

Episode 8 Part I  
Doctrine and Covenants 14-17 : Dr. Casey Griffiths

- Hank Smith: [00:02](#) Welcome to followHim, a weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their Come Follow Me study. I'm Hank Smith.
- John Bytheway: [00:10](#) And I'm John Bytheway.
- Hank Smith: [00:11](#) We love to learn.
- John Bytheway: [00:12](#) We love to laugh.
- Hank Smith: [00:13](#) We want to learn and laugh with you.
- John Bytheway: [00:15](#) As together, we follow him.
- Hank Smith: [00:20](#) My friends welcome to another episode of followHim. We are a podcast designed to help individuals and families with their Come Follow Me studies.
- John Bytheway: [00:31](#) Today, we have Casey Griffiths with us and I have an official bio from religious education down at BYU. Casey Griffiths was born and raised in Delta, Utah. He served his mission in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Returned home to complete bachelor's in history from BYU and later earned a master's in religious education and a PhD in educational leadership and foundations at BYU. And he's focused on the development of religious education programs among the Latter day Saints. Before joining the faculty in Religious Education at BYU, he served in Seminary and Institutes for 11 years as a teacher and a curriculum writer, and his research focuses on the history of religious education. He's married to Elizabeth Ottley Griffiths. They live in Saratoga Springs with three adorable children. And Casey, we're so glad to have you today.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [01:27](#) Good to be here. Four children now.
- John Bytheway: [01:30](#) Oh, that's great. We got an update.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [01:31](#) My family is growing.
- Hank Smith: [01:32](#) Oh, Casey, we're so excited having you here. And just on a personal note, I've known Casey for many years. We've been in

the same hallway at BYU and he is everything [crosstalk 00:01:40].

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [01:40](#) Now we run the same PHD program.
- Hank Smith: [01:43](#) I mean, it's a long time, and Casey, everything you would hope that Casey is, he is. He is kind, he's generous, he's humble. He is just very down to earth. One of my favorite stories of him is, I saw this nice coat he had on and I said, "I like that coat, where'd you get that coat?" And he looked at it and said, "Oh, at the D.I." He's like, "That's where I get a lot of my clothes."
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [02:10](#) That's where all my books come from also.
- Hank Smith: [02:14](#) You could probably pick up John a nice books there at the D.I., right John? We have our own shelf. Listen, there are some amazing books at the D.I. We'll, we didn't know we were going to do a commercial for Deseret Industries.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [02:28](#) Keep up the good work.
- Hank Smith: [02:30](#) We are excited to have you with us, Dr. Griffiths, and we want to tap into your historian brain today for our listeners. So this week, our Come Follow Me lesson takes us into the Doctrine and Covenants, of course section 14, 15, 16, and 17. These are shorter sections, and if I'm a first time reader through the Doctrine and Covenants, or my first exposure to church history. I run into a name, a family name that I probably haven't heard before in... It doesn't show up in Joseph Smith history and it doesn't show up yet in the Doctrine and Covenants until I get to section 14 where it talks about the Whitmer family. So what can you tell us about the Whitmers and how they came in contact with Joseph Smith?
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [03:23](#) Well, just as an organizing principle, when you're studying the early history of the church, you can simplify it down to a three families basically. I mean, the church at this stage is really three families in three different locations. There's the Smiths in Palmyra, and the Knights in Colesville and Harmony, Pennsylvania. And then there's the Whitmers in Fayette. And in sequence, Joseph Smith gets the plates in Palmyra, spent three months trying to translate, but there's just too much persecution in Palmyra. So he leaves and goes down to Harmony where the Knights are and where Emma's family's from. And about a year of bookworm and translation takes place in Harmony, then things in Harmony get too intense. And they contact this family called the Whitmers that Oliver has ties

to, and they move up to Fayette, New York, and that's where they spend the last month of translation.

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [04:17](#) So for a lot of the translation it's just Joseph and Oliver and Emma, in this little cabin in Harmony, Pennsylvania. The great thing about the Whitmers is they're this big sprawling family, a number of siblings in and out of the house. And so a lot of our accounts of translation and what went on during the last month of the translation of the Book of Mormon come from the Whitmer family. And then a year later, when the church is organized, it's organized in the Whitmer family home.
- Hank Smith: [04:44](#) Any idea how Oliver got in touch with the Whitmers? Did they leave any account of how they met Oliver? Because he ends up marrying a Whitmer, right?
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [04:53](#) Yeah. Oliver is a Whitmer. I mean, it's good to think of him that way. He's a brother-in-law, he marries Elizabeth Whitmer. But we don't really know exactly how they come into contact, except that they were friends with Oliver before Oliver moved to Palmyra and boarded with the Smiths as the local school teacher. And then Oliver goes down and volunteers as Joseph's scribe, and that's when translation takes off. But there is a revelatory elements too. Lucy Mack Smith, who's one of the best sources for this early period, uses the language that Joseph was commanded to write to the Whitmers. We don't have a revelation that marks that, but her phrase is Joseph was commanded to write a letter to one David Whitmer, a man Joseph had never seen, but he was instructed to say to him that he must come with his team immediately to convey Joseph and Oliver back to his house, which was 135 miles away. And that they might remain there until translation was completed.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [05:48](#) So things are starting to get bad in Harmony where Joseph and Oliver have been engaged in translation. And Lucy Mack makes it sound like the Lord intervened, that Oliver may have had a prior relationship with the Whitmers, but it's really the Lord that's telling Joseph, this is where you're going to complete the translation. And these people will provide a shelter and protection while this work is going on.
- Hank Smith: [06:13](#) Casey, I wonder how much the Whitmers knew of Joseph Smith before this. I mean, there had to be, I mean, Fayette and Palmyra and Manchester, what are they? They're 30 miles apart. I wonder if they'd heard anything.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [06:27](#) Fayette's about 30 miles away from the Hill Cumorah. And so it's very likely because the whole area is up in arms, especially

after Joseph gets the plates. That the Whitmers knew a little bit about what was going on and had received, I'd like to think their own spiritual witness. There's a couple of unique experiences, for instance, that happened before the Whitmers go to get Joseph, they convinced them that they need to engage in this process.

