

## Podcast Episode 41: The Journey

**QUESTION: We understand from scripture that “Wise men still seek Christ today”. At the time of the birth of Christ, the people in Palestine knew almost nothing of the birth of the Savior. Even Herod’s priests were wholly unaware, yet certain wise men “from the East” made an arduous 2-year journey to come into the presence of the Savior. What would cause them to take a journey of thousands of miles, and how did they even know about Christ, his birth, the signs in the heavens, and how to correctly interpret them?**

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DENVER: In examining the mission of Christ and what was accomplished during His lifetime and what was left unaccomplished during His lifetime – but intended by the Lord to be accomplished at some point before His second coming – even the record of the Lord’s accomplishment is incomplete and suggests that there is a great deal more that might have been learned or might have been recorded at the time of His ministry, but is simply omitted from the record of the New Testament.

After His resurrection and His appearance to the women at the garden Tomb, He appeared and spent the better part of the day walking on the road with two disciples from Jerusalem to Emmaus – about a seven mile walk. He sidled up beside them and He walked beside them and they talked throughout the day. It was evening when they arrived at their destination. And they asked Him to come in and to sup with them, to eat with them, because they had enjoyed the fellow’s company. And He went in and blessed the food. Actually, He took bread and blessed it and brake it and gave it to them. And then their eyes were opened and they realized it was Him. But their reaction to Him after they recognized who He was, was a reflection on how they ought to have perhaps recognized Him earlier in the day. Not because of seeing Him as He is and recognizing His person, but instead because of the message. Reflecting on what He had said, asked one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way and while He opened to us the scriptures?” And then they rose up from there and scurried back to Jerusalem to announce the news that He had appeared.

So, we know that the Lord spent the better part of the day walking with two disciples on the road to Emmaus and that the subject that He discussed with them was the scriptures in such a way that the scriptures were opened to them and the effect of that was to have their hearts burn within them from the conviction that what they were being taught was truth. Not one word about what the Lord said or taught when the disciples’

hearts were touched and when they were brought to understand by having the scriptures opened to them.

And so when something is missing from a record, a page or a hole in the record, that is called a lacuna. So one of the more obvious lacunas in the narrative is the failure to tell us anything about what Christ did to open the scriptures in order to have these disciples, these believers, these people who He deliberately chose as witnesses of His resurrection, and that too as priority witnesses.

It's an interesting study to take a look at who the Lord appeared to and in what order because there appears to be a pattern in the appearances of the Lord and the priorities of the people to whom He appeared in order to have witnesses of His resurrection. But these are two of the earliest and so they have a high priority. And I believe that one of the two witnesses was in fact Luke, who leaves his own name out. He identifies the companion who was with him, Cleopas, but he doesn't identify himself. And I think that it was Luke who wrote the books of Luke and Acts, in which he explains the history, the life, the death, the resurrection of Christ, the message, the importance of the message, the vindication of the promise of Him being a Messiah because of His resurrection, and then the immediate effect of the post-resurrection ministry of the apostles. All of those things are written about, and they're written in some detail by Luke. And yet, that talk that was so convincing that the hearts of both him and his companion, Cleopas, burned within them is left as a glaring lacuna in the narrative by a fairly exhaustive biographer. Luke picks up upon some details of Christ's life that only appear in the Gospel of Luke. This incident on the road to Emmaus is one of those, but some of the more intimate details about the birth of Christ are preserved by Luke. There are things that Luke was fully capable of preserving and conveying and he clearly, if his heart was burning within him, that kind of a message is going to have some durability, some persistence, capable of writing it, and it's gone from the record.

In the Book of Mormon, there's an early visionary encounter before they migrate very far from Jerusalem in which Nephi is shown the whole sweep of history and he begins to record the account of what it was he saw. And he's interrupted and told you can't write a record of what I'm going to show you hereafter because this record is going to be entrusted to another person who is going to write it. His name is John. And the account that John would record the Book of Mormon doesn't recite, but we all can identify it as the Book of Revelation. And so Nephi is told, "Don't write about this visionary material. Someone else is going to do that." So, Nephi is told he cannot write that. A fuller account is going to be given by John. But Nephi is also told that this same kind of material has been shown to others. Nephi later, in the second book that he composes, by that time 40 years has passed from the time of the visionary encounter near

