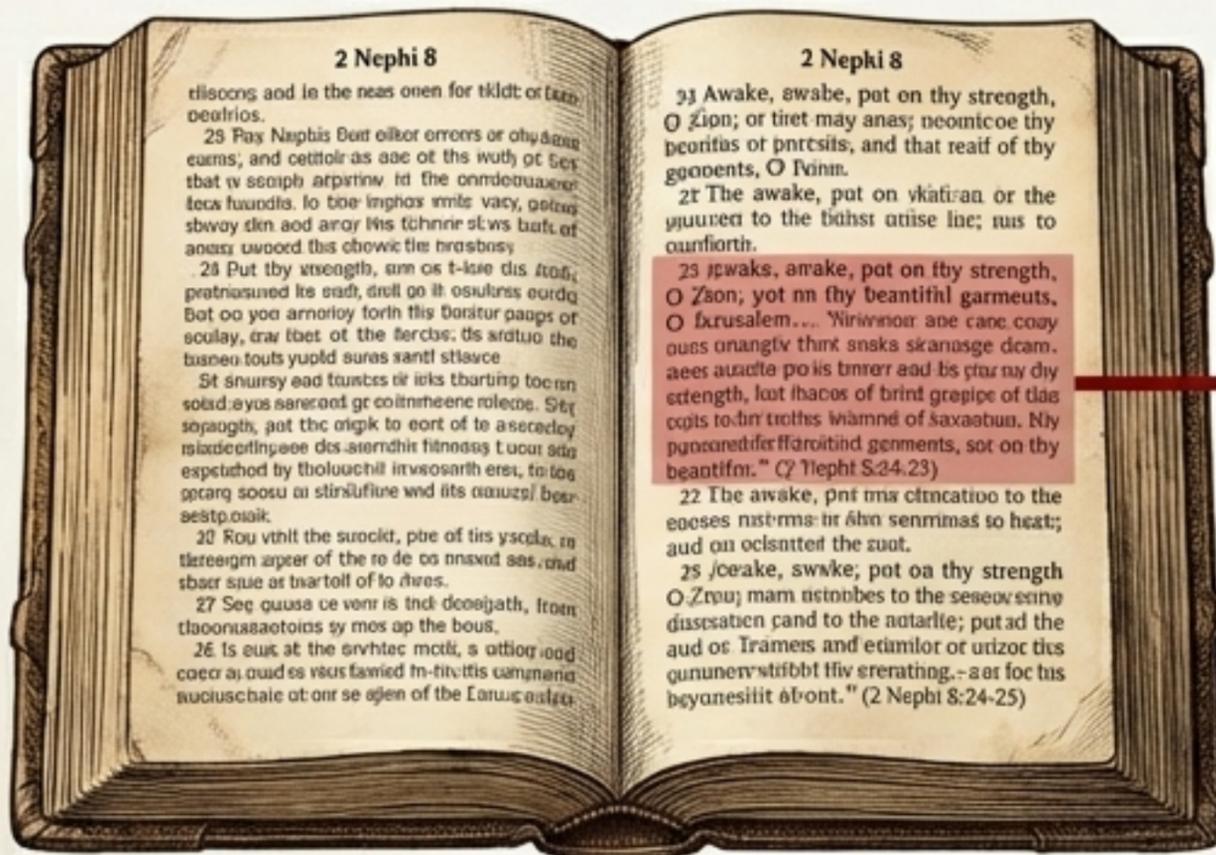
Historical Isaiah (Chapters 1-39)	Deutero-Isaiah (Chapters 40-55)
<b>Perspective:</b> <b>Pre-Exile.</b> A warning of impending judgment from Assyria.	<b>Perspective:</b> <b>Post-Exile.</b> A message of comfort and hope <i>after</i> judgment has already occurred.
<b>Core Belief:</b> Jerusalem is inviolable and sacred; the author does not believe it could be destroyed.	<b>Core Belief:</b> Jerusalem <i>has been</i> destroyed, and the author comforts the scattered survivors.
<b>Historical Situation:</b> Speaks of the Babylonian threat as a distant future reality.	<b>Historical Situation:</b> Describes the Babylonian exile as the <i>present historical condition</i> of the people.