Hank Smith: [06:56](#)

I got to hear this.

John Bytheway: [06:58](#)

In fact, this was one of my questions I wanted to ask the story that sounds like it could possibly be a Three Nephites type story, involving plaster of Paris. Which I used in an elementary school to make stuff, but apparently there's an agricultural use for plaster of Paris.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [07:16](#)

So this story comes from Lucy Mack Smith again. Again, she's our source on most of this stuff. And she says that David Whitmer is the one that's supposed to go down and get Joseph and Oliver at the end of May, 1829 and bring them back to Fayette to complete the translation. And she said that David was getting ready to go, but he had to sow the soil with the plaster of Paris. Which is this action that's designed to reduce the acidity of the soil so that it works a little bit better. The way she records it, she said, "The next morning, David took a wooden measure under his arm and went out to sow the plaster, which he had left two days previous in heaps near his sister's house.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [07:54](#)

But on coming to the place, he discovered it was gone. He ran to his sister and inquired of her if she knew what had become of it. Being surprised, she said, "Why do you ask me? Why was it not also in yesterday?" "Not to my knowledge" answered David, "I'm astonished at that." Continue to sister for the children, came to me in the four noon, begged me to go out and see the men who sow the plaster in the field.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [08:13](#)

Saying they never saw anybody sow plaster so fast in their lives. I accordingly went and saw three men, this is your Three Nephites connection here, at work in the field, this the children said. But supposing that you had hired some help on account of your hurry, I went immediately in the house and gave the subject no further attention." Lucy goes on to say, "David made considerable inquiry in regard to the matter, both among his relatives and neighbors, but was not able to learn who had done it.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [08:38](#)

However, the family were convinced that there was an exertion of a supernatural power connected with the strange occurrence

and David immediately set out for Pennsylvania and arrived there two days without injuring his horses in the least, though the distance was 135 miles." So they've got this big work to do. I mean, we sometimes forget that in the background of all these miraculous spiritual events, you still have to plant your crops and harvest them and do things like, sow the field with plaster of Paris. They have these three men show up and do it. And some people have made that connection because there's three, and because nobody seems to have known where they came from. David didn't hire them, his sister doesn't know where they came from. That these are somehow connected to the Three Nephites disciples in the Book of Mormon.

- Hank Smith: [09:25](#) Wow. That's absolutely incredible. I can't imagine, I wish this would happen to me more often. Where someone says, "All that paper was written by somebody. You do turn it in." I did.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [09:41](#) For me it would be, three men appeared and graded all your papers and I'd be like, wow. I must have something important to do elsewhere.
- John Bytheway: [09:49](#) So the interesting part though is, it sounds like there was an urgency connected to it, because David was going to delay a little bit. So the plaster in the field, and because somebody did this, he was like, "Oh, I better go to Harmony." Is that the gist of it?
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [10:07](#) That's it. Things in Harmony where Joseph and Oliver have done the first two months of translation, were starting to get bad, really bad. In fact, the next summer, after the translation is done, Joseph goes back to Harmony. That's where he lives. That's where his farm is. That's where his wife's family is from. And the next summer he's arrested two times and brought before a court. Eventually he and Emma, a year after this are going to have to leave Harmony altogether because persecution is so severe down there. And so there's indications, I mean, Lucy Mack says that Joseph really had the feeling that someone was going to make an attempt on his life. And that's why they had to get out of the area and go up to Fayette.
- Hank Smith: [10:48](#) I was going to say in a way the Whitmers are, this is a lifesaving mission, not just a, hey, we're going to help out with work.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [10:59](#) It's not just a, hey, this is a nice thing. I mean, the work might not go forward unless we intervene and they intervene. It's a huge act of faith on their part but it's a significant shift in the restoration. For the rest of the New York period, the Whitmer home is church headquarters. And that starting the day, David

Whitmer picks them up and ends the day that the Lord commands them to all move to Ohio.

Hank Smith: [11:23](#)

Wow. John, what were you going to say?

John Bytheway: [11:26](#)

I just keep thinking of how ironic these names are. There's Harmony, where there wasn't a whole lot of harmony. There's a Liberty where there wasn't a whole lot of Liberty. These interesting names in church history, but the church, what they've done there is just beautiful in Harmony, and moving some things around and having the highway moved. I can think of three places where they've succeeded in having the highway moved. In Kirtland, in Palmyra and in Harmony. And then built these beautiful restorations of these cabins in Harmony. Can't you go there and be in almost the same space where a lot of the translation occurred?

Dr. Casey Griff...: [12:08](#)

Yeah. And at each place there's a unique special spirit. I mean, in each place, the church has rebuilt the structures that Joseph Smith would have been in when he's performing translation. And for instance, if you go to the Whitmer farm, the building is reconstructed. They reconstructed it for the sesquicentennial of the church in 1980. But even sitting in a reconstruction, you just get this sacred feeling of translation and then later events that happened. For instance, that same summer Joseph Smith said the voice of God was heard in the chamber of old father Whitmer. And authorized them to ordain each other to the Melchizedek priesthood. I mean, it's a wonderful spirit and you just get this sense that this is one of those turning points in history and to stand in the spot where it occurred is really a great honor.

Hank Smith: [13:00](#)

That is.