Jerusalem. He's now on another continent, a new world, a promised land given to them. And he's had 40 years of reflection on what he saw and what he heard. And from that 40 years of reflection he realizes that he can bear testimony of what he saw, without infringing upon the right of John to write the fuller account, simply by quoting Isaiah who wrote about much of the same material. And so Nephi adopts as his text in large measure the text that came from Isaiah as it appeared on the brass plates – slightly different than the version that we have in our Bibles that descend from the Masoretic Text – but he preserves as his testimony words that were composed by Isaiah in the form that he had them as his testimony. Then as his entire account is winding down at the end of the second book that Nephi composed, he begins at about – in the standard LDS-published version it's chapter 27 – he begins to change from quoting the Isaiah text to paraphrasing the Isaiah text in order to adapt it to a very specific, prophetic foretelling of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in the last days in order to make the Isaiah text fit exactly what would be happening with the Book of Mormon coming forth. Then he gives his interpretive key from that point explaining exactly why it was that he put those Isaiah materials in in order to have people understand that it is his testimony of what he knows and what he was shown, and to convert the language of Isaiah into the prophecy of Nephi to convey Nephi's message.

Well, we don't have any explanation from Luke as to why there is a lacuna in the record and the omission of Christ's post-resurrection exposition, opening up the scriptures, explaining what it was in the scriptures that bore testimony of Him. We just have Luke leaving it out. But in the Book of Mormon, the record that we have of Christ's appearance to the Nephite descendants, includes Christ opening up the scriptures in order to show how they bear testimony of Him, not merely of Him coming as the sacrificial lamb, but also of Him coming in the last days. Christ's missing material from the Book of Luke is back-filled by the Book of Mormon's account of Christ's appearance and Christ's ministry and teachings to the Nephite people.

So if anyone is a devoted follower of Christ and attentive to the scriptural record as the way in which they come to understand and know who Christ is and to gain a conviction of His status as the Redeemer of mankind. Anyone who is sincere about searching into and trying to find how and why and what the Savior was, is, and what He did, is going to be eager to back-fill the lacuna that appears in the Gospel of Luke and find out what it was that the Lord was saying. And they'll be eager and willing to look at the Book of Mormon with that in mind.

I can tell you that the Book of Mormon has received perhaps the greatest amount of neglect of any volume of scripture since its coming forth in 1830. The one who translated the record, Joseph Smith, made almost no use of it in his public ministry. He

was dealing with people who were largely converts from other denominations, including initially predominantly people who had been followers of Alexander Campbell. They were among the most devoted people to the Bible. New converts who came in believed the Bible and accepted the Book of Mormon, but regarded the Book of Mormon largely as a sign that God was up to something. When Joseph Smith taught, even as the one who translated the Book of Mormon, he largely focused upon the Bible and an exposition of the content of the Bible, because prospective converts and new converts to the idea relied upon and had a priority for the Bible above any other volume of scripture. So adapting to the audience, Joseph Smith's teachings largely focused upon the content of the Bible. You can see leaking through in the talks, the transcripts of the talks that are preserved of Joseph Smith, that there was tension that ran all the way up to the highest level of the church. Sidney Rigdon was a counselor to Joseph Smith, and in a talk that has been called the King Follett discourse. It was a funeral sermon about the recently deceased man named King (first name) Follett (last name). We used to give names like King to people. King Follett was a fellow who had been killed in an accident in a well. He was recently deceased at the time that Joseph gave the King Follett discourse. In the discourse, he talks about a variety of things stretching on in to the eternities, and the post-death course that mankind will take. In the middle of that, Joseph makes an aside. Sidney Rigdon was not in the audience at the time. He wasn't in the city of Nauvoo. He was elsewhere. But he makes an aside, specifically calling Rigdon by name, and saying, to the absent Sidney Rigdon, "I suppose that the inquiry has to be supported by the Bible." And then he goes on to use the Bible in order to demonstrate the teaching that he is going to advance to the audience is Biblical. It is based in the content of the Bible itself. So, Joseph Smith is saying, "Rigdon, I'll prove the truth of what I'm about to teach from the Bible. I suppose I have to support it by the Bible." That tells you that one of the problems Joseph was confronted with is that people, including those very closest to him at the top of his organized church at the time, didn't want to hear anything that wasn't supported by the Bible, didn't want to hear him talking about the Book of Mormon, didn't want to accept something based upon the new revelations. At a still later time, a fellow who was one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, who got excommunicated and disassociated himself with Joseph in 1838, he wrote in the late 1870s or early 80s a pamphlet that was called "An Address to All Believers in Christ." And in that, David Whitmer, one of the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon, complained that the revelations of Joseph Smith were given too much priority. I assume that the attitude that David Whitmer reflected 30 years after the death of Joseph Smith was an attitude that he held even while Joseph was alive, one of the reasons why he became disaffected and that he didn't want to see the revelations of Joseph Smith expounded upon. He didn't want to hear material that was more recent. Although David Whitmer did hold the Book of Mormon in some considerable regard and he remained true to his witness as one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon.

