

Episode 8 Part II

Doctrine and Covenants 14-17 : Dr. Casey Griffiths

- John Bytheway: [00:05](#) Welcome to Part Two of this week's podcast.
- Hank Smith: [00:08](#) This gives us a great chance, Casey, to move to Doctrine and Covenants 17, which from my studies, it's a moment that Joseph Smith has been looking forward to for a long time. Where the Lord allows a view of the plates to others. Can you tell us what led up to this event? And tell us about the section, Section 17.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [00:27](#) Yeah, Joseph Smith is following instructions directly in the Book of Mormon. How strange it must've been for him to be translating the Book of Mormon, then all of a sudden he gets to Ether 5 and it's speaking to the translator of the book. Moroni writes directly, "It's like you're reading a story, and then all of a sudden one of the participants turns and looks at you." Imagine watching a movie and a guy up on the screen looks at you and says, "And now I need you to do this."
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [00:54](#) The text reads, "Behold, ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates unto those who shall assist and bring forth a work. And unto three shall they be shown by the power of God, wherefore they shall know of assurity these things are true. And in the mouth of three witnesses shall these things be established." This is in the Book of Ether. Moroni's writing this directly to the translator, and Joseph takes this very seriously. He selects three witnesses, obviously, Oliver Cowdery, he's been a scribe through most of the translation process.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [01:26](#) This is one indication that Joseph was closer with David Whitmer than any of the other Whitmer brothers, because he chooses him. And then Martin Harris returns back into the story, which I love the fact that Martin Harris comes back because after the lost manuscript, you want to write him off and say, "Enough with that guy." But we don't appreciate how important Martin Harris was in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. And letting him come back into the story is a sign that, yeah, he did repent, he did change.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [01:55](#) Martin Harris comes back into the church and becomes one of the three witnesses. Three witnesses choose the 12 apostles. There's a bunch of other stuff that happens. But it's just nice to see Martin Harris step back into the narrative because the last

time we left him, the Lord had called him a wicked man, told him that he needed to repent. Now, Joseph is saying, "I want you to be one of these three special witnesses that the book describes."

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [02:18](#) So, there is a little bit of a hiccup. They select a place near the Whitmer Farm, we don't know exactly where, to go out and pray. The first time that they pray, nothing happens. The second time nothing happens, then Martin Harris decides to withdraw himself. He feels like he's the problem. He leaves, then Joseph and Oliver and David all together have this miraculous experience where the angel appears. The angel not only shows them the plates, but shows them all these relics that are described in Section 17.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [02:50](#) Section 17 lists everything that is going to be shown to them as part of their experience. You can look in verse one, "You shall have a view of the Plates, and also of the Breastplate, the Sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, which were given to the brother of Jared upon the mount while he talked to the Lord face to face, and the Miraculous Directors which were given to Lehi while in the wilderness, on the border of the Red Sea.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [03:13](#) But we assume that last reference to Miraculous Directors is a reference to the Liahona itself. And all of them, basically say, Moroni appears. He shows them the artifacts. And then they hear the voice of God bear witness. When the experience closes, David and Oliver go back to the farmhouse. Joseph goes to find Martin. He said, "I found him several rods off, praying on his own." He kneels down and prays with Martin, then Martin has the same experience. He even says that Martin covers his face and says, "'Tis enough, 'tis enough, mine eyes have seen."
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [03:47](#) But, boy, that is neat just not to see an angel, but to hear the voice of the Father bear witness, that the book is true. It's really, really amazing. And then, again, witness of women are important this is the quote that's in your Come Follow Me manual but Lucy Mack Smith is at the Whitmer Farm the day the three witnesses have their experience. So, this is planned as a big event, Joseph brings his family in, he brings Martin Harris down from Palmyra. This is a culmination of everybody that's spent the last two years sacrificing to bring forth this work.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [04:22](#) Lucy Mack Smith says, "I'm coming in." Joseph threw himself down beside me and exclaimed, "Father, mother, you do not know how happy I am. The Lord has now caused the place to be shown to three more besides myself, they've seen an angel, who's testified to them and they will have to bear witness to the

truth of what I have said. For now, they know for themselves that I do not go about to deceive the people. And I feel as if I was relieved of a burden, which was almost too heavy for me to bear. It rejoices my heart, that I am not, any longer to be entirely alone in the world."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [04:53](#)

