

EPISODE 28 • PART I



Dr. Steven C. Harper

D&C 76



- Hank Smith: 00:01 Welcome to followHim, a weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their Come Follow Me stuff. I'm Hank Smith.
- John Bytheway: 00:09 And I'm John Bytheway. We love to learn, we love to laugh. We want to learn and laugh with you. As together, we follow Him.
- Hank Smith: 00:20 Hello, everyone! It's a good day here at the followHim podcast. My name is Hank Smith, and I'm your host. I am here with the delightful John Bytheway. Welcome, John.
- John Bytheway: 00:31 That's an adjective I don't hear with my family, but thank you.
- Hank Smith: 00:35 You are delightful in every way. We want to remind everybody that you can find us on social media. We have a great Instagram and Facebook page that are run by the wonderful Jamie Nelson. You can get show notes, transcriptions at followhim.co, and please rate and review the podcast. That really helps us out when you do that.
- Hank Smith: 00:58 I look forward to every week, to be honest. I mean, we've just had some brilliant experts on. But way early on in our podcast, I don't know if you remember, back when we weren't podcasters. We didn't know what we were doing. We invited Dr. Steve Harper on to the podcast. He graciously came when we didn't know what we were doing. Tell us about Steve.
- John Bytheway: 01:19 He will be so surprised that we still don't know what we're doing. We're so excited to have Steve back, and I am excited to have him back especially for this section. In fact, I'm going to read his bio. I have a book. I bought this like 10 years ago called Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants. And what I love about this book that Dr. Harper wrote is, sometimes books sound like they're written for other scholars, and sometimes they sound like they're written for the rest of us.
- John Bytheway: 01:49 And this is one of those that is so easy to understand and has helped me tremendously in addressing these sections. I always read this before we do our podcast and before we look at each

section. And in the back of making sense of the Doctrine and Covenants, we've already had Steve on before, so I'm going to use this little shorter bio, the about the author on the back jacket cover here.

- John Bytheway: 02:14 Steven C. Harper is an associate professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University, and one of the editors of The Joseph Smith Papers. After serving a mission in Canada, he told me that was Winnipeg, and graduating from BYU, he earned a PhD in Early American History from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and taught for two years on the faculty of BYU Hawaii.
- John Bytheway: 02:37 Brother Harper has received several fellowships and awards for scholarship and writing, including the T. Edgar Lyon and Juanita Brooks Awards from the Mormon History Association. He and his wife, Jennifer Sebring Harper, are the parents of five children. And we understand he's currently serving as a bishop. So, thank you for being with us. Dr. Harper, and welcome.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 03:00 Thank you, gentlemen. It's a pleasure.
- Hank Smith: 03:01 I would say if Edward Partridge was reincarnated, he'd be Steve Harper. He's just brilliant and wonderful. I will say this to everybody listening, if you haven't, some of you have joined us halfway through. Because your friends, thank you for recommending us, recommended the podcast to you. I would highly encourage you to go back to our very, it's our second, I think it's our second interview that we did on the First Vision with Dr. Harper. It is enlightening. It will just fill your soul with joy and incredible knowledge about the prophet and what he was going through at the time.
- Hank Smith: 03:41 There's nobody, and Steve will disagree, he always does. But there's nobody on the planet that knows more about the First Vision than Steve Harper, there really isn't. Maybe his mentors, he would say. A couple of his mentors like Richard Bushman, and he's always giving credit to his mentors. And I think that's wonderful. But I hope you'll go back and listen to that episode.
- John Bytheway: 04:02 Hank, I'm glad you said that. And I read some turning around because I'm looking at my, I have a shelf over there of church history. But Steve's book, I think it's called Joseph Smith's First Vision, and that was great because he went through all of the different accounts and spoke about each one of them. But boy, so one of those last chapters about being a seeker. I still remember, in fact, I think I e-mailed you, I don't know how

many years ago and told you thank you for that, Steven. So, I'm glad you said that.

- Dr. Steven C. H...: 04:30 That meant a lot to me. Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 04:32 Steve, let's jump into this week's lesson. It is one section of the Doctrine and Covenants. It's Section 76 of the doctrine covenants. I've noticed just even in the heading, you read, Revelation Given, Revelation Given, Revelation Given. And then you get to 76 and it doesn't say revelation given to Joseph Smith, it says a vision given to Joseph Smith, the prophet and Sidney Rigdon in Hiram, Ohio. So, let's go back as far as you want, and set us up to read this section with the right context in mind.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 05:08 In the beginning, the Gods created the heavens and the earth.
- John Bytheway: 05:11 Go back as far as you want.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 05:15 There are all kinds of religious ideas in the air, but it is overwhelmingly a Protestant country. And that means that it is very biblically based, but the Bible is read in particular ways you might, I sometimes use the metaphor of glasses. Everybody has glasses that they wear when they read the scriptures. And those glasses change how you read, what you see what, you're able to discern, and that's true for everybody.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 05:52 So, Protestant, early American glasses mean that people read the Bible as the Word of God, and that they see in it salvation through Jesus Christ. I'll over simplify here a lot but, but that comes by faith. Faith in Christ who gives His grace to believers, and saves them from sin and death. Those who receive Christ as their Savior go to heaven, and those who don't, go to hell.
- Hank Smith: 06:28 Can you do us a quick favor for those of our listeners who are listening who have heard the word Protestant, and going, "I don't know quite what that is." It comes from the word protest, right?
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 06:40 Yes, that's right. So, Protestants are Christians. They originate in Europe. They are dissatisfied with Catholic Christianity. There's much that they love about it, but also much that they disagree with. And so, in one way or other, they reformed Christianity, and begin to preach their own versions. They publish their own versions of the story.