*This is not a gradual evolution of one prophet's thought; it is a stark break reflecting two different authors living in two different historical eras.*

# Deutero-Isaiah is Embedded in the Book of Mormon

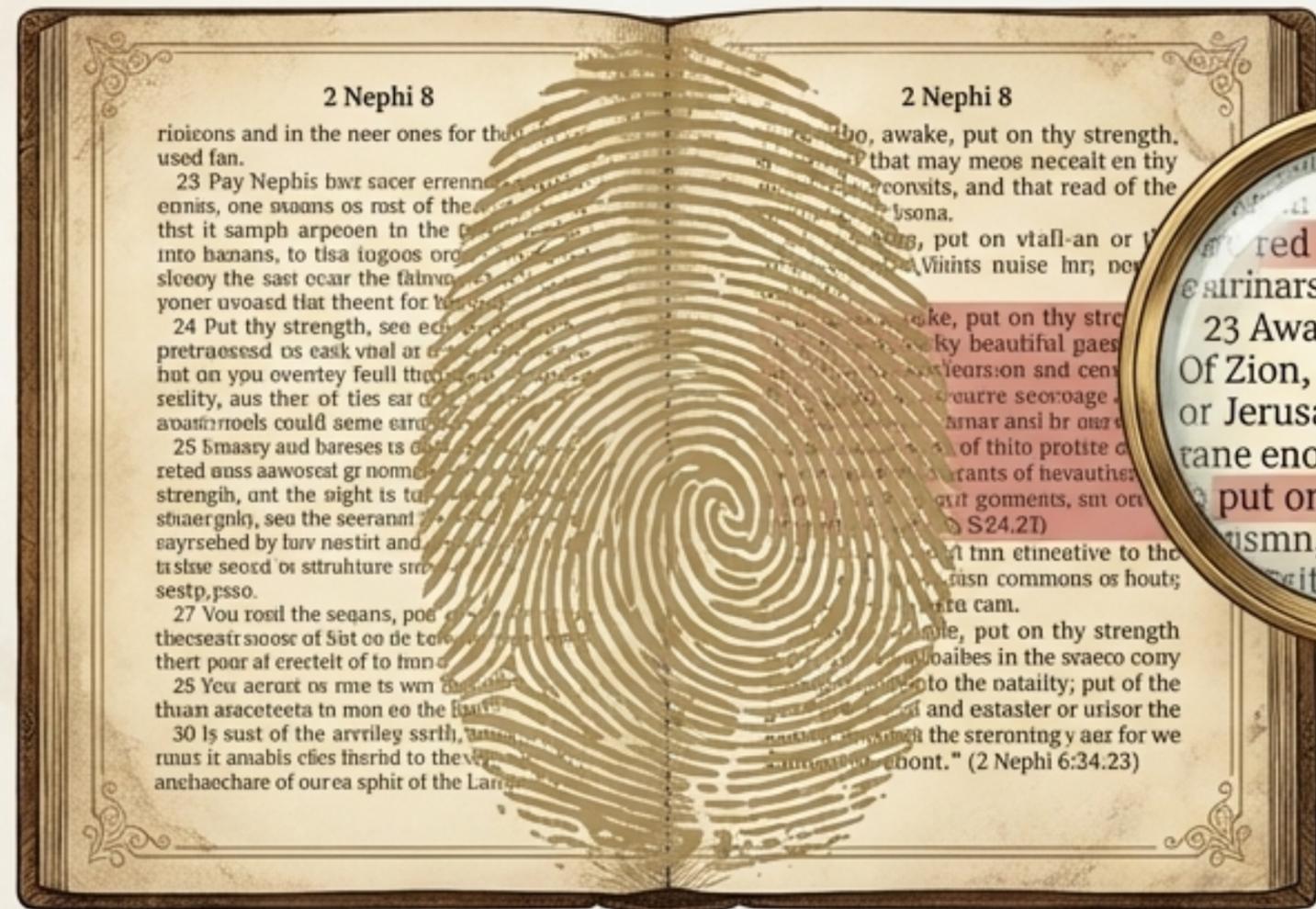
The Book of Mormon doesn't just reference Deutero-Isaiah; it quotes entire chapters, attributing them to the Brass Plates Lehi carried.

- 2 Nephi 7-8 quotes Isaiah 50-52.
- 3 Nephi 16 & 20 quote Isaiah 52.
- Mosiah 14 quotes Isaiah 53.
- Moroni 10:31 quotes Isaiah 52.



# More Than an Anachronism: It's a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Fingerprint

The problem is compounded because the Book of Mormon doesn't just quote the content of Deutero-Isaiah; it quotes the exact text of the 1611 King James Version (KJV).