We sometimes don't appreciate the burden Joseph Smith carried where, you would want to with all your heart show these Plates. I mean, it's easy. It's easy to prove that he's telling the truth. I can just show him the Plates, but he's been given strict commandment to not show anyone the Plates and having someone else see them was apparently a huge relief to Joseph. I've heard of other, not other witnesses like this, but you've got Emma and Lucy and Joseph Smith's siblings say, "Yeah, they were real. I never saw him, but I picked them up. He had them covered up. I moved him to dust, to dust around the table or whatever." So, how faithful are these family members not to say, "Oh, I'll just go ahead and look myself."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [05:42](#)

I marvel at Emma Smith. Emma said, "I moved the plates while I was cleaning and there was nothing." She said that, "I even flipped through the pages with my thumb." Imagine being Emma Smith and there's no one around, I would have lifted up the cloth and taken a look. But Emma's better than me and she didn't. There's other things like the Smith stock, Josiah Stool the guy that employee's Joseph Smith to find the silver mine. He's at the Smith house the night Joseph brings the plates there. And Joseph actually hands the plates through the window to Josiah Stool. I mean, if you're counting people that saw the plates wrapped in linen, there's a whole other cloud of witnesses, male and female that are present there as well.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [06:20](#)

And the fortitude that they have to not say, "Hey, just give me a peak." Or Joseph to not say, "Hey, come here, Sophronia, I want to show you something." It shows how seriously they took these commands and how marvelous it was. Again, Joseph also has the experience where he shows the eight witnesses.

John Bytheway: [06:44](#)

Is that during about the same time?

Dr. Casey Griff...: [06:46](#)

According to Lucy Mack Smith, it takes place a couple of days later, and it takes place at the Smith home in Palmyra. And again, the eight witnesses, if you look down that list are all Smiths and Whitmers, Hiram Page is married to Catherine Whitmer. He's a Whitmer brother-in-law and they all see it. And I think John brought this up earlier, but one of the unique things about these two experiences, the three witnesses and the eight witnesses is the way they reinforce each other. B. H Roberts, for

instance, pointed out that if you want it to disprove the three witnesses, you would say they had a hallucinatory experience, that they were on Peyote or something like that and they hallucinated an angel. At the same time, what the eight witnesses see has no supernatural element at all.

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [07:28](#) They just saw the plates. They handled the plates, the three witnesses see the angel, but all three of them clearly say, "We didn't touch anything. We saw, but we did not touch." The eight witnesses touch and they don't see anything miraculous. So, if you were saying, Joseph was trying to fool the eight witnesses, you'd say he made a fake set of plates and trick these rubes into believing it. But the three witnesses are coming and saying, "It wasn't just plates. It was an angel." One witness is supernatural. One witness is totally natural. And the two back each other up to show that there's no way Joseph Smith could have pulled all of this off, give three people a similar hallucinatory experience under two different circumstances, because there's really two visions, one to David and Oliver, one to Martin Harris, and then to give these eight witnesses at completely mundane experience, other than seeing the plates and holding them. And the eight witnesses themselves give extensive descriptions of the plates.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [08:25](#) John Whitmer said, "I picked them up. I moved the pages. Here's exactly what they look like. Here's how much they weighed.
- John Bytheway: [08:31](#) I saw the symbols.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [08:32](#) I saw the symbols on them." I've got an interview with John Whitmer here, do you want to hear this?
- John Bytheway: [08:37](#) Sure. [inaudible 00:08:38].
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [08:38](#) This is an interview John Whitmer does with a reporter from the Deseret News in 1878. So, the reporter says, "I'm aware that your name is a fixed of the Testament of the Book of Mormon, you saw the Plates." John Whitmer says, "It is so that testimony is true." The reporter says, "Did you handle the plates?" "I did so." "Then they were material substance." "Yes, as material, as anything could be." "Were they heavy to lift?" "Yes." "And you know gold is a heavy metal. They were very heavy." "How big were the leaves?." "So far as I can recollect eight by six or seven inches." "Were the leaves thick?" "Yes, just so thick that characters could it be engraven on both sides?" "How were the leaves joined together?" "Three rings each one in the shape of a D with a straight line towards the center."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [09:17](#) "In what place did you see the Plates?" "In Joseph Smith's house. He had them there." This is the Smith home in Palmyra. "Did you see them covered with a cloth?" "No, we handled them uncovered in our hands and we turn the leaf sufficiently to satisfy us." I mean, it's cool that there's plates, but there's no angel. There's nothing supernatural about the experience they have whereas the experience the three witnesses have is completely supernatural and the two experiences are designed to reinforce each other. And so, like I said, the simple fact that you have eight witnesses plus three that's 11 and Joseph that's 12. That's a nice round number. Don't you think?