Well, after the death of Joseph Smith, among the people who are nicknamed “the Mormons”, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints being the largest one of those, the one that most Christians would be familiar with, the church that sends out the missionaries two by two in their white shirts and ties to knock on people’s doors, the one that sponsors the Tabernacle Choir, the one that sponsors Brigham Young University, the largest single denomination. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints did not give any serious consideration to the Book of Mormon until the 1950s, and only then, in the 1950s, because the church president – at the time it was a man named David O. McKay – asked a professor at Brigham Young University, whose name was Hugh Nibley, to write a priesthood manual that could be used by the institutional church to teach a course in priesthood for a year. When that interview took place, in the accounts that Hugh Nibley tells of it, he wanted to focus upon the Book of Mormon, and David O. McKay’s reaction was surprise because no one took that book seriously. And Hugh Nibley was saying, no, he believed in it. The seriousness with which the Book of Mormon was taken after the 1950s is largely the result of a now-deceased Brigham Young University professor, Hugh Nibley, and his conviction that the Book of Mormon was an authentic book.

I say that to a Christian audience because the Book of Mormon has largely been so neglected by the people who are nicknamed “Mormons” that if Christians were to take that book up and to examine it through the eyes of a devoted Christian believer, I believe that Christians are going to find treasures within the Book of Mormon, an understanding, as a result of their Christian background from the Book of Mormon, that the Mormons themselves have never been able to harvest, have never noticed, and do not have the eyes with which to even see its presence. The Book of Mormon remains a Christian treasure that has yet to reveal its greatest results, having only been taken seriously. In 1950 there were leaders in the church who had never read the Book of Mormon. Mormon church leaders who did not read the Book of Mormon, much less understand it. It was quite some time after that before the Book of Mormon became something in which there was some regular study among Latter-day Saints.

Because the Book of Mormon was published before there was an LDS church, and because the Book of Mormon stands as an independent witness, there is no reason why accepting the Book of Mormon requires you to be institutionally loyal to anyone. You can be a Baptist and believe in the Book of Mormon and there is at least one minister out there who is doing that right now. There is no reason why Catholics, and Presbyterians, and other mainstream Christian denominations can’t pick up the Book of Mormon and make use of it without pledging allegiance to any institution that claims ownership over the Book of Mormon. In fact, the most accurate edition of the Book of

Mormon currently in print is one that was prepared independent of any institution and is available for purchase on Amazon. It is part of two books combined in a single volume called the New Covenants. The first half of the book is the New Testament and the second half of the book is the Book of Mormon. They were intended to go together as a witness by people who on one side of the world and on the other side of the world both witnessed the ministry of a resurrected Lord, who showed the prints of the nails in His side, and in His hands, and in His feet. And had people bear testimony that it was Him who was sacrificed, that rose again from the grave, and who is the Savior prophesied of by Isaiah; He uses Malachi in the Book of Mormon; He uses other texts to demonstrate and to teach His identity as the Son of God and Redeemer of mankind. And I believe if the Presbyterians, and the Baptists, and the Catholics were to pick up the Book of Mormon and treat it seriously it would yield truths to them which they could then preach independent of the LDS church or the people who are nicknamed “Mormons” and they would find themselves growing closer to Christ as a consequence of having this material available to their study.