John Bytheway: [13:01](#)

And I believe there's, to the East of there a cemetery with one of the Smith's infants that's there in the cemetery.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [13:12](#)

In Harmony, right next to where Joseph and Emma would have had their farm. There's a cemetery and there there's a little headstone for Alvin Smith, the first son of Joseph and Emma. Obviously named after Joseph's brothers. This is the little boy that died during the episode with lost manuscript. And that's part of the reason why Joseph Smith wasn't able to get up to Palmyra and find out what had happened to the manuscript was that, Joseph and Emma had a baby die and then Emma almost died afterwards. So it's actually Emma, two weeks after the birth that tells Joseph, my family can take care of me, get up there and find out what happened.

- Hank Smith: [13:52](#) Wow. I think each of these individual spots, they are like you've said Casey, they are special places. I will say this as a, and I know both of you have guided church history tours. I've guided my own church history tours down there. And if I could tell these early saints one thing, I'd say, could you do this a whole lot closer together because these bus rides are really long. And second, if you could do them around just better restaurants that would be helpful as well. But sometimes I'm going man, this is a two hour bus ride, they should have just done all this right here in Palmyra. Right John? Why do you got to spread this out so much?
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [14:30](#) Well, imagine 135 mile trip by horse as well. Lucy Mack makes the comment specifically that it was miraculous that he was able to travel that far and not injure his horses. Which again, to them, a miracle is something different than what we talk about today. We complain about a two and a half hour bus ride, imagine riding in a wagon. And in fact there's an incident on the way back from Harmony, that David Whitmer records too. That maybe you've heard of. That's where he sees the Angel Moroni on the side of the road.
- Hank Smith: [15:01](#) Tell us about that. I want to hear about that.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [15:02](#) David Whitmer lives longer than any of the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon. A lot of people interview him. In one of the interviews, he says, they're traveling from Harmony back to Fayette, and this is the way he recorded it. He said, "A very pleasant, nice looking old man suddenly appeared by the side of our wagon and saluted us with good morning, it is very warm. At the same time, wiping his face or forehead with his hand. We returned the salutation and by a sign from Joseph, I invited him to ride if he was going our way. But he said, very pleasantly, no, I am going to Cumorah. This name was something new to me. I did not know what Cumorah meant. The Book of Mormon hasn't been published, so nobody knows the name Cumorah. We all gazed at him and each other, and as I looked around and quietly of Joseph, the old man instantly disappeared. Joseph later on told me it was the messenger who had the plates and had taken them from Joseph just prior to our starting from Harmony."
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [15:55](#) So it's not just men traveling between Harmony and Fayette, it's angels. But it's funny to me that the Whitmers... David sees the angel and Mary Whitmer also sees the angel, they both describe him as a pleasant looking old man. Which we tend to imagine him as like this WWE wrestler figure that's huge and muscular. They describe him as a nice guy on the side of the road. And you

were expecting an angel they saying something more profound than it is very warm. But I guess even angels talk about the weather.

- John Bytheway: [16:28](#) It makes me sad because I think, wait, you mean even when you're resurrected being, you're doing stuff like, man, it's hot.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [16:37](#) Maybe he's trying really hard to pretend not to be a resurrected being. So he's sitting in the room like, "Gosh, you guys, boy, it is warm for you mortals, is it not?"
- Hank Smith: [16:47](#) And he winks at Joseph Smith. Was it Joseph who told him who he was?
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [16:51](#) Yeah. Apparently they get further down the road.
- John Bytheway: [16:55](#) And Joseph says, you know who that was?
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [16:57](#) Because you would imagine David turning to Joseph and going, "Where's Cumorah? And Joseph later on saying, "Well, that's the angel."
- Hank Smith: [17:07](#) That's him in his 1800s garb walking down the street.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [17:12](#) So the next time you're in that two and a half hour drive between Fayette and Harmony, you can at least tell that story and fill a few minutes of time.
- Hank Smith: [17:20](#) All right. That is a great story.
- John Bytheway: [17:22](#) I think too. When I've been there, I've just been impressed that the first time I drove by Harmony, 25 years ago, there was hardly anything there. And now that church has a nice church building there and has rebuilt these cabins, of course moved the highway and everything. But it just made me think, oh so when Joseph was translating, if he wanted to put something that could be verifiably ancient in the Book of Mormon, he could just go over to the Harmony Public Library and find something. And it's like, there's nothing there. And even now this is, the church history side is the only thing there, I guess maybe it was a bigger community at some point.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [18:04](#) You're right, that it was always relatively small and rural. All the places where the Book of Mormon was translated are relatively out of the way small and and not well trafficked.

- John Bytheway: [18:16](#) Tell you that's what I said, better restaurants. We've got to do this by better restaurants. So I have a couple more questions about the Whitmers before we move into the meat of section 14. How old is David and is it his farm or is it his parents?
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [18:35](#) It is his dad's farm. So it's the Peter Whitmer Sr. farm. Peter's married to Mary Whitmer. And then their kids are John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Peter Christian Whitmer, there's also a couple of Whitmer sisters like Elizabeth, who marries Oliver Cowdery. There's Katherine Whitmer who marries Hiram Page, who's one of the eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon. Then there's Anna Whitmer. And David Whitmer is the closest in age to Joseph Smith. So it's likely that David and Joseph would have formed the strongest connection because they're at similar ages. There are at similar points in their life. It seems like David and Joseph and Oliver Cowdery were kind of the three amigos during this time.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [19:15](#) They were very good friends and they were very close. But other Whitmer brothers like John and Christian and Peter Jr, are all involved in translation. And that's one of the interesting things about the translation as it happens at the Whitmer farm, is like I said, it's not just Joseph and Oliver and Emma, like it is down in Harmony. This is a whole bustling household with people moving in and out. And that's why a lot of the historical accounts of translation are linked back to the Whitmer family. They're there during the last month, and a lot of them live multiple decades after they leave the church and share their histories. They're interviewed by a lot of people.
- Hank Smith: [19:55](#) Wow. Just one more question about the Whitmers and then let's jump in. But they're of German descent, right?
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [20:04](#) Yes.
- Hank Smith: [20:04](#) Are they spiritual people before they meet Joseph? Because you look at Joseph's family and some of them were devout Presbyterian. Were the Whitmers, did they have a religious background?
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [20:17](#) They were very devout and very religious. I'm trying to remember their religious affiliation. One of the things you see in the recent video that was released that they show at Fayette, is they depict the Whitmers with German accents. And that probably is accurate. Peter Sr. and Mary are both German immigrants, and so they would have spoken with the German accent and the kids probably would have grown up around there too.