John Bytheway: [09:53](#) We like that number.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [09:54](#) Twelve witnesses of the Book of Mormon. And then if you want to add Mary Whitmer, it's a Baker's dozen because she sees the plates as well. She's the only-

Hank Smith: [10:01](#) Yeah, tell us that story. You've hinted towards that story, Casey, I want to hear more about Mary Witmer's experience.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [10:06](#) Okay. Let me pull it up here.

John Bytheway: [10:07](#) So, that's also referenced in the Saints Book that hopefully everybody's reading on page 70 or something. I think it references the Come Follow Me manual too. So yeah, go ahead, Casey.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [10:19](#) We're more cautious with this one because it doesn't come directly from Mary Whitmer. It's a secondhand account. Her grandson, John C. Whitmer is the one that tells this, but here's what he records. He said, "I have heard my grandmother, Mary Musselman Whitmer say on several occasions." So, he heard her say the several times that, "She was shown the Plates of the Book of Mormon by a Holy angel, who she always called Brother Nephi." She undoubtedly refers to Moroni but he says, Nephi. It was at this time, she said, "When the translation was going on to the house of the Elder Peter Whitmer, Peter Whitmer Senior, her husband, Joseph Smith, and his wife and Oliver Cowdrey and David Whitmer, a short time previous brought up from Harmony, Pennsylvania. We're all boarding with the Whitmers and my grandmother and having so many extra persons to care for besides her own large household was often overloaded with work to such an extent she felt that to be quite a burden."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [11:12](#) So, having Joseph Smith in your house is crazy, I guess. There's extra people there. She already has a large family. She is feeling

worn down. He says, "One evening after having done her usual day's work in the house. She went to the barn to milk the cows and she met a stranger carrying something on his back that looked like a knapsack. At first, she was a little afraid of him, but when he spoke to her in a kind, friendly tone and began to explain to her the nature of the work, which is going on in her house, she was filled with inexpressible joy, and satisfaction. He then tied his knapsack and showed her a bundle of Plates, which in size and appearance corresponded with the description subsequently given by the witnesses to the Book of Mormon."

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[11:52](#)

"This strange person turned the leaves of the Plates over leaf after leaf, and also showing her the engravings upon them after which he told her to be patient and faithful in bearing her burden a little longer promising that if she would do so, she would be blessed and her award would be sure if she proved faithful to the end. The personage then suddenly vanished with the Plates and where he went she could not tell. From that moment, my grandmother was unable to perform her household duties with comparative ease and felt no more inclination to murmur because her life was hard. I knew my grandmother to be a good noble and truthful woman. I have not the least doubt of her statement in regard to seeing Plates being strictly true. She was a strong believer in the Book of Mormon until the day of her death."

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[12:37](#)

So, it's nice to know that even a person whose role in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon was a milking the cows and making food for everybody was given some measure of reward. Now, I've always looked at this story too and said, "It's so interesting that Mary Whitmer gets an experience like this, but Emma Smith does not... I don't know why the Lord singled out Mary Whitmer and to have this experience, but it is wonderful to know that there is a female witness of the plates as well. There's someone that saw them in broad daylight shown by the messenger and was given a witness."

