

## Episode 60: Third Root

**QUESTION: Today, Denver teaches us about the three roots of scripture and how these efforts to recover lost information compare with the Book of Remembrance that contained the gospel, as originally revealed to Adam.**

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DENVER: At the beginning, in the first generations, there was a book of remembrance that was kept contemporaneous with Adam. Enoch was one of those who helped preserve the records from the early days, but a book of remembrance began; and so, the first scripture that ever existed began at the time when Adam was still living. That record of the first fathers got preserved all the way down to the time of Abraham because Abraham writes that the records of the fathers at the beginning—the first fathers, even Adam—all that came down into his possession. I could tell you exactly how that came to pass, but that's of no moment.

He inherited the records, and he was able to look at the records and learn about things that were around in the beginning, including the religion as it had been preached in the days of Adam. And Abraham says *Therefore, a knowledge of the beginning...and...the stars...* (Abraham 2:4 RE)—those things came into his possession. So part of the religion that went back to the beginning was something that tells you about the organization of the heavens and the signs that are put up there and things that are going on. After the days of Abraham, the records of the fathers disappear from the scene, and we don't have any mention of them—although it's probably safe to assume that Isaac and Jacob had access to that same record.

By the way, it's never “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”—it's *the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob* (see Exodus 2:3,6 RE; Matthew 10:22 RE; and 1 Nephi 2:1 RE). There's a reason why it is stated *the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*, because each one of them, in turn, separately held a covenant with God, and therefore, He was their God; they were His son, in effect—certainly a member of His family. And so the way the scriptures refer to it is to acknowledge the covenantal existence, and from that I think it's probably safe to conclude that Abraham passed the records down to Isaac, who passed the records down to Jacob.

So reading between the lines of the Old Testament (because the record doesn't make it clear), we can assume that the garment that was given to Adam in the beginning was handed down through each of those, just like the records were handed down through each of those; and it was that garment that came into the possession of Joseph that the jealous brothers took and destroyed—well, damaged; a remnant of it remained, all of which proved to be an allegory to what history would show about that family.

We don't know if, at the time of destroying the relic of the garment, they destroyed the relic of the records of the fathers, because the record is silent about that. But it's pretty clear that if they couldn't *share* in the prize, if they couldn't *share* in the artifact, if they couldn't share (and from their perspective, this is probably the correct way to categorize it) in the *talisman*—

See, when Abraham received the records of the fathers, he got it from his father who was an idolater. He regarded those records as nothing more than a talisman, a good luck charm. Abraham regarded it as something different, and he worshipped the God of Heaven, and through them he connected to the God of Heaven. Well, the brothers who were jealous of this passing down of a relic (that's more “*talisman*” than “*meaningful source of inspiration and knowledge about God*”) may well have destroyed it. They may have *copied* it; there may have been other versions of it that were made available or parts of it, if

they were interested in it. But I think the original of that may, just like the garment that was given to Adam, have been destroyed at that point.

But when we get down to the end of the hundreds of years of captivity in Egypt, Moses comes into possession of an ordination from Reuel who was (also had a new name of Jethro) the priest of Midian, who would ordain him. He handed down some kind of (at least oral) tradition, at the time that Moses was ordained by Jethro, and so he fell into possession of *something*—however distant that may have been from the records of the fathers at the beginning. When Moses established prophetically the religion that had been lost in a more pure form, Moses actually *wrote* the scriptures. So whether what he did was rely upon oral traditions or scraps, whatever it was that Moses had in his possession, he wrote the five books of Moses as an attempt to re-create the scriptural record that goes back to the beginning—because it's always an attempt to restore the original religion; it's never an attempt to start something new. We have been in a state of apostasy and restoration ever since the original Patriarchs died, and so the tension is always between apostasy and restoration of what was here at the beginning. Moses attempted, in part, to restore that; and we know from fairly-reliable history that Moses wrote five books. We can't be certain that the five books that Moses wrote are the five books that have been handed down to us, but he wrote five books. So Moses is one root of scripture.

There is a concept in the law called “root of title.” If you can trace back —depending upon what state you're in; the state we're in right now looks at the root of title back fifty years—if you can track the title that you have to your property back for fifty years, than you have a good root of title. In some places, people can track the title to their property back to the Spanish and before the United States gained possession of the property in the western United States.