- Hank Smith: [20:45](#) I love that. Man, I love that. And I remember Dr. McKay in his interview, he said, "Listen, these aren't crazy, this isn't Joe Bob down by the river, these are upstanding people in the community." These are complex... What did Dr. Dirkmaat say John? These are competent farmers.
- John Bytheway: [21:04](#) All right. That has always been a nice testimony boost for me. They weren't gullible fools, they were smart people. And then you get the Orson Pratt's and the Parley Pratt's. And then later on, these were smart people and it helps me to go, this wasn't just some guy that was very charismatic and found a bunch of gullible people to follow him.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [21:29](#) And even later on in their life, David Whitmer, for instance, is elected mayor of Richmond, Missouri. He's a respectable member of the community. And when people cast aspersions on his testimony, the Book of Mormon, he takes it as a personal insult. Like he asks people in the community where he lives to sign an affidavit, basically saying that he's a man of good character, that he's upright, that he's honest, and that he doesn't lie to people, especially about something as big a deal as the Book of Mormon.
- John Bytheway: [21:59](#) Well, and I've always thought he knows he's answerable to a lot more than just Joseph someday for what he's going to do with his testimony of seeing the plates. So I've always thought he's really careful. No, wait, I need it to be known that, no, I saw those and I've never denied it. How old was he when he died, Casey?
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [22:23](#) David makes it into his eighties, I believe. He's, like I said, the longest live to the Book of Mormon witnesses. And especially as more and more of the witnesses pass away, more and more people try to interview David. There's a book about this thick just called David Whitmer Interviews. Where Linden Cook collected all of the people that sat down and spoke with David Whitmer, whether they were pro church, anti-church and what David said to them. It's a remarkable read first of all for consistency, but also because David gives more details about those early days and about the appearance of the Angel Moroni than any other person does.
- John Bytheway: [22:59](#) Well, and I know that the Interpreter Foundation, somebody is making a movie called Witnesses, right now.
- Hank Smith: [23:06](#) That comes out this summer, I believe.

- John Bytheway: [23:09](#) I'm excited for that because I think it was so wise to have witnesses, and we'll get into this later perhaps, but to have three in a very spiritual way, to have eight in a very tactile way to see the plates and everything is amazing. Maybe now, as we're learning who the Whitmers are, can we look at what the Lord's message is to them in these three sections coming up.
- Hank Smith: [23:35](#) I want to hear if Casey teaches the Doctrine and Covenants to BYU. So I want to hear what his highlights are in these three sections and how the Whitmers would have received them.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [23:44](#) A couple unique things in these sections, these all come during that month that Joseph Smith is at their home translating. And every historical account says it was a busy time. There's a lot going on, a lot of comings and goings, and Joseph and Oliver are rushing to complete the translation of the Book of Mormon. But along the way, it was very, very common for a person to approach Joseph Smith and say, "What's the will of the Lord concerning me?" And that's exactly what happens in section 14, 15 and 16, is there's these three Whitmer brothers, David, John, and Christian who are asking, what does the Lord want me to do? And each of the revelations is really short. For section 15 and section 16, for instance, are almost identical except for one or two things about it. And each one of them follows a pattern that's common at this time starting with section four, which is first given to Joseph Smith's dad.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [24:39](#) A marvelous work is about to come forth. The Lord will generally tell them that you're called to the work. And I want you to thrust in your sickle with your mind and start to harvest souls. And a lot of these early people, whether it's section 4, Joseph Smith Sr. or section 11 is to Haris Smith, section 12 is to Joseph Knight. And then section 14 is to David Whitmer. They're among the earliest and most important missionaries for the church. Now, there are a few differences though, for instance, verse 7, David Whitmer, this is section 14, verse 7. Is told, if you keep my commandments and endured to the end, you shall have eternal life. Which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God? And it shall come to pass if you shall ask the father in my name and faith, believing you shall receive the Holy ghost, which given utterance that you may stand as a witness of things of which you shall both here and see that you may declare repentance out of this generation.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [25:35](#) So right there, the Lord is hinting at bigger things for David that he's going to act in a role as a witness, which he does. He's one of the three witnesses, almost every single one of the three witnesses and the eight witnesses is a member of the Smith

family or the Whitmer family. The only exception is Martin Harris. He's the only one that's not linked either one of those families. But David's here is told specifically to endure to the end. Now I mentioned that a lot of people have the opportunity to speak to David Whitmer. One of them was B. H. Roberts who becomes this important historian in the church later on. B. H. Roberts visits with David Whitmer after he leaves the church. And David Whitmer talks about the experience he has with the angel when the three witnesses see the plates. And B. H. Roberts said that the angel during the experience, the [inaudible 00:26:25] turned and looked directly at David and said, "David, blessed is he that endureth to the end."