John Bytheway:

[13:09](#)

Wow. You think Lucy Mack Smith, Emma Smith are both going, "Hey, I did a lot for this." But I love how you just were honest there. I don't know why. I don't know why.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[13:21](#)

Well, the other big female witness is Elizabeth Whitmer, who marries Oliver Cowdery. She's interviewed later on. She talks about translation as well. So, she saw at least as much as Emma did as well too. And when we tell the stories of the history of the church, sometimes we forget that one of the unique things about the history of the church is that there's all these women that participated as well. I always tell my students this is no

criticism of the Book of Mormon, but there are five women mentioned by name in the Book of Mormon. In Church History, there's dozens of women that participated in the most sacred of events. And we need to make sure that we're getting their stories out there as well. People like Mary Whitmer, Emma Smith and Elizabeth Whitmer and Lucy Mack Smith really deserved to be heard because they have some great things to say.

- Hank Smith: [14:06](#) Wow, that's fantastic. I think it was Dr. McKay who said, "You can't understate Emma's influence on Joseph Smith." He said, "The church was founded by a man and a woman because they worked together on this. He doesn't even get the Plates until Emma's part of his life. And then it's almost as if he's complete.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [14:35](#) And along the way, I mean, the first person to really see the Nephite Interpreters or handled them anyway is Lucy Mack Smith. And Mary Whitmer sees the plates, Elizabeth Witmer witnesses translation. I mean, there's a lot of important, wonderful women involved all the way.
- John Bytheway: [14:51](#) Casey, you mentioned that in verse one of Section 17, it lists not just the Plates, but the Sword of Laban and the Breastplate and the Miraculous Directors, perhaps the Liahona. And I was just wondering when we have the account of the eight witnesses, do they mention any of the other things other than the plates? I think a lot of our listeners would like to know, have people also seen the Sword of Laban, for example?
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [15:17](#) It doesn't seem like the witnesses did see all the artifacts that are there. Section 17 is given to the three witnesses primarily. The Lord does say in the Book of Mormon that, "Joseph can show it onto others that assist in the work." But the number eight isn't given specifically either to my knowledge and Section 17 has given to the three. So, the eight witnesses tend to just describe the Plates. They don't talk about the Directors, the Liahona or the Breastplate, or the Sword of Laban. The William Smith who wasn't one of the witnesses. He does describe the Breastplate. And it seems like a lot of the Smith family when Joseph was in Palmyra when first receives the Plates and the Nephite Interpreters saw, or handled those things. Joseph again, would keep them wrapped up in linen cloths but William Smith for instance describes it. But like I said, it seems like the witnesses stick with the Plates. And what is described in Section 17 really is what the three witnesses see.
- John Bytheway: [16:20](#) It's for the three. Oh, that's really helpful. I just wanted to comment to that. I love that at this point, when Joseph Smith

comes home and says, "You do not know how happy I am." That I just think there was such wisdom in having witnesses, in having shared visions that were not just Joseph, but Oliver saw things, Sydney saw things. And now Martin Harris, David Whitmer, they're all... And I think of as we've commented before, I just love the idea of the burden coming off, Joseph. And then as we go through history, we will see when that finally he can say, "The keys are with the 12 and now they can kill me if they want, because the work will go on." I see so much wisdom in the sharing of these things with witnesses. I just thought that's a comment I wanted to make.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[17:18](#)

One of the real strengths of the restoration is as much as we talk about Joseph Smith, it's not a one-man show. Richard Bushman comments on how there were a lot of movements similar to the saints that are trying to bring back the New Testament church. There's nobody that has anything like the Book of Mormon or claims to see an angel, but a lot of these movements around this time really are kind of a one-man show. And when that person dies, the movements fracture, and dissipate, and kind of go away. One of the reasons why the church has endured to this day is because Joseph Smith was always training other people. There was always a backup. I mean, you can go back and read section three, where the Lord says, "Hey, if you can't do this, I can find somebody else to do it."