- Dr. Steven C. H...: 07:11 So primarily, followers of John Calvin's teachings come to the Atlantic shores of New England, Massachusetts, Connecticut. Joseph Smith's ancestors are among them, and they bring a version of Christianity that is what we sometimes call Puritanism, Congregationalism, or Reformed. And it has lots of important doctrines that concern us.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 07:49 But today primarily, what we're concerned about noticing is that it's heaven and hell, kind of soteriology, that is doctrine of salvation. So, Christians will go to heaven if they are faithful to Christ and accept Him as Savior and he accepts them in some versions, and they'll go to hell if Christ is not their Savior. And in many of these theologies, heaven is very, very small and hell is very big. In other words, most people are going to hell, deservedly so. And very few relatively will go to heaven.
- Hank Smith: 08:31 That's kind of a depressing ideology, but okay.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 08:37 Yeah, I'm grateful for the restoration for many reasons. But one of them is that it radically, radically revises that soteriology, that doctrine of salvation.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 08:53 And what might be interesting for folks to notice is that Section 76, which is really a series of visions that are narrated, and then commented on, as well. It goes well beyond anything that had been restored before that.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 09:12 In other words, think of the Book of Mormon. There's no reason that a Protestant, couldn't read the Book of Mormon and agree completely, with its soteriology. And some have, there's famously a Baptist Book of Mormon, a Baptist person who weighs in and says, "There's nothing wrong with the Book of Mormon. It is perfectly in line with biblical teaching." And the reason for other Christians sometimes to reject it is the way we get it, not anything it says, in particular.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 09:45 So, the Book of Mormon says, there's heaven and hell. There's two ways. When you die, you go back to the God who gave you your life and then you're separated into heaven or hell. So, what we want to notice is that Doctrine and Covenants Section 76 is a little bit like going into higher math. I'm always uncomfortable using math metaphors. I have no idea about math.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 10:17 But you learn pretty simple math early on, and know the basics. And then if you keep at it, you learn that math is more sophisticated, more complicated. It doesn't invalidate the basics you learn, those are still the building blocks. But there's more to

it than what you learned. And Section 76 is the beginning part of the restoration that says, there's more to it than you've ever heard before. It is the first of what we sometimes call the exaltation, revelations.

- Dr. Steven C. H...: 10:53 President Nelson's terms, he's talked a lot about salvation. Salvation is what we've been talking about so far too. That's Christians being saved by Christ to heaven. And Latter-Day Saints things believe in salvation. But because of the restoration, we also believe in exaltation. We believe in heavens beyond heaven. We believe in conditions of salvation that are more than just not being damned or going to hell. In fact, Latter-Day Saints are the only people I know of who think you can be saved and damned at the same time.
- Hank Smith: 11:28 That's exactly right.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 11:31 And when you ask a Latter-Day Saint, "Are you saved?" It takes half an hour for us to answer that question. We're just being asked for a yes or no answer, but it takes half an hour. The reason it does is because of Revelations like the one beginning in Section 76. It is spectacular.
- Hank Smith: 11:53 It is. But I've heard you say before that if you join the church in 1830s, 1840s, they didn't talk about the First Vision. You talked about The Vision.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 12:04 The earliest manuscript that we have of Section 76 begins with the great big words at the top, The Vision, and this comes February 1832. So, this is months before Joseph, as far as we can tell, records his First Vision. So, The Vision in the early days of the church meant Section 76. It was controversial from the beginning.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 12:32 It essentially says, Christianity as we received, it is perfectly fine, but it is kindergarten. And we're advancing into higher math. And there's more to the story of salvation than the simple version we've been told. And so, as you might expect, that throws people for a loop, even Latter-Day Saints. Later in the early 1850s. As I recall, Brigham Young will give a talk and he'll say, "Man, when the vision came along that was tough for me to swallow. That was way outside anything I'd ever been taught before." And he did a wise thing. He said, "I did not reject it. I couldn't just accept it all at once, but I decided to think and pray and pray and think."

Dr. Steven C. H...: 13:28 And as he did that, he learned by the Holy Ghost that the vision was right and good. So, I'm grateful that he didn't just reject it because it was unfamiliar. You remember Joseph saying things in January of 1843. He said, "The saints fly to pieces like glass every time I tried to teach them something new. Well, Jesus Christ."