It’s been too long that the Book of Mormon has been neglected. It’s been too shoddily handled by the people to whom it was originally given. The copyright has expired. The book is now available to the public. The institution that got it originally has made precious little use of it. And if you find yourself not only disbelieving the LDS church, but because of your institution’s native hostility towards the LDS church, you will find in the Book of Mormon a great deal of ammunition to use to condemn, to criticize, to censure the LDS institution because the Book of Mormon spares very little ink in criticizing, condemning, and judging harshly the people to whom the Book of Mormon would be delivered, including the LDS church. The use to which the Book of Mormon can be put by Christians is so relevant to the Christian belief system that if Christians will soften their heart and consider it and allow for the record that is latest in time to be used to help understand the records that are earlier in time – because God’s latest word clarifies and governs the interpretation of His earlier word – Christians are going to reap a fabulous reward in doing so. And, unlike the texts that we have in the New Testament, many of which are copies of copies of copies, that we know have been altered in the process of transmission. Bart Erhman, a one-time believer, now agnostic, parsed through the texts of the New Testament, compared it to quotes in the anti-Nicaean, the pre-Nicaean fathers, and to internal evidence in the New Testament itself, and reached the conclusion that the New Testament text deserves great deal of skepticism because the method and manner of its transmission has been demonstratively shown to be inaccurate and the record to be muddled. In one place, the less-altered text of Hebrews, preserves the words that are drawn right out of the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of Proverbs: “This is my son; today I have begotten you,” a statement that was made prophetically about Christ. The book of Hebrews preserves it in that form. The gospels, however, were altered, and

the statement that was made at the time of the baptism of Christ when John the Baptist was baptizing the Lord was changed to be, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased" because of a controversy that erupted over the nature of Christ during the Christological debates of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century and it's one of the illustrations that Bart Erhman points to in his book, "The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture." That title tells you something about the transmission of the New Testament: "The Orthodox corruption of scripture." Bart Erhman isn't the only scholar, but his books are fairly easily available if you're interested in the topic through Amazon.

Another scholar who has done essentially the same thing in picking apart the Old Testament and the integrity of the transmission of the Old Testament text is a Methodist scholar in England named Margaret Barker, whose works demonstrate that there was an earlier, an older religion that got defeated at about the time that the Jews were taken captive into Babylon and on the return from the exile a new religion that had been altered emerged. Christians generally view information like that as threatening the very core of their religion because, if their Bible is flawed and not inerrant, if their Bible has been poorly transmitted and is inaccurate, then the basis upon which they seek salvation is itself threatened.

The Book of Mormon, on the other hand, bears witness of the very same Lord, in essentially the very same kinds of terms, identifying Him as having accomplished the work of the redemption by the sacrificing of His sinless life in order to defeat death and to restore mankind back to life. But unlike the transmission of the Bible record, the Book of Mormon record was preserved for generations by a singular transmission through a line of record holders. At the end of that line, a prophet named Mormon, hence the name for the book, did a summary explanation excerpting from all of the prior records a final and inspired God-commanded and prophetically-infused record summary of the preceding nearly millennium of history, giving us the truths that God wanted preserved. He turned that record over to his son. His son finished it up and then buried it up. And when it came forth out of the ground it was translated by the person who accomplished the translation through the means he called the gift and power of God. And the original language in which the Book of Mormon was first published in the last days was English. The original of the first transcription has been preserved in part. It was put into a cornerstone and water damaged it and so we only have about 28% of that original. But, the original was hand copied before it was taken to the printer for the first printing. And all of that printer's manuscript still exists. And then the one who was responsible for the translation of the Book of Mormon had the opportunity to review it for another edition in 1837, and to review it and again publish it in 1840. We do not have the transmission issues with the Book of Mormon that are existing with the current Bible. Christians hear this criticism about the Book of Mormon that there's been 9,000 changes made to the

text. Those 9,000 changes have been located and largely dealt with, every single one, in that New Covenants edition of the Book of Mormon that is currently in print and available through Amazon. Most of those purported changes are punctuation changes. Many of them come from the fact that when it was first printed it was printed like a book, but it later became versified and divided into chapters, and footnotes were added, and in the tally of changes, many of the changes also are superficial changes to versification, and chapter divisions, and other such things. There were some errors made. There were some lines that were dropped out between the original manuscript and the printers manuscript that have been located and have put back in. But even with every one of the identified changes to the Book of Mormon, the fact is that it is demonstrably, on a whole other order of magnitude, more faithfully preserved and more reliably a text attesting to Jesus Christ, than anything that we have transmitted in the bible.