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[18:02](#)

And sometimes we put too much burden on Joseph Smith and don't realize the Lord always had another person there. Other than the first vision, which of course is unique and uniquely personal for Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery was there when the priesthoods restored, when the keys are given in the Kirtland Temple, you mentioned that he brings the 12 apostles into the circle. I mean, Joseph is always looking for allies and the Lord is directing him to bring other witnesses into the church. It's always about not just what you can do, but what you're doing to prepare the next person that has to do what you're doing right now. I mean, when you think about the fact that the restoration not only brought Joseph Smith in, but remarkable people, you mentioned earlier, John like Orson Pratt, and Parley Pratt and Brigham Young. Joseph Smith for instance, is not the first official missionary of the church, it's his brother, Samuel that sent out.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[18:58](#)

Now, along the way, the Lord is directing Joseph to train other people, to take up the mantle. That's part of the reason why we survive so strongly today. And why today in the church, I mean, why do we make eight year olds give talks? And why do we give the priesthood to 11-year-olds? I mean, in any other church,

they would say, "That's ridiculous. Your deacon is an 11-year-old kid." Well, we're always focused on leadership and not just saying, "I had an experience, believe me." But you have an experience. It's interesting how Joseph shows up at the Whitmer Farm and isn't interested in just being secluded and getting his work done, but he's bringing them in, he's using them as scribes and having them participate in this great experience of divinity.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[19:42](#)

It's not about Joseph. In fact, for everybody in the early church, it was about the book. It was about the experience after you talked to Steve Harper. Steve likes to mention that the first vision, for instance, really comes into its own as the founding event in the 20th century. It's partially because in the 19th century, the miracle everybody would talk about the proof of the church was true, was not the first vision. It was the coming forth of Book of Mormon. And the coming forth of Book of Mormon is very much a collaborative experience. Joseph is reading the text to Oliver, but Oliver is writing it down and so is Emma's brother, Alvin Smith and so are the Whitmer Brothers and everybody's doing their part. It's a communal experience. And we sometimes forget to honor the larger group of people that stood by Joseph and not only supported him, but saw what he saw and saw miracles, just like he did.

Hank Smith:

[20:38](#)

To me, that's that makes all the difference in the world are these, are shared visions. That's something that I would say is impossible to just create just out of thin air.

John Bytheway:

[20:55](#)

And we'll get to this eventually, but man, Section 76 for Sidney Rigdon to be sitting there the whole time and going back and forth, what do you see? I see the same and what a relief that must have been to Joseph to know it at some point, "They can kill me now. My work's done priest has restored. The keys are here." And I show my students a clip from the Cincinnati Gazette that said early in July of 1844 that says, "The terrible excitement from the West, Joseph and Hiram have been shot." And then the last three words thus ends Mormonism. And that's what they thought. This is a one-man show. And I like to tell my students actually, 11 years later thus ends the Cincinnati Gazette. And so, they're not very good at prophesying. They went out of business. But I'm trying to remember, and maybe this is not really our topic today, but I tried to research about how many members of the whole church that even were at the time of the martyrdom, June 27th, 1844. And I got something around 16,000, I think.