Dr. Steven C. H...: 13:51 Brigham Young was open right? Brigham Young was wide open to the restoration through Joseph Smith and he struggled to internalize Section 76. He recognized that it was just so different from what he'd [inaudible 00:14:05] from the top.

Hank Smith: 14:05 So, for our listeners, they need to get out of the mindset of, "Oh, I've been taught this since I was two, right, about The Three Degrees of Glory. We need to get to, "Okay. This is brand new," for these people who think...

Dr. Steven C. H...: 14:18 Brand new.

Hank Smith: 14:19 Think heaven is small and hell is big. Is that a lot of the Latter-Day Saints?

Dr. Steven C. H...: 14:24 Yeah. Oh, yeah. These people are Protestant for their whole life. So, Brigham Young, for example, comes from the Methodist tradition. And he brings with him the idea that you can influence your salvation, you can come to Christ and receive his prevenient grace, a gift of His grace, but that'll qualify you for heaven, and otherwise, you'll go to hell. And that's pretty much all there is to it.

Dr. Steven C. H...: 14:51 I have that line. Are you guys old enough to know the 1976 First Vision movie where they got the Protestant minister saying, "Saved or damned? That's all there is to it."

Hank Smith: 15:03 Yeah.

Dr. Steven C. H...: 15:03 All right. That's a way of capturing [crosstalk 00:15:06].

Hank Smith: 15:06 I remember the newer first version movie where the man looks at Joseph says, "Be careful, boy, your eternal soul is at stake." Right?

John Bytheway: 15:16 Hey, Steve, could you comment on the idea of universalism?

Dr. Steven C. H...: 15:23 You bet. Universalism is certainly a thread that is running through and under and around Section 76. Universalism is a

response to versions of Protestantism that are especially emphatic about God's plan being to damn most of his children.

- Dr. Steven C. H...: 15:49 And Universalists, including Joseph Smith's father, who joins a universalist society in the late 1700s. They read the scriptures. They read the same Bible with a different pair of glasses, and they focus on lots of passages that show that God is love, right? They like the teachings of John and other places that say, "God's not a damning God. That's not his dominant nature. God is full of love. God wants to save his children. He will. It's only reasonable that He's going to save all of his children. Now, they may deserve some punishment for their bad behavior, and they'll get it, but in the end, God will save his children, all of them."
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 16:38 That's Universalism in a nutshell. And as you can see, it's a response against, it's a reaction to versions of Protestantism that are considered by Universalists to be unreasonable and overly harsh readings of the Bible.
- Hank Smith: 16:54 You can see then why he doesn't go to church. Joseph Smith Senior.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 16:58 Yeah, right. Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 17:00 Because the Presbyterian Church, if God doesn't choose you, sorry, right? That's the Presbyterian version that Lucy Mack joined.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 17:08 What we're noticing then is that the revelations that Joseph Smith receives are in conversation with teachings that are in the air, right? The revelations don't come in a vacuum. They come because people have questions and concerns. And there are ideas colliding with each other, right? There are arguments that are ongoing and different versions and visions of what the future holds. And it's not that there's nothing out there to think about and Joseph needs to fill the void. It's that there are lots of things out there to think about and competing, and he needs to know which of them is right. He needs to understand.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 17:55 And he, particularly in this instance, is revising the Bible. He's reading the Bible through very, very carefully. And here, in the early part of 1832, he with his scribe, Sidney Rigdon. And Rigdon himself is a reformed Baptist minister. So, he's steeped in this argument about what the nature of God's salvation is. Rigdon knows it well. He knows the versions of it well, the alternatives to it. And he's argued for a salvation through Christ, for sure.

- Dr. Steven C. H...: 18:39 And Joseph and Sidney are reading the Bible carefully, By now, they're in John, and they're in the fifth chapter of John. And they're reading the part that says that, "The just will be resurrected to glory and the unjust resurrected to damnation." And you can't live in their time and place without wondering what that means, right? It's pretty black and white. And as Joseph reads it, he thinks, "Well, what does that mean? How exactly does it apply? Who qualifies as the just and who qualifies as the wicked?"
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 19:22 And he knows enough about human nature and behavior to think that's there's no nuance in that. And of course, those are reflected in the various versions of churches and doctrines of salvation in the day. So, it's overly simple to say, he's just got John 5 on his mind and nothing else is in there competing with John 5. The fact is, he's in John 5, but he's got a whole bunch of other ideas colliding with and allying with and bumping off what he reads and that's the reason he needs more light, more understanding.
- Hank Smith: 20:04 And to me, you just described the process of revelation for a lot of us. Ideas, thoughts, competing, what am I supposed to do here? John 5. This is the Lord speaking, correct? He says, "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 20:35 So, there's either eternal life or damnation. And Joseph's history tells us that, at this point, he reflects and he says, "Well, what does this mean? What does this passage mean?" If everybody is rewarded for the deeds done in the body during their mortal life, then how will this actually work out in practical reality? Well, there's not just people who are purely great, and then purely evil, there's not just two camps.
- Hank Smith: 21:08 To get an A in my class, you have 930 points. And those who get 929, those are the ones you're like, "I'm so sorry." Right? But we have to put the line somewhere. Oh, that would be so hard to see salvation, your one work away, right?
- John Bytheway: 21:25 There's this razor thin line that divides it.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 21:28 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 21:28 And that's why this whole thing just tastes good. But could I ask you, Steve, the JST changes, resurrection of good and evil in

John 5:28 and 29, to the resurrection of the just and the unjust, what is the timing of the JST? Is that before Section 76?