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [26:33](#) And then B. H. Robert's comments and says, "It's a sad reflection of these three witnesses that David was the only one who died outside of membership in the church." I wonder if Moroni was not trying to sound a warning to the stubborn man, that perhaps whatever his experiences and trials may be, that the last he too might've been brought into the fold and might've died within pale of the church.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [26:52](#) So every single one of the witnesses has slight variances, but according to B. H. Roberts, David told him that the angel and the Lord in section 14, both specifically tell him that it's a marathon, that he's got to endure to the end. And though David never denies his witness to the Book of Mormon. He does become very bitter against the church later on in his life.
- Hank Smith: [27:14](#) Especially Joseph Smith.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [27:17](#) David writes a pamphlet in 1887 where he very bitterly screeds against Joseph Smith. And is angry and upset of him, and yet there's this unique contradiction where David never, ever denies the Book of Mormon or that the Book of Mormon was true or that the revelations that happened during this time were genuine. So I always tell my students, it worked out the best possible way it could have for the Restoration Movement, just not for the Whitmers. Like you have this group of people that leave the church, but never deny their testimony. So they have no motive to uphold Joseph Smith if he's a fraud, and yet they refuse to deny their testimony to the day all of them leave the earth.
- Hank Smith: [28:01](#) One thing that I was hoping our listeners that would happen as a result of our podcast is, seeing the Whitmers in a positive light, how helpful they truly were to Joseph Smith and that we can hear them out and listen to them and not think of them as apostates.

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [28:20](#) And to be honest with you, a lot of the early events in the history of the church, the Whitmers are a very important source. John Whitmer who's one of the recipients of these revelations as well becomes the church's historian. And section 47, John writes an early history of the church that's invaluable to us today. And the other thing is that John is probably responsible for recording most of the early revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants. There's a beautiful book called Revelation Book 1, Revelation Book 2, where John Whitmer sat down and recorded all of the early revelations that are given to Joseph Smith. I mean he's a major source for the Doctrine and Covenants.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [28:58](#) And so really until 1838 or so, there's no stronger witness in the church than the Whitmers and they're real stalwarts. And even though we sometimes talk about the entire Whitmer family leaving, even that's not correct. Peter Whitmer and Christian Whitmer both die within the faith.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [29:16](#) It's later on in 1838 when the entire family leaves together. And that's one thing about the Whitmers too, is that they were united as a family. Like they came into the church all in. When trouble came up in 1838, they all left together too. And they stick together for the rest of their life. Most of them, except for Anna Whitmer live within a 50 mile radius of each other. And they try to start their own church a couple of times too. Like they definitely, as a family were united on the same page and that's something that's really admirable.
- Hank Smith: [29:47](#) They're very close to each other. I really liked that. I wanted to mention two things in the section that I saw John and then maybe you can jump in. One, I'm a New Testament teacher, and so when the Savior approaches his apostles, he says, "From henceforth, you're going to catch men." And I like in section 14, it's the field is white, all ready to harvest. So as a teacher, he takes something that his students already understand and says, "I'm going to help you understand my work, what we're going to do here. I'm going to use farming because that's what you understand. So I'm going to use farming as this principle." And then in section 15 and 16, which you said Casey are very similar.
- Hank Smith: [30:35](#) He says, "The greatest thing you can do for me is declare repentance onto people, declare repentance on the people." So as the Lord is changing his methods for his students, he's not changing the message. The message is always the same, repent, repent, repent. And I've noticed in Joseph Smith's early life, it seems his experiences with divinity always start with repentance. The first vision was about, can I be forgiven of my

sins? Moroni was, I felt like I, do you know I had just fallen, I wasn't doing what I should be doing, so I'm going to repent. All of these divine experiences start with repentance. So for me personally, I'm going, I need to repent more. If I want to have experiences with the divine, I better start looking for ways to repent. And you, John, you know very well, it's hard for me to repent because it's just hard to find things. It's hard to find things to repent of, but I'm going to look harder and see if I can find some things of.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[31:37](#)

One thing that's always touched me about Joseph Smith at this stage in his life, is that idea that he needs to check in with God. If you're reading about his experience with Moroni, he says, "I was anxious to know my standing before the Lord." That's why he goes and prays. It's like, he hasn't done anything super wrong, but he's just wondering how come I'm not getting more, maybe I am doing something wrong and I didn't know it. There was an elder on my mission, he was a convert to the church. He had a giant marijuana leaf tattooed to his shoulder. We thought he was the coolest guy ever. And he was so sincere that like, he read that passage in Joseph Smith history. And he told me, "I pray to know my standing before the Lord."

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[32:21](#)

And I was a zone leader at the time, so he saw me as like an ecclesiastical figure. And I go, "Well, tell me what happened." He goes, "I don't know, that night I had a dream and I was walking in a chapel and I went into this room and president Hinckley was there." President Hinckley was the prophet at the time. He said, "President Hinckley looked at me and gestured and said, I need you to come over here and help me ordain this young man to the priesthood elder, because I know that you're worthy of the priesthood you hold." And this missionary looked at me and said, "Well, what do you think that dream means?" And I go, "It sounds like you're worthy of the priesthood you hold." And it was funny because having grown up in the church, I had never once thought about that.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[33:01](#)

I took my priesthood and my calling as a missionary for granted. I went home and I did the same thing. I didn't feel like I had a need to repent, but I hadn't asked my status before the Lord. And the next day after I had said that prayer, we were out on a random media referral to drop off a Bible. And the lady that we were dropping the Bible off to said, "I hear that you guys give blessings. Could you give me a blessing?" And I remember looking at my companion with a big grin on my face and saying, "Well, I guess we're worthy to do that, so let's go ahead." But in all these people, it's wonderful to see with David Whitmer, with John Whitmer, with the rest of the Whitmers, this desire to

know, am I okay? Like, what is my status before the Lord? And what work would he have me do? We don't often ask those questions often enough maybe.