In short, if you are a Christian who feels some insecurities as a consequence of the criticism leveled at the Bible because of its clear transmission issues, it's very demonstrably true problems of conveying the text from the original authors down to what we get printed – and, the vagaries of how you convert some Greek lettering into other languages. At the time the New Testament was written, the form of Greek that was used didn't have lower case, it only had uppercase. It didn't have punctuation. And in almost every text there's no separation from the end of one word and the beginning of another. Dividing it up into words, upper and lower-casing the alphabet that was used, all of that was accomplished by monks hundreds of years after the original text had been handed down. Well, the Book of Mormon has far greater integrity. So if you're insecure about the reliability of the content of the Bible, none of those insecurities should attach to the text of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is not only a testimony of Jesus Christ, but it is perhaps the most reliable testimony of Jesus Christ that exists in available print right now, today, in the English language.

So, if you're a Christian and you're sincere about your faith, I think you neglect the Book of Mormon at your peril. If God has sent to you a message, a testimony about His Only Begotten Son, in order to bring you closer to Him, to prepare you for the day of His coming to judge the world, and you decide that you're simply going to dismiss that message that came from God, then what kind of a Christian are you really? Have you no faith? Do you think that God cares less about the generation of people who will be on the earth at the time of His returning to judge the world, cares less about them, than He did about the people to whom He came and ministered when He came here to sacrifice His life to redeem mankind?



Now, it's true at His first coming precious few took seriously the message and accepted Him. But God bears testimony whether you will listen to it or not. Wise men, who were some distance from the place of the Lord's birth, watched for and understood the signs testifying of Christ in the heavens above. Based upon the appearance of the sign, and the journey, and their arrival, it took them two years, according to the New Testament record, to get from where they were to where the Lord was. And Christ is called a young lad when they bring gold, and frankincense, and myrrh in order to worship the newborn King. And when they depart they depart without advising Herod where they'd found the newborn king because they'd been warned in a dream, which means God had been talking to them also, and they returned perhaps on a two-year journey somewhere else. The people who were on this continent, the American continent, watched for signs in the heavens, knew about His birth, knew about His death, and were anxiously testifying of Him before He came to visit with them.

The testimony of Christ to the world by God at His first coming was not local. Admittedly, the record begins with Zacharias bringing incense to burn before the veil of the temple, to recite the prayer asking God for the redemption of Israel to take place, when an angel appeared. And the record begins with the angel announcing that, "Your prayer about the redemption of Israel is going to be answered, and your wife's going to have a son who is going to go before the face of the Redeemer of Israel," which seemed improbable to Zacharias because of the age of his wife. Nevertheless, it was vindicated. That's not the beginning of the testimony concerning Christ by God throughout the world. And at least some company, two-year's journey away, heard the message and appeared to worship Him. How many others were there throughout the world? Has a Christian ever contemplated the fact that God's testimony to mankind was not tightly confined to a small group of people in Palestine, but it went out so far and so wide that one group responding to it took two-year's journey to get there? The Book of Mormon testifies that there were yet others, on the entire other side of the world, separated as they were by oceans, to whom Christ went to minister.

The purpose of the Book of Mormon, among other things, is to remind us living at the time when Christ's return is imminent, that His message is global. If you think you can just brush off a message that was intended to help prepare Christians for His return, well, you're like those whose hearts were hard and refused to hear even when Christ walked among them. We ought to be rather like those who would undertake an arduous two-year journey just to come into the presence of the Redeemer of mankind.

If you refuse to take the Book of Mormon seriously as a Christian, you are no more Christian than the Jews who crucified the Lord, giving lip-service to a false and inadequate religion, rejecting the message of a Messiah who intends to save your soul,

because you prefer your false, inadequate, partial tradition to the truth of a living Redeemer. The Jews didn't reject Jesus because they had no religion. The Jews rejected Jesus because the religion they had did not adequately encompass the truth concerning Him and so they felt comfortable rejecting Him – just like Christians who feel themselves adequately informed from a false and incomplete set of beliefs about the work of Jesus Christ to be willing to accept the record that was intended to come forth to prepare the world for His return. You're no different if you reject the Book of Mormon. And I testify of that in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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The foregoing comments by Denver Snuffer were recorded on September 8, 2018, in Sandy UT.