- Dr. Steven C. H...: 21:50 So, Section 76 is the reason for that revision, right?
- John Bytheway: 21:55 For that change, cool.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 21:56 So, they're reading John 5, as they're revising the Bible, thinking about this is how...
- John Bytheway: 22:03 Simultaneous.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 22:05 Yeah, they read slowly and deliberately. Sometimes you can read past whole books and no real engagement, nothing really much at stake. But here, there's a lot at stake. So, we're reading slowly, deliberately, and we're wondering what it means. Right? We're very interested in knowing more. And so, this revelation, this series of visions is the catalyst for making changes in that passage.
- Hank Smith: 22:35 Before we get into the verses themselves, can you give us, can we just back up a little bit? It's February of 1832, can you give us just a little background?
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 22:45 Yeah, it's been almost two years since the church was organized in New York. And then at the end of that year, Joseph is commanded to leave New York with all of the saints in New York and gather to Ohio. So, he and Emma have moved to Northeastern Ohio. And one of the converts there is Sidney Rigdon, Sidney and Phebe Rigdon.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 23:07 Sidney had been a very influential minister in a reformed Baptist tradition. He and like-minded people are looking forward to, they'll even sometimes use the word restoration or restoration of Christianity. They're careful readers of the Bible. They believe in faith in Christ, repentance, and baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 23:36 Now, when the Book of Mormon comes through, and the missionary say, "You're right there and just add to that the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, and you're most of the way home." They recognize that this is what they've been looking for. Sidney Rigdon reads the Book of Mormon carefully for a couple of weeks and comes to the conclusion, there's no possible way a mortal person wrote that, at least not one in the 19th century. It is God's work and he decides to forsake his ministry. His congregation had just built him a house. And so,

he's homeless because he embraced [crosstalk 00:24:13] to the gospel.

- Hank Smith: 24:13 That's something we haven't mentioned. He says something to his wife, right? "Are you ready to go into poverty with for this?" Right? And she says, "Yes."
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 24:25 She really is a lovely, faithful Christian. They've counted the cost. She says, "I know what we're in for and I'm all in." And that made it possible for him to be all in and he becomes a major asset, right? He immediately travels to New York and meets Joseph Smith. And there, the Lord gives section 35 of the Doctrine Council which calls Sidney to be a scribe, to help Joseph Smith in this project of reading the Bible very carefully and closely and making substantial revisions to it.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 25:01 And so, here we are now, almost a couple of years later, they've moved back to Ohio. And they've moved South, about 35 miles South of where Sidney Rigdon was living and where Joseph and Emma found short term housing when they arrived. They've been invited to live with Alice or Elsa and John Johnson in their home. They have a lovely home, the large family that's mostly grown up now. And so, they've got some space, and they invite Joseph and Emma to bring their twins and come and live with them. And Sidney moves down and lives in a home next door. And this is to make it possible for them to have time and space to really go to work on their revision of the Bible. So, that's where they're living and that's the setting here.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 25:55 You may know the wonderful story of Sister Johnson. She has rheumatism in her arm. And several of the members of this Campbellite church it's sometimes called because the main leader of it is Alexander Campbell, his father before him. And so, these Campbellites or disciples are some of the ones who are most interested in and likely to convert when they hear the restored gospel. And a group of them and others visit Joseph Smith, and that includes Sister Johnson, and they raised the question in that meeting.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 26:38 Here's Sister Johnson, "Has God given anyone power on earth today, like the ancient apostles had to heal the sick?" And while that conversation is going on, Joseph walks across the room, gives her a healing blessing and she is miraculously healed, and they all know it. One of our very best sources for this is a book about the disciples of Christ in the Western Reserve, that is this area of Northeastern Ohio. It says, "There's no way around it. She was healed. She was sick and now she's not." And it says it

was the mental and moral shock produced on our system by Joseph Smith's audacity that did it.