- John Bytheway: [22:10](#) And so, now we're at 16 million but I just thought, yeah, I love what you've just said, Casey. I hope people will listen to that and replay it. What a collaborative effort, the restoration, this marvelous work in a wonder was, and how many different people were involved. Thank you for that.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [22:27](#) And you're just making me realize, I mean, President Ballard likes to talk about councils and how they're strengthened councils. I mean, the three witnesses really are kind of the first formal ecclesiastical council. They're a council in the church before there is a church. If you keep going on in the doctrine covenants, right after Section 17, Section 18 has given to all of Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer. And in that section, they're called specifically to locate and find the 12 apostles. Section 19 is given to Martin Harris, the other one of the witnesses, and all along the way, the Lord is setting up this council system that's going to allow the church to endure. So in 1844, if half the first presidency is killed and the other member apostatizes, you've got a council to step in and take its place. And all along the way, like I said, we're setting up this system, this web of believers.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [23:21](#) In the human mind we like to simplify it down to one or two people. But we do a disservice when we don't do the deeper work to understand the people that stood by Joseph. The Knight family for instance, is very, very under appreciated. What they did was remarkable. Oliver Cowdery doesn't always get as due. It's true that he left the church, but he did come back and never denied his witness either. And he's right there alongside Smith, leading missions and helping people and training leaders to take his place. So, Peter Whitmer, for instance, whose Section 16 has given to is going to be called in the first formal mission of the church. He's a missionary of the Laymanites. David Whitmer, John Whitmer, they're all given jobs to do in the church. And from the beginning that idea that you can't just come and passively sit and sing the hymns and listen to the sermons is built into the DNA of the church that everybody has a job and everybody's job is important.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [24:15](#) Maybe Mary Whitmer was sitting there thinking, "I just milk the cows and make the food." But the Lord sends an angel to her as a way of saying, "Your job matters. You are part of the Body of Christ. And the contributions that you're making right now are helping forward the work and bring forth the kingdom of God in the latter days."
- John Bytheway: [24:32](#) Wow. And here we are talking about it today. I love that we're talking about Mary Whitmer and some of these others today. This is good.

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [24:43](#) Mark McConkie tells a great story about something that happened to a young lady at the Whitmer home. Her name is Sally Heller Conrad, Sally Heller Conrad. And it says this, that she was working in the Whitmer home. And it said that, "The home was small. And in addition to the large family already living there, there were guests living in the house as well." And something was going on upstairs. One day Sally noticed a couple of young men come down from the second story. They looked most unusual. Their faces were exceedingly white and strange. She asked the family why they looked that way, but no one would tell her. It's like some kind of secret the family had. As time passed, it happened again and again, each time Sally saw them, their faces were the same unearthly-white, and it frightened her until finally she went to the lady of the house, I'm assuming this is Mary Whitmer and announced that she would not stay with her until she knew the cause of the strange looks of these men.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [25:36](#) The lady of that house was Mother Mary Whitmer at Fayette, New York. It was June of 1829, Mother Whitmer explained to Sally that those two men, Joseph and Oliver were translating a record upon a written upon Plates by the gift and power of God. And that the power of God was so great in the room that they could hardly endure it. At times, angels were in the room in their glory, which nearly consumed them. This satisfied the girl and opened the way to her embracing the gospel. Sally Heller Conrad married in the faith, came West and died in Provo, Utah, July 23rd, 1903 at 92 years old. So, some of these side stories that we try to get as many as we can here on the podcast, John these seemingly ordinary people, having extraordinary experiences.
- John Bytheway: [26:24](#) I love that story too, because of the consistency of the shining face thing of Moses, of Abinadai. Just last week in church, somebody quoted a President Jamesy files October 2005, taught, called a light in their eyes and spoke of students at the BYU Jerusalem Center in how the one of our friends over in Jerusalem said, "Okay, we know your young people, aren't going to prose light, but what are you going to do about that light in their eyes?" And it's kind of a consistent thing. That's a fun story. That's Mark McConkie. And what's the book?
- Hank Smith: [26:57](#) Mark McConkie a book called Remembering Joseph. I'm sure Casey's read that more than I have.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [27:03](#) It's a wonderful book. Great book. And that's usually the first book I hand people to read about Joseph Smith because it's all firsthand experiences. Really good stuff. See, I was scrambling

while you brought that up, Hank. Similar experience, this is from Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, a little girl who meets Joseph and Kirtland. She was present when Joseph was speaking, she said, "Those who looked at him that day said there was a searchlight within him. Over every part of his body, I never saw anything like it on the earth. I could not take my eyes off him. He got so white that anyone who saw him would have thought he was transparent. I remember that I thought I could almost see the cheekbones through the flesh. I have been through many changes since, but that is photographed on my brain. I shall remember it and see it in my mind's eye, as long as I remain upon the earth."