Hank Smith: [33:54](#) No. The scary part is if you ask the Lord, he'll probably tell you.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [33:59](#) Yep.

Hank Smith: [34:00](#) Probably tell you your standing. As a father, if I don't know what to do for family home evening, it sounds like in section 15 and 16, where it's like, well, the thing that's of most worth is declare repentance. So let's default to repentance and the atonement of Jesus Christ. Let's make that a big part of our focus of teaching our children or teaching our students. It sounds to me like the Lord is saying, you can't talk about repentance enough.

John Bytheway: [34:32](#) And I really, we brought this up in previous podcasts, but I just love the Bible dictionary definition of repentance. A fresh view about God, about oneself and about the world. And it doesn't have to sound like a scolding type thing as much as... I love what you said Casey, how am I doing? It sounds like that. I want to see what my standing is before the Lord. Am I doing okay? I could use some encouragement here. How am I doing? And the Lord always seems to be so encouraging too thankfully. And I think maybe we can glean from that too.

John Bytheway: [35:09](#) And I wanted to ask, and this is something that in Matthew 16, whom do men say that I am? And when Peter gives his awesome answer, Jesus says, "Thou art Peter." Well, I noticed in section three, there was a thou art Joseph. And I mean they know that the Lord knows their names. Is there more going on here? Here we are in section 14, verse 11 and behold thou art David. Right after saying, I am Jesus Christ, the son of the living God. Verse 9 and 10, kind of then thou art David. Any comment on that similarity? We see that pattern.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [35:52](#) I mean, in all these revelations, he identifies them by name. For instance, for a section 15, first verse, my servant, John. Section 16 first verse, my servant Peter. It was important that they were called by name and that they were recognized and known of God. Sometimes that was what a revelation did and almost nothing else. Was to just say, I know you.

Hank Smith: [36:15](#) I know who you are.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [36:16](#) I know who you are. I know what your struggles are and I want to help you reach your potential. Which again, a really short

revelation like section 15 or section 16, even that could be a really powerful message to help somebody join in the work and get on the path they need to get into.

Hank Smith: [36:36](#) John I like what you said, the Lord is always very encouraging, isn't he? It's okay, I'm going to help you. I like what Casey said there, I'm going to help you reach your potential. That seems to be the message of a lot of these opening sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. He says I know you and I want to help you.

John Bytheway: [36:54](#) And even their first names, Peter was just Simon Peter, but well, Simon [inaudible 00:37:02] or whatever in Matthew 16. But here you're David, you're Peter. I like that and I draw a lot of hope from Jesus's parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. That the Pharisee is outlining all of these ways that he's so righteous, telling God how righteous he is. And the Publican just says, "God, be merciful to me a sinner, smote upon... He wouldn't even look up. And for Jesus to say that man went home justified and not the other, gives me a lot of hope about just getting on your knees and how am I doing? I'm sorry, I mess up. And how encouraging the Lord is, it kind of is a [inaudible 00:37:42]. I like Moroni, taught today.

Hank Smith: [37:45](#) I have noticed in the New Testament in my studies, that a lot of the parables, a lot of the sermons are just different ways to repent. Different angles to view repentance. It's just over and over, the Lord's messages on repenting. I'm going to share a quick story. John Huntsman Sr. told this story about his friend Harold W. Hunter, where he his friend as President of the Church, how would you like to be best friends with the President of the Church? He invited him, he said, "Can you come over to my house and give me a blessing?" And when he got there, I'll make the story quick, when he got there, he said, "Are you sick? And he said, "No, I'm not sick. I just feel I need a blessing." And John Huntsman Sr. said, "Well, are you okay? What's the problem if you're not sick?" And he said, "Today, I had an unkind thought and I just need a blessing." And when I read that story, I thought, you know how many blessings I'd need in a day. So there's always something to repent for. There's always something you could find.

John Bytheway: [38:51](#) Oh my goodness. Wow. Well, I love this thou art David. And the counsel that he gets to do everything we've talked about, and I'm glad that you told that story about Moroni. Because I found that in my own reading, that Moroni during the three witnesses type event, turned to him and said, "Endure to the end." Wow. Maybe it might be helpful to define what does endure to the

end mean? I mean, I heard Sherry did once say, "That those endure to the end talks, depress the Dickens out of me." If we look at it as like this, I just got to hold onto the end. What do you think endure to the end means?

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[39:39](#)

Well I'm glad that it doesn't mean just this life. I used to when I was a young teacher go through and just pronounced verdicts on people in church history. So it would be like, "Here's section 14 and David Whitmer was a good guy, but he died outside the church, so that's it for him." As I've gotten a little bit older, my perspective on that has changed to where I'm giving everybody the benefit of the doubt. David did die outside the church, so did most of the Whitmer clan, but they also stayed true to their witness and their testimony. And that is really significant. They had every reason to deny it and they didn't. And so in that sense, they endured to the end. I mean, if you go to Richmond, Missouri today, and you find David Whitmer's headstone, which isn't difficult, chiseled into his headstone, it says, the record of the Jews and the record of the Nephites are one, truth is eternal.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[40:38](#)

I mean, this is a guy who's serious about his witness of what he saw. He did have conflicts with church leaders, especially Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith. But as a witness, which was what he's called to do in section 14, he is 100% faithful and endures to the end. And I'd like to think that in the next life, there was a reconciliation between the two and that the Whitmers are eventually going to receive all the blessings of the gospel. So enduring to the end to me isn't just this life it's eternal life, which the Lord promises to David Whitman right here. That's one of the earliest uses of that term. I think of in the Cannon, was when the Lord says, "If you do this, you'll have eternal life." And like I said, I've gone from saying this person apostatized, so they're done. To having more of an open mind to say, "Well, they stayed faithful to their testimony. So I'll give them the benefit of the doubt and we'll see what happens with them."