- Dr. Steven C. H...: [27:18](#) And so, the fact of the matter is, she was healed. And then the interpretation is up to you, you can decide. I decide it was the power of God that was manifested through Joseph Smith. So that's the setting. No wonder Sister Johnson and Brother John Johnson are wanting Joseph and Emma to come and live with them. They want to foster the restoration as best as they can. They can help by providing some housing and offset some costs. And that will buy Joseph some time to do the Lord's work and it's in their home, we think. We're nearly certain it is in their home where Joseph, we know that's where he receives many revelations, and that's where Section 76 comes. This is when we wish we had a magic school bus, right?
- Hank Smith: [28:10](#) Yeah.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: [28:10](#) We'd load all the people listening on the bus...
- Hank Smith: [28:13](#) Go to visit...
- Dr. Steven C. H...: [28:13](#) And go to the Johnson home and sit in that room and feel as people have felt. I've felt, you've felt, feel the power that comes from realizing this is a place of revelation. Some of the greatest revelations of the restoration were given there.
- John Bytheway: [28:33](#) The first time that I ever got to visit there, I was like, I think I was in Cleveland at a youth conference and we took a quick break and drove down there and missionaries, senior couple told me that there was a couple of women who were there who weren't members of the church, and they were spending some time with them and I was with that group. When we walked into the room, one of these women looked at her friend and then looked at the missionary and said, "Whoa, what happened in here?"
- John Bytheway: [29:03](#) And I was just like, "Wow, there's a sensitive soul right there because she knows something happened here in this place." And the light is coming through the windows. It's beautiful. And yeah, it's one of those places you just want to sit there and soak it in for a while.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: [29:22](#) I hope everybody has a chance to go. The church has done a really wonderful job of restoring it to, it's as close as you can get to walking into Joseph Smith's world.

John Bytheway: 29:34 Yeah, well put, and it's not a city. It's a home out there in farmland. It's very, there's corn, it's very beautiful.

Hank Smith: 29:43 And the famous tar and feathering has yet to occur out there. Right, Steve?

John Bytheway: 29:49 But it's there.

Dr. Steven C. H...: 29:50 Or one month away. About five weeks away until they're going to drag Joseph out of that house and it's the antagonistic wing who's, siblings and neighbors have converted to the restored gospel and they're pretty upset with Joseph and they break in and drag him out of the house and drag Sidney out of the house next door, beat them soundly. Cover them in hot pine tar that's laced with acid and then break a feathered pillow over their head to finish the humiliation.

Hank Smith: 30:25 And that's going to happen a month right after this.

Dr. Steven C. H...: 30:29 Yeah, 24th of March. And the visions are on the 16th of February. So, you might think of, in some ways, the price Joseph pays and Sidney pays for receiving this revelation and the others, right? The price they pay for restoring the gospel is tar and feathers, beating, being hated by neighbors.

Hank Smith: 30:53 And Ezra Booth has a lot to do with this?

Dr. Steven C. H...: 30:56 Yep, he is a Methodist minister who has converted and he watched Elsa Johnson be healed. He knows she's healed.

John Bytheway: 31:02 She's right there.

Dr. Steven C. H...: 31:03 He knows she was healed by the power of God. And then he went with Joseph all the way to Missouri and back and he decided that Joseph was a real person, and therefore no profit. People do that even today. But I don't understand that way of reasoning. Where in the scriptures are we told that profits aren't real people? We've got 100 stores in the scriptures. The profits are real people who do real stuff, make mistakes, have body odor.

Dr. Steven C. H...: 31:29 And Booth for some reason decides Joseph Smith is just not prophetic enough, whatever bar that is, whatever standard that is. So, he bails out, and he and Simon's writer, and others then really antagonize the saints and Joseph especially including, violence on Joseph's person.

Hank Smith: [31:54](#) We haven't talked about Simon yet. You want to just give us a little bit on Simon's writer before we...

Dr. Steven C. H...: [31:59](#) He's another one of these disciples who converts and then it's really short lived. Some sources say one reason he gives for his defection is that Joseph misspells his name in a revelation. Man, if Joseph had to be held to that standard by everybody, if all prophets had to be, spelling bee champs, I don't know how many we really have over the course of history. That's not one of the criteria of being a prophet. You just have to be called by God.

Hank Smith: [32:28](#) Where do we get these? I mean, we might as well talk about this for a second, Steve, because where do we get these assumptions about profits? Some people, they should never get sick. They should probably win the lottery every time. I mean, where's the line?

Dr. Steven C. H...: [32:43](#) I call it hypothetical history. That's where we decide what the past should be like, based on nothing more than our imagination. Right? If he's a prophet, then he will always be nice to everybody. If he's a prophet then, and those things are not evidenced anywhere. There're no scriptures that say them. There's no reason to believe them, except we just decided that they should be true. They're just our imagination. That's a terrible, terrible way to do history because when you see the evidence, it's going to upset your hypothetical version of what the past should be like.

Dr. Steven C. H...: [33:25](#) So those kinds of assumptions are subtle and dangerous. They're not real. They have no basis in reality or what's what actually was. The scriptures tell us that truth is things as they actually were, and will be and are to come. And that's what we ought to study, right? Our scriptures are clear, full of stories of prophets, who are real people whom God called, and they worked with them, and they struggled and faltered and he worked with them. And they accomplished his work miraculously because they were mere mortals who allied with him and overcame, and never, never did in this life become perfect, but who were called by God. That's the accurate historical view of what a prophet is. Any assumptions to the contrary are poorly founded and are going to be disrupted.