But there is such a thing as a root of *scripture*, as well; and the root of all the scriptures that were subsequently inherited by the various Judeo-Christian-Muslim traditions— when you reach Moses, that's a starting point. Everything that happened before that is largely obliterated, with one exception I'll get to in a minute. And Moses is the commencement of the scriptural canon as a new work, as a new restoration. What Moses did, then got handed down for generations—got added to, got supplemented—until we get to the point where the Babylonian captivity takes place. (And I'm setting aside, for a moment, the party of Lehi and the Book of Mormon record; we'll backtrack to that in a bit.)

After the Babylonian captivity, the remnant returned back to Jerusalem, and whatever records they may have had before they went into Babylon—doesn't appear from our scriptural record that it was well-preserved or intact—and Ezra rewrote the scriptures. And so the second root of all scripture that we have, that goes back into antiquity, is Ezra's recovery and restoration of what had once been a scriptural record that began with Moses and had been added to; and so the second root of all scriptures becomes Ezra. And the Old Testament, largely, was reconstituted, rewritten, restored, and recovered by Ezra when they returned from the Babylonian captivity.

Now, we have reason to believe that at the time that they went into the Babylonian captivity, there was an active conflict underway. The Book of Mormon record begins in the middle of the conflict immediately preceding the Babylonian captivity, and the tension that you see is over the concept of a Messiah. A group of people (we have, in common vernacular today, begun to refer to those people as the Deuteronomists—“deutero” meaning “a second”—and they wanted to create a *second* kind of interpretation of the law that had been handed down from Moses), the Deuteronomists were decidedly opposed to the idea of a Messiah—so much so that there are people today who are Jewish who claim that the concept of a Messiah, the concept of a Redeemer came very late to Judaism—post-Babylonian-captivity late. And so they, as followers of the Deuteronomist tradition, have been successfully taught of a faith that purged the idea of a Savior—of a Redeemer—out of the religion; which means that by the

time you get to Ezra re-establishing the root that originally went back to the days of Adam, the recovery was so complete, at that point, of the Deuteronomist point of view, that you now have a second root to your scriptures that is purged of Messianic information.

Now, the Deuteronomists couldn't get away with everything they wanted to get away with. They couldn't thoroughly purge every indication of a coming Messiah. They could only get away with eradicating the most radical information that testified bluntly and directly of a Messiah. The one who had done a tremendous job of bluntly disclosing a Messiah was coming was Zenos. Zenos tells plainly about the coming of Christ, of His sacrifice, of His death, of His resurrection, of witnesses that will know about this on a global scale because there will be earthquakes; that the islands of the sea are going to know about (and the islands of the sea, in the Book of Mormon vernacular, includes America)—are going to know about it because there will be these tremendous signs in nature, testifying to the birth and testifying to the death.

In the Book of Mormon, Zenos is generally referred to as "*the prophet*." When we think of "*the prophet*," we think of Moses, or we think of Isaiah. When the Book of Mormon is referring to "*the prophet*"—as an unidentified "*the prophet*"—it's Zenos. The Book of Mormon preserves something over 3000 words—I cut and pasted, one time, all the words that you could attribute to Zenos into one MS Word document; my recollection is about 3400 words. I don't know what happened to the document. I don't have it anymore—but 3400 words of Zenos makes him one of the most quoted authorities in the entire Old Testament record. Lehi's party departed from Jerusalem before the Babylonian captivity, in possession of a brass-plates-version of the Old Testament, in which you find Zenos talking plainly, openly, and blatantly about the coming of a Messiah.

As the opening scenes of the Book of Mormon begin, Lehi—who is praying—gets a vision, is shown a book, and Lehi begins to prophesy. He joins in with others, and he testifies that the Jews are wicked (which causes them to laugh at the man because they think that's a ridiculous proposition—that they're not righteous), and he testifies of a Messiah; and it's that second testimony of the Messiah that provokes them to want to kill him. So the coming of a Messiah was so controversial—at the time that the party of Lehi departed from Jerusalem—that to testify openly about the Messiah had become so divisive (because of the effort of the Deuteronomists) that you risked your life to testify about it. They were—they were militant, they were motivated, and they were determined to eradicate the concept of a Messiah out of the religion that they had inherited from the days of Moses down.