**KJV Translation Errors:** Known mistranslations from Hebrew present in the KJV are duplicated.

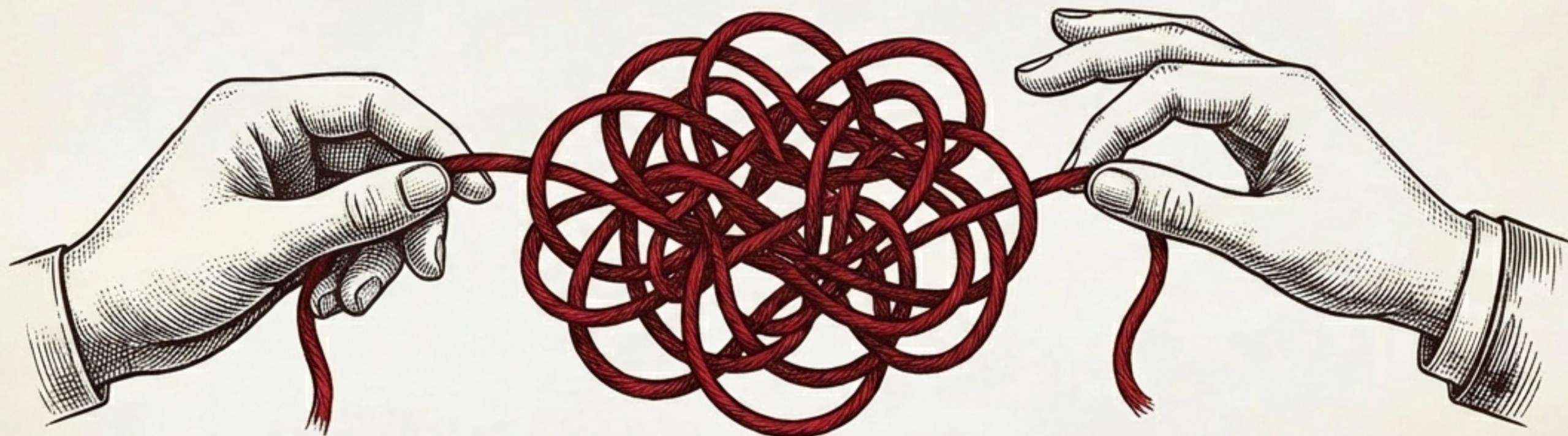
**Italicized Words:** Words added by KJV translators for clarity (and not present in the original Hebrew) are included.

**17th Century English:** Language is Jacobean English, not a translation from an ancient text.

The source text for the Book of Mormon's Isaiah chapters was not an ancient set of Brass Plates, but Joseph Smith's 19th-century KJV Bible.

# Attempting to Reconcile the Irreconcilable

The Deutero-Isaiah problem is so significant that LDS apologists have proposed several theories to explain how a post-exilic text could appear in a pre-exilic record.



## 1. The “Primitive Text” Theory

Perhaps an earlier version of these chapters existed that Lehi could have had.

## 2. The “Loose Translation” Theory

Perhaps Joseph Smith simply used his KJV Bible as a shortcut during translation.

*Do these explanations solve the problem, or do they create even greater contradictions?*

# Response 1: The “Primitive Text” Fails the Evidence Test

## The Apologetic Argument



An original, “primitive” version of Isaiah 40-55 was written by the historical Isaiah.

This version, without specific names like Cyrus, was on the Brass Plates.

It was later “reworked” by a scribe during the exile into the form we have today.

## The Unresolved Problems



**1. Contradicts All Evidence:** This theory ignores the comprehensive linguistic, thematic, and theological evidence for a later author. It’s an argument from necessity, not from textual analysis.

**2. Doesn’t Match the KJV:** The Book of Mormon text *doesn’t match* a hypothetical “primitive” version. It matches the *later, reworked* version as found in the King James Bible, complete with its specific translation choices, errors, and italicized words.

# Response 2: The “Loose Translation” Contradicts the Translation



## The Apologetic Argument

To save time, God allowed Joseph Smith to recognize the Isaiah text and copy it directly from his KJV Bible, rather than re-translating it from the plates.



## The Unresolved Problems

- 1. Contradicts All Witness Accounts:** Witnesses (David Whitmer, Emma Smith) described a “tight” translation where Joseph read English words directly from a seer stone. If a single word was transcribed incorrectly, the stone would not reveal the next characters. There was no “referring to a Bible.”
- 2. Creates a Theological Paradox:** Why would God direct Joseph to insert text from the “corrupted” KJV (as per the 8th Article of Faith) into the “most correct of any book on Earth”? It implies God approved using an inferior, error-filled text for convenience.
- 3. Defies Logic:** The argument that this “saved time” is nonsensical. Reading glowing words from a stone is no more difficult or time-consuming than finding, opening, and copying passages from a physical Bible.

# Conclusion: A Pattern of 19th Century Creation

- The Book of Mormon claims ancient origins from **~600 BCE**.
- It quotes a text, **Deutero-Isaiah**, definitively dated to **~540 BCE**.
- The quotations are copied from the **1611 King James Version**, not ancient plates.
- Proposed explanations contradict the historical and theological claims of the Restoration itself.

## The Broader Context

The **Deutero-Isaiah** anachronism is not an isolated error. It is part of a consistent pattern of Joseph Smith incorporating his contemporary 19th-century sources and worldview into texts claimed to be ancient. This pattern is also seen in:

- The **Long Ending of Mark**
- The **Sermon on the Mount additions**
- The **Book of Abraham**



Pulling on the thread of Deutero-Isaiah reveals that the Book of Mormon is best understood not as a translation of an ancient record, but as a work of 19th-century **"Bible fan fiction."**