Hank Smith: [34:19](#) You said once in our earlier interview, I'm trying to remember the exact phrase, but if your faith is based on bad expectations, it will easily be overturned.

- John Bytheway: 34:31 Well, and that was Ezra Booth, right? He went to Missouri and went "This doesn't look like any promised land thing." And then saw Joseph Smith's humaneness and maybe was converted to some degree by a sign, which isn't, that can maybe open your heart, but then you've got to get the real thing.
- Hank Smith: 34:50 Steve, I was just going to say this happens a lot today, to our students, and to others who have some version in their head and maybe they say, "I got it from primary. I got it from seminary. I got it from this version in my head. And then I read the actual history and it's not as Disneyland as I thought it was, and so I'm out." But what you're saying is, change your expectations, analyze those assumptions.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 35:18 Make them real, make them real instead of hypothetical. Frankly, it comes, in my opinion of having been somewhat lazy to begin with, and then all of a sudden paying attention and being jarred by that transition. Right? If you've been paying attention all along, it's not so shocking to find out that things aren't what you thought. And I'm also sometimes frustrated when people blame them or the church, right? Well, they didn't tell me this or they that... One of the principals, as you know of Come Follow Me is you are responsible for your own gospel learning.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 36:02 You work hard to seek the truth. Don't blame someone else. Don't blame your seminary teacher. Now, if I were talking out on the other side of my mouth, I'd be wanting religion professors like me and seminary teachers to make darn sure they teach the truth and love by the power of the Holy Ghost. So, I'm not trying to skirt that obligation. But every person is ultimately responsible to seek and discern the truth for themselves.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 36:32 And it frustrates me when people blame the church as if they're supposed to be a ultra regulation on primary lessons, right? There's somebody from correlations sent to sit in on every primary class to make sure nothing devious gets taught, that's just unrealistic expectations. And the Lord is, the Lord has placed the expectation on us to seek learning by studying by faith out of the best books. And if we don't do that, I don't think we can fault anybody else for not doing it for us.
- John Bytheway: 37:07 I think that President Nelson's emphasis on Hear Him, on learning to hear the Lord. He's not saying even hear me, he's saying, "Hear the Lord. Get your own inspiration and learn to hear him." I love that emphasis. And also, the phrase that I think President Nelson has used the continuous restoration and this

whole thing is part of that. This is a huge example of the Lord wants to give us more, this whole section.

- Hank Smith: 37:40 And we don't want anybody to be discouraged. It's a good time right now to say, "You know what? I'm going to learn. What is that Steve Harper book. Let me look that up. I'm going to go. I want to learn right?" It's a good time today, whoever's listening to us right now to say, "Well, I want to become, I want to know, this kind of stuff." Because I'll tell you, the books have been written. There is plenty of them out there.
- John Bytheway: 38:04 Yeah. Have we ever had an easier time? Have we ever had more resources at our fingertips with our phones in our hands? I mean, this is an incredible time to live. And I think Hank, probably three or four times we have heard some of our wonderful guests say something like, "It's not that you know too much church history. It's that you don't know enough." You took one thing and you didn't say, "Now, wait a minute, I got to learn the rest. I want to know the context. Who was there? What they say?" And that's why I love this. We're trying to get as much as we can.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 38:37 Yeah, that's really well said, I think.
- Hank Smith: 38:40 All right, Steve. I think, do you feel like we're ready to get into the revelation? Is there anything else we need to know about the players involved?
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 38:49 The Lord is the most important one. So, let's hear what he has to say. The first 10 verses are an introduction. I don't know exactly the nature of it. It might be a kind of a composition by Joseph Smith or Sidney Rigdon or both. Maybe it's revealed to them, hard to say for sure. But it's certainly a prologue to the visions that are coming. So, it's a very beautiful passage. The Lord is first person voice is there beginning from verse five on.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 39:23 Let's notice this then. Let's notice that the first four verses are a kind of a prologue, probably appended afterwards, kind of attached as an intro. So, you guys got to really listen to this, here this, this is coolest stuff you ever going to hear. And then, we transition at verse five into the Lord's first-person voice, maybe we ought to read at least part of that five through 10.
- Hank Smith: 39:47 "For thus saith the Lord, I the Lord am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth and to the end, great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory. Unto them will I

reveal all mysteries. Yea, all the hidden mysteries of my kingdom from days of old and for ages to come, will I make known unto them the good pleasure of my will concerning all things pertaining to my kingdom." This is really beautiful stuff.

