

Podcast Episode 40: Interpreting Scripture

QUESTION: Sometimes it seems like there is a conflict between the Old Testament and the New Testament. They seem to come from very different people with very different ideas about God. How do we reconcile the differences?

DENVER: When we have the history of the Jews and the loss of the Northern Kingdom and the ten tribes, the lost ten tribes of Israel, and then the captivity of the Southern Kingdom or the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, there's an intermediate event that occurs between the moment that you lose the Northern Kingdom and the moment that the Southern Kingdom gets taken captive. And that was an event in which another planting of Israel took place by the out-migration by a small group that were in the Southern Kingdom but had been warned by God to flee before the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon. That record or account is contained in the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon details the history of people who leave the land around Jerusalem. They take with them some records in order to preserve their religion. They migrate across the Arabian Peninsula, settle into a place where they're commanded to build a ship. They build a ship and then they begin to migrate. The route that they take appears, from the record, to go down the Eastern edge of the continent of Africa, around the cape at the bottom of Africa where there was a terrific storm, coincidentally, a terrific storm at the very moment when things are getting out of hand inside the family and there's a rebellion of sorts going on. They return to peaceful navigating after that. They appear to come up the western edge of Africa and then across the English Channel, Iceland, Greenland, the Northern Canadian shore and down somewhere into the Americas where they settle. And this planting then practices their religion in a new land in which they are never exposed to the head of gold. They are never exposed to the influence of the Medes and Persians, or the Greeks, or the Romans. They preserve their civilization for a period of about a thousand years. And over the course of that thousand years, they not only practice the earlier, more ancient form of the religion that they had, they also qualify to have their own prophets come teach, preach. They have their own instructions, revelations, and connections with God. And ultimately they get visited by Christ who comes to minister to them as one of the scattered branches of the house of Israel.

Now, if we are looking for something that will come about eventually to fulfill a prophecy about a stone cut out of the mountain without hands that will succeed in defeating the head of gold with Babylon and all the other cultural influences that came about

thereafter, one of the chief candidates that every Christian should be curious about investigating is the possibility that preserved in the Book of Mormon is a record that is independent of and uninfluenced by the head of gold, the shoulders, the belly of brass, the legs of iron; uninfluenced by any of that because it sprang into existence separate from those influences, was never taken captive, overrun, or imposed upon culturally, religiously, economically, governmentally by any of them. They simply had no influence.

One of the big criticisms of the Book of Mormon by people who have taken the time to look at it is that there is too much Christology in the Book of Mormon for it to be an authentic 600 BC reflection of what the Jews believed. Well, that's an interesting thing because what you are accepting when you make a statement like that is an idea that the correct barometer, the correct measuring stick, are the traditions that got handed down from those who were influenced by the head of gold, the Babylonians, the Medes, the Greeks, the Romans. You're saying that that's your correct measuring stick, instead of saying, let's flip that and let's apply the measuring stick that has been handed to us from the source that purports to be free of those influences, and let's see if the Book of Mormon can't give us a more accurate gauge from which to measure all these things.

There was a Christian radio preacher who styled himself "the Bible Answer Man," Dr. Walter Martin. I mean, I listen to a lot of radio preachers even when I disagree with them because they entertain me. And one of those I'm entertained by today is Joel Osteen. And there's a Catholic program on the Catholic channel on SiriusXM that gives some interesting stuff. Dr. Walter Martin, the Bible Answer man, used to use this slogan in almost every other broadcast: "It is the first principle of Biblical Hermeneutics that you interpret the old in light of the new." Meaning, when you encounter in the New Testament an interpretation of a prophecy that came in the Old Testament you don't go to the Old Testament to decide whether or not that prophecy fit the events in the New Testament. You reverse that, and you say, what does the New Testament tell us that the Old Testament means? And the Old Testament means whatever it is that the New Testament says it means. You arrive at your Biblical interpretation always by using the new to tell you what the old meant. Which is another way of saying that prophecy is so obscure that it requires it to be fulfilled in order for you to understand what it was all about. When it is fulfilled, then the evidence of what was in the mind of God and the prophet, when it first got composed, is apparent, but it is not apparent until the events happen. Which is why all of the people trying to date and foretell all of the events are always surprised because they missed something. They're always advising Herod when the wise men show up and say, "Now where's the king that was born?" And they're shocked there was a king that got born and they have to search around and rummage before they say, "O Bethlehem, thou art not least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a ruler," and lo and behold, well, he must be in Bethlehem. If you find

him, hey you bring him to us so we can worship him. Wink, wink. Nod, nod. Because they had the prophecies in front of them, but they didn't know what God was doing. And they wouldn't know it, they couldn't know it. Just like today. God's doing things and but no one knows it because it requires its fulfillment before people can comprehend what happened.