Hank Smith:

[41:38](#)

That's beautiful. I love that one.

John Bytheway:

[41:40](#)

One of the commentaries I've reading, I have a Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig Ostler Commentary. I have a Steve Robinson and Dean Garrett Commentary, and he says in here, "This doesn't mean perfect or sinless, but it means you stay loyal to Christ." And I liked that. And like you said, Casey, that can be not just in this life, but you're loyal to Christ, loyal to the witness too. So Casey, we know that a lot of the translation took place then in Harmony. And I love how you've helped us with that. But what do we know about the actual process? There's

been a lot of discussion lately about it. What are some things to hang our hat on? This much we know.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[42:28](#)

Well, the Whitmers, like I said are invaluable when it comes to a source of how translation work, the actual mechanics. I think Garrett Dirkmaat was with you guys a little while ago, and he talked about sources. A good historian would always say, let's look at primary sources first and then secondary sources. So when it comes to translation, the two people that we most want to talk to were Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. And unfortunately there's frustratingly little material from the two of them. They both die really young, Joseph in 1844, Oliver dies a few years later in 1850. And they don't leave behind a whole bunch of sources about how it works, but they're the two that are there the entire time. Emma is involved, Martin Harris is involved. And according to the manuscripts, the Book of Mormon that we have, John Whitmer is also a scribe.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[43:17](#)

Emma said that her brother was a scribe as well. And so we go to them to look at them. Now, Joseph and Oliver, both leave behind narratives where they talk about the plates and also where they talk about the Urim and Thummim and Nephite Interpreters. And the last couple of years, there's been a lot of attention given to the seer stone. Which the Whitmers talk about in the church published pictures of in 2015 as part of the Joseph Smith Papers Project. So I'll just phrase it this way. Joseph and Oliver tend to use the phrase Urim and Thummim to describe the instruments that they use. And both of them also tend to say the Nephite Interpreters when they describe it. Like in 1842, Joseph Smith writes the Wentworth letter. This is what he writes, he goes at great lengths to describe the plates.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[44:05](#)

And then he says, "With the records was found a curious instrument which the ancients called Urim and Thummim, which consisted of two transparent stone set in the rim of a bow, fastened to a breast plate. Then he says through the medium of the Urim and Thummim, I translated the record by the gift and power of God." And that's about as detailed as Joseph Smith gets about the translation process. Was that I used the Urim and Thummim, this is what it is. I translated it by the gift and power of God. Now, Oliver Cowdery writes several letters on translation. And when he comes back into the church in 1848, he does bear his testimony. So apparently they're at winter quarters and Orson Hyde, the apostle who's presiding there, sees Oliver Cowdery, brings him up to the stand, asks him to bear his testimony. And a guy named Ruben Miller writes this down.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[44:50](#)

So it we're talking to a primary source participant, but recorded through a secondary participant. Ruben Miller is writing down what he hears Oliver Cowdrey say. Oliver Cowdrey according to Ruben Miller in that occasion said, "I wrote with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon, save a few pages as it fell from the lips of the prophet Joseph Smith. As he translated by the gift and power of God, by the means of the Urim and Thummim or as it is called by that book, Holy Interpreters. I beheld with my eyes and handled with my hands the gold plates from which it is translated. I also beheld the Interpreters, that book is true." So that's Joseph and Oliver, Holy Interpreters. They tend to describe them as the Urim and Thummim and the Whitmers tend to describe the use of a seer stone. So does Emma, so does Martin Harris. So you got to reconcile those things.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[45:35](#)

And one of the major things that we've shifted towards saying, is that Joseph used multiple instruments when he translated the Book of Mormon. He used the Nephite Interpreters, but he also used the seer stone that the Whitmers described using. For instance, David Whitmer when he describes translation, says it this way, this is the popular image that's out there now, "Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat. He put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light. And then the darkness, his spiritual light would shine, something resembling a parchment would appear. And on that appeared, the writing of one character at a time would appear and under it was written the interpretation in English. Brother, Joseph would read off the English Oliver Cowdrey who was the principal scribe. And when it was written down or repeated to brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear."

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[46:24](#)

That is a divine translation process. And a lot of people like David Whitmer's description, because it's describing a very tight translation process. That what you're seeing in the Book of Mormon is exactly what the Lord wanted Joseph and Oliver to write down. People have varied back and forth between saying, "Well, maybe the impressions came to Joseph and he chose the words." David Whitmer makes it sound like the words were exactly given to him. And that's a big deal because when you think about all the meaning that comes from a word like infinite. Infinite appears second Nephi 9 and Alma 34. If that's the exact word the Lord wants Joseph Smith to use in the English language, that means infinite is exactly what it's supposed to mean there. And that's very, very important for us that the wording in the Book of Mormon at least in English is a big deal and we ought to pay close attention to it and what it means.

Hank Smith: [47:20](#) So we have Joseph, Oliver, David, did anybody else record? Martin Harris?

Dr. Casey Griff...: [47:26](#) Martin Harris describes it. Emma Smith describes translation.