You might ask: Well, why—why would the Messiah be so controversial? Messianic hopes and dreams had proven to be a kind of plague on Jerusalem and the Jews. Surrounding cultures opposed it; fools made claims that they *were it*; bad luck ensued every time you had someone out there claiming to be a Messiah; and it was troubling to conquerors to think that these Jews were one day going to be liberated by a Deliverer. And so, that part of the religion made a Jewish population continuously a political threat to whoever held dominance over them. Babylonians didn't want to hear that they were going to have a Deliverer; the Assyrians didn't want to hear that; the Greeks wouldn't want it; and the Romans, later, wouldn't want it.

And so, the Deuteronomists were taking a more pragmatic approach to the religion and said, "We can improve this thing by getting rid of the idea, because if we've got a Messiah coming, we're continuously a threat. Let's get rid of this part of the religion." So because Zenos is so blatantly Messianic—is so blatantly a writer filled with Christology or notions about Christ—that book simply got decanonized. It was removed from scripture. *Isaiah* is Messianic, but his poetry, his imagery, his vagueness, his poetic structure allowed for different interpretations to be made; and it was a lot less successful in getting rid of Isaiah because, in many respects, Isaiah can be interpreted in a variety of ways: the "suffering servant"

can be Israel itself or the remnant of the Jews itself. It needn't be a single individual—there are a lot of things you can do to manipulate that text.

So Zenos is gone from the Deuteronomist canon when they succeed, but a bunch of material got preserved when Ezra restored it. You can ask yourself, how much mischief can they do with a text when they're rewriting it, and how true is it the original? There's a—there's Sirius XM radio that will play for you (if you want it) channels wholly devoted to the 1950s or the 1960s or the 1970s, 80s, and so on. You can just choose the era—and there's even a Beatles channel on Sirius XM. You can hear the opening chord of songs that go back to the 1960s and you can start singing right along with it because you grew up hearing these tunes. You grew up familiar with this music. I don't know how many songs you have in your head as a library of material, but if someone picks up *Please Please Me* and starts singing it and substituting new words, you'll be able to pick up the error that quickly because they're not singing it the way that the song was written and sung by the Beatles. K? Scriptures with the Deuteronomists posed exactly the same problem. People could quote them—they were their songs; they were their literature; they were their folklore; they were their everyday conversational stuff.

I don't know how many times I hear people quoting *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, and you just instantly [Denver snaps] identify with the context of the comment. "I'll bet you've never smelled a real bus before." Okay? (I didn't realize how obscene *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* was until my daughter was sick, stayed home, watched it, and reported: in the first fifteen minutes, there were over, I think, twenty-five obscenities in the show—she's a junior-high kid at the time, home sick from school, and I didn't realize there was that much. It's not a kid's show, as it turns out, at all!)

The Deuteronomists were confronting exactly the same problem. ([Quoting *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.] "He'll keep calling and calling!") I mean Ferris is just gonna bug Cameron until he finally comes around.) When you've got a culture that knows how the language ought to go and you try to introduce complete alterations of the text, you're gonna run into a brick wall because the people are gonna detect it. They're gonna call you out on it; and they're gonna reject your work. So while Ezra could do some things—like throwing out Zenos, like altering marginally the text—what we got in the recovery (the second root of our scripture), we can have some level of confidence that they didn't make a wholesale, complete alteration of what Ezra was doing. It was more clipping, cutting, eliminating, curtailing; it was more of that sort of thing than it was complete rewrite. If you can throw it out, throw it out. And so what we've got is probably true and faithful to what had been here earlier, it was just the *Reader's Digest* abridged version of what had once existed. But it's a second root of title, a root of scripture, root of the record. So whatever it was that Moses did *originally* got replaced in the recovery at the time of Ezra.

Well, *if* you believe in the restoration of the gospel—from our perspective, in our day, we have a *third* root of scripture in the work that was done by Joseph Smith. Joseph was commanded, very early on, to go through the scriptures and to make inspired corrections, additions, emendations into the record, in order to clarify, in order to make the record more complete; and repeatedly, revelations given through the Prophet Joseph Smith affirmed that the church itself would fail if it did not have possession of that record that he was supposed to produce.