Well, if we accept Dr. Walter Martin's Biblical injunction that you interpret the old in light of the new, then, if you're a faithful Christian, and you accept that premise, what that requires that you do, is that you interpret both – because the Book of Mormon did not come translated into English until 1830, so it is the latest in time, even though a composition that began 600 years before Christ and a composition that continued to record until 400 years after Christ, it did not come forth for our access until 1830. Now clearly, the last 400 years were post-Christ, but the entirety of the text reckons in its public availability post-Christ by 18 centuries. So if we accept the edict to interpret the old in light of the new, then if you want to know what the New Testament was about, and in turn the Old Testament, if you want to understand the ancient religion, then the first principle of interpretation is: you must go to the Book of Mormon to find out what that was all about.

One of the clearest examples, right in the Book of Mormon, that helps you see why Dr. Walter Martin's edict is useful is when Christ appears as a resurrected being, showing the wounds in his hands and in his side and in his feet, to the people who are gathered as a faithful body on the American continent and He tells them, "Ye are they of whom I said, Other sheep I have which are not of this fold. I must go to them and they must hear my voice. And there should be one fold and one shepherd." He explains that the disciples at Jerusalem didn't ask Him about that and they didn't understand Him when He said that. And that they wrongly supposed that what that meant was that Christ would only come to speak to other sheep through the ministry of the people in Palestine as they spread the message outward. Instead, what He meant was He, Christ, would go as a resurrected being to scattered remnants of the House of Israel and that He would let them hear His voice, see Him, and He would minister to them. And that included within the body of those that Christ intended to minister to, when He made that statement preserved for us in the New Testament, was the intent to go and visit with the people who were writing the Book of Mormon. And then He extends that and He says, I have still other sheep, in addition to you, and I'm going to go visit with them also. And so, from the record of the Book of Mormon, in just one example, if you want to understand the obscure statement that Christ made, preserved in the New Testament, that He has other sheep to whom He's going to go minister, in order to understand that prophecy, you go to the last in time, the later to interpret the earlier, and the Book of Mormon supplies you that interpretation and explains, yes, Christ meant as a

resurrected personage that He would go and He would appear. The record of Christ's appearance in his post-resurrected state in Palestine include appearing first to two women. Then He spent the better part of the day walking on the road to Emmaus with two disciples – Cleopas and an unidentified other who wrote the record, Luke. Then He appeared to the twelve. Still later, He would appear to the apostle Paul. And then when He ascended there were above 500 gathered together at the time that He ascended from the mount. And so there were multiple sightings, multiple witnesses, and multiple audiences to whom He ministered as a post-resurrected being. Then in the Book of Mormon, He does exactly the same thing. He appears as a resurrected personage and he ministers.

The Book of Mormon helps contextualize Isaiah, Psalms, Christ's Sermon on the Mount. It helps contextualize the prophecies about that time that is coming in which the head of gold is going to be ground to dust. It foretells the coming ultimately of the Kingdom of God on earth. There are a lot of prophecies that are requiring fulfillment right now that must precede the return of the Lord in His glory. In addition to everything else that you learn from the Book of Mormon, there are prophecies about a kingdom, an incipient planting, a return of a religious body, small though it may be, that will build what's called a New Jerusalem – an antecedent to the establishment of Zion – and that the Old Testament prophecies about Zion and Jerusalem at the time of the Lord's return is not talking about one location. It is talking about two separate locations because when the Lord returns the sun will never set on His kingdom. One of them will be on one side of the world and the other will be on the other side of the world. And He will establish in Jerusalem, that is, at old Jerusalem, a kingdom. And He will establish in the New Jerusalem, that is in Zion, a second part of His kingdom. And out of Zion and out of Jerusalem will go the law and the teachings that will constitute the effort and the government and the society and the culture that's going to finally free itself from the toxic influences and the corrupt traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation, being influenced all the way back to Babylon. That's why the prophecies of John talk about the fall of Babylon the great. Because the head of gold is still with us. The Babylonian influence remains with us still in our banking, in our profit motives, in our culture, in our education, in our false ideas about what's important and what's not, in our desire for power and wealth and influence. All of those things remain with us still today. And they corrupt everything. They corrupt business, they corrupt governments, they corrupt churches. They corrupt society. Everyone is vying with one another to gain influence, power. And in turn wealth and the acclamation of this world. And it all goes back to Babylon. Which is why John prophecies the fall, not of every one of these components of the great image that Nebuchadnezzar saw, but he goes right to the head because as soon as you destroy the head everything else is going to unravel. And he prophecies about the destruction of Babylon, the head of gold that holds sway over all

else. So, if you want to tune in to the work that God began in 1830 to preliminarily prepare for a coming harvest, you have to consider, if you're a sincere Christian, the possibility that the Book of Mormon is an actual planting of something God wanted planted in order to permit that work of God to be fulfilled in the last days. The Book of Mormon came forth as a record of a fallen people in order to testify of the great work of Christ.