Hank Smith: [47:30](#) They were described it similarly to David's.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [47:33](#) They did. So, basically what happened was is, the reason why the seer stone makes some people a little bit queasy, is because when we put together our narration of translation, our narrative, we relied on Joseph and Oliver. And we didn't rely on people like David Whitmer or Martin Harris, or even Emma Smith, because they didn't end up in the church. But a century later historian started to circle back and say, "look, David and Emma and Martin weren't trying to convince people that it wasn't true. They were trying to say it was miraculous." So whether it's the Nephite Interpreters of the seer stone, I would tell people don't miss the forest for the trees.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [48:14](#) The main message that every single one of these people was trying to convey was that this was not a normal translation process, that it was miraculous. That it wasn't Joseph learning an ancient language and using his intellect, that it was a miracle that occurred. In fact, let me share something with you really fast. I do interfaith work with Community of Christ and they hold a lot of the papers that belong to the Smith family, specially Emma Smith. Well, one day I was working in their archives and their archivist Rachel Killebrew, pulled out this set of papers that were Joseph Smith's the third's last interview with Emma Smith. They were the actual paper.

Hank Smith: [48:54](#) The actual paper.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [48:55](#) I could send you guys this, like she, let me take photographs. It's Joseph the third's notes in pencil on this scratch paper, as he's asking his mom questions. She asked him, "Who were the scribes?: She lists of the scribes, Joseph, Oliver, Alvin Hill. She mentions the Whitmers. Did Sidney Rigdon write the book? She goes, "Sidney Rigdon never showed up to our house until a year after Book of Mormon was written." I never saw him. I never met him." And then at the end, he sits down with her and says, "Just tell me, do you think that dad could have made this up?" This is exactly what he writes on the page in his notes. That Emma said, "My belief is that the Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity. I have not the slightest doubt of it. I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writings of the manuscript unless he was inspired for when acting as a scribe, your father would dictate to me hour after hour. And when returning after

meals or after interruptions, he could have once begin where he left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [49:52](#) This was a usual thing for him to do. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this. For one so ignorant and unloaded as he was, it was simply impossible." So I would say to people out there that are getting a little uncomfortable over the seer stone or the Urim and Thummim, or the Nephite Interpreters, the overarching message of the Whitmers of Emma Smith, of everybody involved in this process was it was a miracle. There's no way as they saw that Joseph Smith could have faked this. That Emma who's the first scribe of the Book of Mormon who records a lot of the lost manuscript, just saw it as something that was impossible for him to pull off. And that is the consistent message they're trying to come across. So worrying less about what instrument Joseph Smith used and focus more on what they're actually trying to say, which is, this was a miracle.

Hank Smith: [50:41](#) I really like what you're saying here. I'm hearing as a historian, it's impossible to know exactly what happened because they describe it differently. And that's normal. For everyone to have an experience and describe it differently. And so you're saying, "Okay, he described it this way. He described it this way. She described it this way. We triangulate all those. We have a decent picture of what it looked like, and it's a miracle."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [51:09](#) And that is the one consistent message that comes through everything. Is people see different things but at the end, everybody was urgently trying to say, this was something I can explain through natural means. Now on the one hand, a testimony of the Book of Mormon comes through the spirit. Absolutely. But it's also nice to know as an empiricist, as a historian that there are people that saw the plates that witnessed translation and that even though, like we mentioned earlier, had no stake in the success of the church, especially after they left it. Upheld it as a true experience that they had. I mean, the Whitmers will always be incredibly valuable for that. I've talked to anti Mormons that hate the church. One guy said, "The thing that keeps me awake at night though, is the witnesses."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [52:00](#) That's really hard to explain a way what their motive was and why they were so consistent in what they said. So it's a spiritual proof and spiritual witnesses are where we go to first, but it always is nice to have empirical evidence as well. And the Whitmers really come through big time for us when it comes to

empirical evidence. That there were plates, that there was a miraculous translation and that there was an angel involved in the process.

- Hank Smith: [52:28](#) I absolutely love this discussion. I just think of the Whitmers seeing this and the, I don't know, the shock, the awesomeness of the whole thing, just watching this happen. And it's in your house, these are biblical type miracles, and they're happening in your house. It would be outstanding. Of course, you'd never forget it.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [52:56](#) I mean, something as mundane as a road trip between Harmony and Fayette, there's an angel. The experience with the three witnesses, which is described in section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants happened somewhere near the Whitmer farm. And then according to Mary Whitmer, Moroni appears on the back door of the Whitmer home to speak to her specifically.
- John Bytheway: [53:16](#) And I am really grateful for this part of the discussion. As we have begun these podcasts, I've received communications from people who are queasy about it. And I just love the way that you characterized. So maybe the Whitmers had a different in the details and especially the seer stone and things like that. But overarching was, they were talking about this record is true. I think that's a really good place to go. Because I have people that I respect who are, they say, "Well, the Whitmers were not reliable witnesses because they later left the church." Or whatever. And so I really like what you've done there. That's a much better way to say, "Look at the final fruit of it. They were trying to defend... No, this book was miraculously given." So thank you for that.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [54:13](#) In fact, let me show you something. One story that's told about David Whitmer is that during his lifetime an encyclopedia was published. And in it, in the entry on the Book of Mormon, they recorded that the three witnesses had later denied their testimony. Now, David Whitmer writes, this is the year before he dies, a letter to the publishers. And then a public letter. This is the public letter. He says, "It is recorded in the American cyclopedia and the encyclopedia Britannica that I, David Whitmer have denied my testimony as one of the three witnesses to the divinity of the Book of Mormon and that the other two witnesses, Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris denied their testimony of that book.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [54:50](#) I will say once more to all mankind that I have never at any time denied that testimony or any part thereof. I also testified to the world that neither Oliver Cowdery or Martin Harris ever denied

their testimony. They both died reaffirming the truth of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. I was present at the death bed of Oliver Cowdrey, he writes. And his last words were, brother David, be true to your testimony of the Book of Mormon.

John Bytheway:

[55:22](#)

Please join us for part two of this podcast.