In the process of doing that, there were revelations that were inspired by inquiries into the meaning of certain passages of the scriptures. While working on the book of John, for example, there was an inquiry made about the afterlife. Doctrine and Covenants section 76 (which is now part of the Teachings and Commandments with a new section number on it that I haven't memorized yet) is a revelation about the afterlife that came about as a result of the work on recovering and correcting the scriptures. Joseph Smith worked on that but never published it. He expressed the intent to publish it in a single volume with the Book of Mormon, but that never got done in his lifetime.

When Joseph Smith died—when he was murdered—the record that he had been working on remained in the possession of his widow. When Brigham Young led a group of people out west, they left without having access to or the ability to read and recover the Joseph Smith version of the scriptures. And so Mormonism—in its predominant form, in the largest single and most successful version of Mormonism (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)—never had possession of the Joseph Smith work on the Old- and the New Testament. Emma Smith turned the manuscript over to her son, Joseph Smith III. Joseph Smith III eventually let the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints get custody of it, and it was eventually published by Harold House in Missouri (the publication arm of the RLDS Church) as what is called the Joseph Smith Translation—or we call it the Inspired Version.

*However* [Denver chuckles], the Inspired Version (published by the RLDS Church) got put into print by a committee, and the committee felt at liberty to make changes to the text that *they* thought were important to have included, and they also failed to be faithful to all of the changes that Joseph had made; and therefore, many of the things that Joseph had done with the scriptures were not included in that publication. In fact, a fully-complete version of the new root of scripture that we have in Joseph Smith did not get published at all in a correct form until the recent work of the scripture committee that has been laboring with the original manuscripts, now available in photograph-photostatic copies, so that you can actually look at the appearance of the text that Joseph worked on.

We also have—rolling out at the same time—transcripts prepared by note-takers who are present in Nauvoo, listening to Joseph Smith give talks in which he mentions a passage of scripture, and then he'll say, "I could render a plainer translation," or he says, "This should be read this way instead of being read that way." And so, by the time you get down to the late Nauvoo talks and Joseph is including new changes or additions or corrections to the scripture, he did not go back to the actual manuscript and insert some of *those* changes into the actual manuscript copy that you can see in photographs available today. But he made the information available *publicly*. So if you're following what Joseph is saying, you can go and see whether or not that change exists in the Joseph Smith Translation.

Well, in the last few years, it has become possible, for the first time, to get access to all of that kinds of information. At the same time, just within the last few years, technological advances have made it possible for document preparation to occur through cooperation between people that are widely separated, even continents apart. They can all access and contribute to the same document, so that work that would have taken hundreds of people thousands and thousands of days to go through, exchange, and look at it (in copies that are passed back and forth), the technological advances allowed for—at almost the same time that the material becomes available to look at—a technological method for those (who are interested in looking at it) to faithfully cooperate in a recovery effort.

So while the *third* root of scripture was created or given to us by Joseph Smith—who made an inspired effort to recover, correct, and make the scriptures state what they should have stated—no one was interested in preserving that or publishing that, in order to overcome condemnation that had been pronounced by God upon the people that pretended to be His. And so the work of doing that remained *undone*, until a group of people cooperatively—all moved upon independent—began the effort of trying to gather together not only what Joseph Smith had done with the Old Testament and the New Testament, but also to do the same thing with the text of the Book of Mormon and do the same thing with the text of the revelations (the revelations that came through Joseph Smith).

And so what we wind up with is, for the first time since Joseph Smith died, an effort to find the most correct version of Joseph Smith's changes to the Old Testament, changes to the New Testament, what his revelations actually said before other people began to interlineate and alter it—some of which was

done long after the fact—and an effort to look at the Book of Mormon and make it a more faithful translation of what had come out through Joseph, including the fact that the punctuation was never supplied by a believer. Punctuation was done by a printer that was hired by EB Grandin because he was competent in book layout and knew how to do that. But he certainly wasn't a believer in the Book of Mormon; he was a believer in type-setting and type-printing and how to lay it out and cut it so that you had front and back, the pages laid out correctly.