I mentioned that one of the criticisms of the Book of Mormon is the prevalent Christology as a criticism because people don't believe that Christ was so openly known, openly talked about, openly expected in the pre-Babylonian captivity of the people in the Bible. But in the Book of Mormon, we learn that there were some prophets who had left a testimony and a record before we get to Isaiah, who clearly influenced Isaiah, and who spoke openly about the coming of Christ. One of those prophets was named Zenos. In the Book of Mormon – I forget the total number of words; I went through and I copied and I pasted every quote of the prophet Zenos in the Book of Mormon into a single Word document one time – and I'm going from memory and my memory could be off, but it was in excess of 3,000 words, and I think it was 3,200 words, that are from the record of Zenos quoted in the Book of Mormon. From the vernacular within the Book of Mormon the references there about "the prophet" appear to identify Zenos. When we talk about "the prophet" of the Old Testament we think about Isaiah; they thought of Zenos. Zenos and Isaiah talk about the same topic. Zenos went before and Isaiah came after. Zenos was apparently a Northern Kingdom prophet and Isaiah was a Southern Kingdom prophet. Isaiah's record about Christ is poetic and, like most poetry, tends to be obscure. Beautifully crafted language with difficult allegories to understand. Zenos, on the other hand, was pretty blunt and pretty straightforward. You could not miss the point of Zenos. Whereas it's very possible to take the Isaiah text and you can construe it, because of its vague allegories, to mean just about anything. Zenos could not be reformed to eliminate Christology. It was blatantly present in the Zenos text. Therefore, Zenos got dropped from the Old Testament. Isaiah, on the other hand, could be used to obscure the Christology because, although he points forward to, in magnificent ways, the coming of the Savior and His sacrifice, the suffering servant passages could be interpreted to not mean an individual Savior, Jesus Christ, but rather the people of God or Israel who went through so much persecution because they preserved a religion that testified of the true God and therefore the language of Isaiah was susceptible of interpretation to construe it away from pointing to Jesus Christ. Zenos could not be so handled or interpreted. He clearly spoke about this coming Savior. As a result, in the reconstitution of the scriptures, the references contained in Zenos were too plentiful to allow it to get into the canon of scriptures, and it got obliterated from the scriptures that were re-gathered at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. But the record of Zenos was included within what that planting of people in the Book of Mormon took with them. They

didn't lose the prophecies of Zenos, and so it informed them about Christ in very specific ways. The presence of Christology in the Book of Mormon are the inevitable result of possessing scriptures that speak candidly, openly and frankly about the coming of this Messiah. And so, when you pick up the Book of Mormon and read it, you literally are reading a text that has not been corrupted by these other influences. And the abundant presence of a Christological theology in the Book of Mormon is not evidence that the Book of Mormon is false, but it is evidence that the traditions that surrounded the religion of the Jews, as it came to be understood when Christ came to earth, that was what was corrupted. That was what was incomplete. That was what failed to preserve the original religion that began all the way back with the first fathers when they learned of a promised Messiah who would save us from the fall of Adam and death entering the world by reversing that as the second Adam, as the apostle Paul described Him, the second Adam who would plant a restored family brought back to life through the power of the resurrection so that as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.

We also learn through the Book of Mormon that the first fathers were not so ignorant as we think them, but that they had from the beginning knowledge of a coming Savior and a promise of redemption from the Fall. That they had from the beginning the practice of baptism. That they had from the beginning animal sacrifice to point to, as a type and a shadow, the sacrifice that Jesus Christ would make to redeem them from death. That Christology was not merely present at 600 BC, at the time of this planting the Book of Mormon refers to, but that Christology was present in the religion from Adam to Enoch and from Enoch to Abraham and from Abraham to Moses, and then because of the slave culture of Egypt and the corruption that they experienced there, Moses had to bring them along with the lesser law of carnal performances and ordinances in order to point their mind forward to the coming of a Savior who would offer an infinite and final and eternal sacrifice for the redemption of mankind.