- Dr. Steven C. H...: 40:17 Yeah, notice what it's telling us about the nature of God. Right? The very first thing he tells us is, "I'm merciful. I'm gracious. Anybody who shows any sort of love for me, I delight to honor them. I'll give you all the mysteries and all the glory you can imagine and more." It's a really wonderful disclosure. And remember that it's coming and the context hasn't been very long since the Reverend Jonathan Edwards, the most influential preacher in American history has said, "God abhors you. He hates your guts. He's dangling you over the pit of hell like a spider on a web. And any minute now, it might sever and you'll be dropped into the abyss." That's, that's the flavor of preaching. That is characteristic.
- Hank Smith: 41:05 Wow.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 41:05 And I don't mean to say that's all there is besides this. But everybody in this, who lives in this world of 1832, America knows that that's one version of God that's pretty pervasive and dominant. So, listen to the Lord, restore who he is, "I am merciful and gracious." So that first introduction of himself is very significant.
- Hank Smith: 41:33 It's important, didn't Joseph Smith teach, in order to worship God, you must know what he's like. You must know his personality. You got to know his traits.
- John Bytheway: 41:42 Okay, eight, nine and 10. "Yea, even the wonders of eternity shall they know and things to come while I show them. Even the things of many generations and their wisdom shall be great, and their understanding reach the heaven, and before them the wisdom of the Why shall perish, and the understanding of the prudent shall come to not. For by my spirit, while I enlighten them, and by my power will I make known into them the secrets of my will. Yea, even those things which I has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet entered into the heart of men."
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 42:13 So, what we have here is a loving God, a merciful and gracious God who delights to give us more. Right? There's a whole lot more, he says here in verses five through 10. I've got more to give you, and buckle up, because we're going to graduate school here in soteriological thinking that his plans of salvation are more complex and more beautiful, more vast than you've ever imagined before, and I want to give them to you.

- Dr. Steven C. H...: 42:46 So, a terrific prologue. Notice that verse 11, we transition back to the voice of the visionaries now. The voices of the visionaries. So, we're listening lots of times throughout this section to Joseph Smith and Sidney report what they see. This is characteristic of sections of the doctrine comes, the reporting on visions. There are really two that are like this, Section 76, and Section 138.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 43:15 And as you know, 138 is a series of visions Joseph F. Smith experienced in the last month or so of his life, where he looked into the world of the spirits of the dead, and saw a variety of things there and then described what he saw, and then commented on what he saw, and then as the Lord also comments on what he sees.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 43:40 So, the composition of 76 and 138, are different, because they are reports of visions by visionaries with commentary from them, and as we've just seen commentary from the Lord. So, we ought to look for those kinds of markers that tell us who we're hearing from and what the nature of what they're telling us is.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 44:06 We also want now to be really mindful of the answer to the question, right, that evoked this revelation in the first place. Joseph is asking, "What is the nature of the resurrection of the just? And what's the nature of the resurrection of the wicked." And if we pay careful attention, we will notice that there clearly is a resurrection of the just and a resurrection of the wicked, but in between them, there is a whole bunch else. That it's instead of the black and white understanding that we start the revelation with when we're done, the Lord has restored an immense amount of more complex salvation. So, it's very useful to pay attention to that from the beginning.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 44:57 All right, so verse 11, we hear from Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. They tell us, this revelation narrates itself, right? Most of the revelations in the doctrine covenants are you joining the middle of a conversation that's already underway, and it's easy to be lost. You just, "Does saith the Lord," and he answers a question and you weren't necessarily there for the question, and you're lost unless somebody explains it to you, not this one.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: 45:25 In this one, they tell us where they were, what they were thinking about, what they were doing. So, they narrate the vision for us itself. And they begin with this spectacular testimony of what happens when you read your scriptures carefully, and marvel about what they mean and wonder and meditate and seek, and then receive revelation. So, at verse 20,

they begin telling us what they saw. And the first thing I saw, is the greatest thing of all. So, we read 20 through 24.

- Hank Smith: [46:05](#) "We beheld the glory of the sun, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fullness and saw the holy angels and then who are sanctified before His throne, worshipping God and the Lamb who worship Him forever and ever. And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony Last of all, which we give of him that he lives. For we saw him, even on the right hand of God, and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the only begotten of the Father, that by him, and through him, and have him, the worlds are and were created and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God." Man.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: [46:54](#) Okay. That's pretty good, isn't it?
- Hank Smith: [46:58](#) It's just, that's the Tenth of Heaven. Even just the cadence is nice.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: [47:03](#) It is very beautiful, and this may very well be Sidney's composition, I don't know. Nobody knows for sure. But Rigdon has much more of that gift than Joseph does. So, I don't mean to be definitive about that, I don't know. But as we'll see, the Lord tells him several times, write that down before you lose the spirit of it. And they certainly wrote a beautiful piece here.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: [47:31](#) Notice the several things. First of all, it's we, we bear this witness. And then notice how sensory it is, we heard, we saw, we felt. This is a witness that's unimpeachable. You've got two visionaries seeing this and you can reject it, but you cannot refute it. This is a powerful piece of testimony. Some people might be somewhat confused by this is the testimony last of all, which we give them. They might hear that as if it was chronological, as if they're done, they're never going to bear their testimony again. What they mean there is not chronological. They mean sort of ultimate, this is the ultimate testimony we give of him. He lives. We saw him. He is God's Son. We saw them standing right next to each other.
- Dr. Steven C. H...: [48:27](#) Not long ago, I watched a little clip from a new website that is a very polite, new site that is antagonistic to the restored gospel. So, it's a new way to go about refuting the restored gospel. And that is by doing it with love and all sincerity. So, the people running this site are trying a new approach, but the little video they were doing was like, "Has anybody ever seen God?" And they said, "No. The Bible clearly says that nobody's seeing God in the Gospel of John."