Well, so we have a new root of scripture at the time of Joseph Smith, and *no one's interested in it*. No one wants to have it—until now; until the project reached its incipient completion and was presented and accepted as a volume, binding upon the people (the Book of Mormon as a covenant; the rest of it as a guide to your life, your belief, your faith), adopted at a conference in Boise, Idaho in September of 2017. And for the first time, the scriptures become a faithful—as much as is possible, despite the neglect and the foolishness of people that have been involved with this—it is as accurate a third root of scripture as can be, at this point, recovered.

In the process of doing that, we know that Joseph Smith intended to do some things to fix the text of the Book of Mormon and that he was actually in the process of making corrections to the Book of Mormon. Most of them were done in order to make it more faithful to the first translation. We still have about 22% of the first manuscript—rest of it rotted away in a cornerstone, but we still have about 22% of that. We have 100% of the printer's manuscript. We can do a comparison between those two and see that the copyist who copied from the original to the one given to EB Grandin to type-set made about 1 ½ mistakes in copying every page. Much of what Joseph Smith did in the second addition of the Book of Mormon was to go back to the first one, compare the original translation to the type-set copy, and fix the mistakes to bring it back into conformity with the original translation.

So Joseph was interested in being faithful to the original revelation. Likewise, the scripture recovery people have tried to be faithful to exactly what Joseph Smith was doing or did, including the revelations to eliminate the additions, the changes, the alterations that people made to the revelations—after they had come out through Joseph Smith—trying to recover the original.

The condemnation that the LDS church (and the people that believed in the restoration) fell under in 1831, in the words of God, *condemned* the people because they had failed not only to *say* but to *do* that which they'd been commanded. Most people have read that revelation as being a failure of *conduct*—they're not *doing* what they're supposed to do. It's been during the process of recovering the scriptures that it has become apparent that the defect was not just in the failure to do, it was also in the failure to *say*; that is, the *text* had not been faithfully preserved and faithfully cared for, cultivated, curated, and kept in print.

So with the new scriptures (that we're hoping to see in leather-bound, onion skin, highly-portable, and very durable print format soon—they're available online, electronically, for anyone in the world to read right now at the scriptures.info website, and they will continue to be so. They are available in a paperback version through Amazon called The Old Covenants, which is the Old Testament; The New Covenants, which is the—as Joseph Smith always planned it to be—the New Testament and the Book of Mormon; and then the Teachings and Commandments, which comprises the revelations of Joseph Smith—along with a number of letters, editorials, statements that Joseph had made that should have been canonized and never were—all of those are gathered in and included, along with some of what God has been up to in our day in this final Teachings and Commandments)—

The result of that is that we now have available to us, in the third root of scripture, a more faithful and more complete restoration of scripture (to give us a more clear picture of the original religion that

belonged to the first fathers) then we have ever had available to us at any time, since the days of Abraham. We have recovered—in addition to a better Old Testament—a book that was originating with Abraham, restored by revelation through Joseph Smith. *Unlike* the way in which the book of Abraham has been preserved in the LDS tradition (with some typographical misspellings and some name changes that shouldn't have crept into the text), in the Teachings and Commandments, the book of Abraham is fit in chronologically, right where it belongs.

I think a lot of the criticism of the book of Abraham that has come about by publishing it as a separate text—and making people look at it as a dubious document because it may or may not be a faithful interpretation of facsimiles, and it may be more appropriately regarded as something from the *Book of the Dead*, a very late Egyptian text—if instead, it had always been fitted into the scriptures in the way it is in the Teachings and Commandments (in the Teachings and Commandments, it simply looks like another revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith, fitted in chronologically in about that 1842 time frame, when a number of other things are canonized; it's *another* revelation), had it been packaged in that format all along, I think much of the criticism would probably never even been thought of. Joseph's revealing something. He revealed something from a parchment that had been written on by *John*—and we don't have *that parchment*. So if we accept a revelation that was written by John on parchment (that Joseph Smith gave as a revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants, now in the Teachings and Commandments), the book of Abraham becomes no different. It's just another revelation tumbling out through the inspiration given to a prophet by God.

The scriptures, in the format that they appear in the new publication, is not only a new root—it's a *more accurate root*. And it originates directly from God's active intervention, in order to try and recover the religion as a witness to all the world.

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The foregoing was recorded on March 2nd, 2019 in Sandy, UT.