So if you want to begin to get your hands around what it is that God has yet to do in order to set the stage so that His kingdom may come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven, and you're a Christian, the place you ought to begin your search to find what God is really up to now, is the Book of Mormon. And you ought to interpret the old in light of the new and accept the Book of Mormon as a guide in order to bring you along. The Book of Mormon poses a question that I'll paraphrase: "Wherefore murmur ye? Because ye receive more of the word of God?" I mean it ought to be self-evident to anyone who claims themselves to be a Christian and to love the Lord that if a record comes about that purports to be a record testifying of Christ written by people who believed in, obeyed and followed Him, that that record bears not just serious consideration, but prayerful acceptance if it is true.

Now I was raised by a Baptist mother and a Christian, but non-denominational father. My father was a Mason and Masonic lodges require that you be a believer in God and my father believed in God. He just didn't necessarily extend that belief all the way to the exuberance of the Baptist faith. But my mother was ever hopeful of turning the whole clan into Baptists. We had our Baptist preacher over for Sunday dinner with some regularity and I always liked the fried chicken. For some reason Baptist ministers and fried chicken dinner, it just goes together like hand in glove. And if you're a Baptist and you're listening to this you know this is authentic because you've been there and done that. So when missionaries came and said, "Hey, here's the Book of Mormon. Um, it's about Jesus and it's going to help you," my response to that news was less than enthusiastic. I mean I had had all of the indoctrination that comes from Dr. Walter Martin and all the other anti-Mormon critics. I'd read his book, "The Kingdom of the Cults." I'd heard all the flaws and problems with this idea. The Book of Mormon grew on me very slowly. I had actually determined the other reasons to affiliate with Mormonism than the Book of Mormon and did so for years before I ultimately discovered the Book of Mormon to be something terribly significant. It took years of reading, of study, and of actually teaching the Book of Mormon before it began to penetrate into my understanding and my heart. Once the Book of Mormon began to be taken seriously by me, I discovered things in there that were beyond the capacity of a forger and a fraud to assemble as the critics of Joseph Smith and Mormonism have claimed. Now I am not a member of the Mormon church today. Although they've recently asserted that their name isn't the Mormon church, it's the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I was one time a member. I have been excommunicated because I prize historical truth above institutional loyalty. And the institution, as it turns out, is disloyal to believing followers of the restoration if they're not sufficiently institutionally loyal. I don't hold any institution, at present, up as the ideal model, an example of the work of Jesus Christ. I think Jesus Christ's work has to be done independent of institutional control at this point because every institution that's out there, just by reason of being institutional, becomes the subject of laws and taxes and rules and Babylon. Just because the institution exists, it's part of the great conglomerate that includes the head of gold, Babylon, the Medes and Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, on down to the present. I believe that Christ's work must stand independent of every other influence under heaven and owe its allegiance, owe its loyalty, and owe its faith to Christ and Christ alone, which makes me really ill-fitted in an institution that prizes above everything else, loyalty to the clan.

Well, the more I began to take in the truths of the content in the Book of Mormon, the greater the gap grew between the lip-service paid to the restoration by the Mormon church, the LDS church, and the practice of the institution itself. In fact, the Book of Mormon, used as a guide or measuring stick, condemns all of the institutions of

Christianity. In fact, it condemns everyone except the few who are the humble followers of Christ, and points out, despite that few being humble followers of Christ, nevertheless they are led that in many instances they do err because they're taught by the precepts of men. If you want precepts that come from God, the best place to look at this point is the Book of Mormon text. The closer you look the more you'll see. The more you see the more you'll find that right now the religion of Jesus Christ is hardly practiced anywhere on this earth. If it's going to be practiced at all it needs to be done by you, by someone who is eagerly searching for and trying to find words that come from Jesus Christ as your guide, as something to lead you back to Him, as the message intended for the last days, and as the means by which you can interpret the earlier New Testament, the earlier Old Testament, to find out exactly what they mean because the key to unlocking all of what God has been, is presently, and will ultimately be involved with to fulfill all the prophecies is contained primarily in the text of the Book of Mormon. And so, if you want to escape before the ultimate destruction of that great image with the head of gold beforehand, to be prepared for the coming of the Lord, if you're a sincere Christian, you don't need to go and join another denominational institution, but you better take seriously the Book of Mormon and study it, and take its interpretations, its meanings, its guidance seriously, because it is the standard that has been planted in the last days as the ensign of truth to which all Christians, if they believe in Christ, need to rally in order to part of His great latter-day work. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

The foregoing comments by Denver Snuffer were recorded on September 7, 2018, in Sandy UT.