Dr. Steven C. H...: 49:04 And they knew very well that Exodus and other places said Moses saw God face to face, so they spun that and they said, "Well, it's poetic." That's euphemistic, right? That's how they did it in the Old Testament.

Hank Smith: 49:16 Isaiah, right? Isaiah said, "I saw the Lord." I mean, that's the exact phrase, "I saw the Lord."

Dr. Steven C. H...: 49:24 Yeah, but their interpretation of that was but it's, it's poetic. Isaiah also said he saw all kinds of things that don't exist and therefore... But I sat there waiting for them to say, "What are we doing with the Book of Acts where Steven sees the Father and the Son on his right hand?" And they avoided that one. A little harder displaying that one away. And that is the same testimony that Joseph and Sidney bear right here. "We saw Christ on the right hand of God. He is God's only begotten son. He is the creator of worlds without end and the inhabitants of those worlds are God's sons and daughters." That is the ultimate testimony and it's really a beautiful thing to have to remember.

Hank Smith: 50:09 We've mentioned this before John, but I think it's the fact that there's two people, a shared vision. Sidney is going to be the same way, isn't he, Steve? He's going to end up leaving, become distant from the church, but he believes this till the end what he saw.

Dr. Steven C. H...: 50:28 Oh, absolutely he does. He'll actually use this to make his case. When he is making a claim to be the next leader of the church after Joseph, he'll say, It should be me by virtue of me being the shared visionary of the heavenly glories." Right? He makes other points too, but this is one of his main points.

Hank Smith: 50:48 Yeah.

Dr. Steven C. H...: 50:49 So, he always will believe it. There's no reason to deny it. Notice the juxtaposition, right? What happens next, in other words, is we go from a vision of God and Christ to a vision of the Fallen Angel, Lucifer, perdition. It's a sad and a jarring reversal. And it's meant to be right? We're meant to have the ultimate testimony pick us up. And then a really depressing view of what happened in heaven after that. So, starting in 25, or so, and we go down through 35 or so 37, 38. And this is the saddest part of this whole thing. This is the vision of the fall of Lucifer and of those who followed after him. They become perdition, meaning lost, forever lost. That's the saddest word in the whole Doctrine of Covenants, perdition. In verse 26, he was called perdition for the heavens wept over him. Right?

Hank Smith: [52:12](#) Wow.

Dr. Steven C. H...: [52:12](#) You guys are both parents. Yeah, we have a hard enough time when our kids are in trouble or hurt. And we really, really struggle when they stray from their covenants or something. This is the feeling that you have when there is no hope. No hope for them. Perdition that's what that word means. Gone utterly, completely lost.

Hank Smith: [52:37](#) I mean, that's, that's the saddest part is, you have this option ahead of you and you turned it down and you chose a different path.

Dr. Steven C. H...: [52:47](#) Chosen knowingly too, right? It's not an ignorant choice, not a knee jerk reaction. It's truly sad. This is the saddest part of the whole revelation.

Hank Smith: [53:02](#) You would remember this, Steve, but Joseph Smith, there's a statement from him that says, "To comprehend God, you must go to the highest of highs and into the darkest abyss." And that feels like this, this section.

Dr. Steven C. H...: [53:13](#) This is the darkest abyss. He has seen into the darkest abyss and it is depressing. Look at verse 34 concerning the followers of Satan in the premortal realm. There is no forgiveness in this world nor in the world to come. That's utterly lost. Now, people might say, well, that's harsh of God. Well, it's not God doing it. This is Satan and his followers doing it. They had a choice to make. I guess God could force them, but that's not who he is.

Dr. Steven C. H...: [53:54](#) My children don't like it when we force them. I don't like, my parents never forced me to do anything, but I wouldn't have liked it if they did. I would have rebelled and resisted. So, God is loving. He's merciful. He's generous, as we've already seen. He would save them if they wanted him to. They don't. That's the point. That's why he's weeping. That's why it's so sad.

Hank Smith: [54:18](#) My daughter asked me once, she's just thinking about... We talked about outer darkness. And she said, "Why would God send anyone there?" And I'm going, "God doesn't send anyone there. They choose it." They look at him and say, "I want to be as far away from you as possible. Send me to that place where I am not close to you." And she said, "Oh." It just broke her heart. "Why would anyone choose that? Why would anyone choose that?" I said, "I don't know. I don't know."

Dr. Steven C. H...: 54:52 It can be hard to understand. I don't pretend to understand it. But there is this common thinking that if Socrates and others have, "If you know the good, you'll do the good." It's an optimistic assumption about human nature. Well, human nature doesn't bear it out. That's not true. There are people who know the good and who don't want the good. They know God and they don't want anything to do with him, and that's how it is, and heaven weeps because of it.

Hank Smith: 55:23 Please join us for part two of this podcast.