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [27:52](#) So, what this young lady you quoted is describing, what Mary Elizabeth Rollins is describing is transfiguration. It's a physical change that happens when someone is really in connection with God. And if we're assuming that heavenly Father is speaking directly to the three witnesses, they're transfigured as well, when they have this experience with the angel and have the experience where they hear the voice of God.
- Hank Smith: [28:17](#) Just one quick thing. Mary Elizabeth Rollins, isn't she one of those that hides the partially printed Book of Commandments? Poor thing.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [28:25](#) Yeah. [crosstalk 00:28:25] is instrumental in saving the manuscripts of the Book of Commandments during a mob attack in 1833. She's got a great story, by the way, I've visited her grave in my mom's hometown down in Minorsville, wonderful early witness of the restoration and just her autobiography on its own is worth a read because she just happened to be present at so many interesting times in the church.
- Hank Smith: [28:51](#) When we go back, I want to just mention one thing about the three witnesses. I wonder if Moroni looks at those three and says, "If you ever deny this, I will find you." And then that's the fear of the rest of their life is, "I did not deny that," they're looking around. "I did not deny that." You know what happens if that there's this almost like, "I saw that angel and I told him I would I'd stay with it."
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [29:19](#) Well, do you want to hear one of those stories? I love that, do you remember that seminary video all those years ago with that little British kid that, "What's your name? "Willie or something like that."
- Hank Smith: [29:31](#) Oh, yes, I remember.

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [29:33](#) This is William Pilkington, he's the young man that's depicted in the seminary video.
- Hank Smith: [29:37](#) With Martin Harris, right?
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [29:38](#) With Martin Harris, yes. Martin Harris rejoins the church comes to Utah, ends up in Clarkson where they used to do the Martin Harris pageant. They don't anymore. But this is what Martin Harris told William Pilkington. "Just as sure as you see the sun shining, just as sure am I, that I stood in the presence of an angel of God with Joseph Smith and saw him hold the gold Plates in his hands. I also saw the Urim and Thummim, the Breastplate, the Sword of Laban, everything listed in Section 17. I saw the angel descend from heaven. The heavens were then opened. And I heard the voice of God declare that everything the angel had told us was true. And the Book of Mormon was translated correct. I was commanded by God's voice to testify to the whole world what I had seen and heard.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [30:24](#) Now, again, you know to a little 14-year-old kid, that's come to work on your farm and be your hand. You say stuff like that. It's powerful that, like I said, through every single phase of their life, the one thing that's consistent is regardless of how these witnesses feel about Joseph Smith and the church, they are 100% consistent in what happened at the Whitmer Farm. This is a touchstone for them that changes everything that comes after in their lives.
- Hank Smith: [30:53](#) Wow. The Book of Mormon and the resurrected Lord have a lot in common, that here it comes out of a stone tomb and it has all these witnesses. In fact, the Savior was seen by his 11 apostles and here we have eight witnesses and three witnesses there are kind of 11 witnesses of this book. There's an angel there, when he comes out of the tomb, there's just some similarities there, but I love what you said. And I think this is probably the most important part is that it changed those people. You look at the apostles in the New Testament, after the resurrection, they get stronger, they get more confident and it seems to happen with these Book of Mormon witnesses that they get even stronger and more confident after these incredible experience.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [31:38](#) Yeah. Yeah. And like I said, those days that they spend on the Whitmer Farm or some of the happiest of their life. I mean, every single one of them is a changed person after and credit to them, whatever happens, they do stay consistent to what they said about the Book of Mormon and the angel.

- John Bytheway: [31:57](#) As far as the eight witnesses, I'm trying to recall have I seen a painting where they were outdoors, or it was this in the house when the eight witnesses handled the Plates, was it out on a table?
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [32:15](#) Tony Sweat talks a little bit about this. How none of the sources describe whether they're indoors or outdoors. They all say near the Smith home. So, we assume it was outdoors somewhere, but Tony talked about how every depiction of that event, there's always like a tree stump that Joseph has the Plates on. Nobody mentions anything like that. They just all say we handled the Plates and we flipped the leaves. And we were able to see for ourselves that the record was a real thing. And I would say also that, that maybe that's... Sometimes when people talk about the seer stone, they get a little discouraged because it sounds like Joseph Smith is just receiving texts via the instruments that he doesn't need the Plates. Texts like Section 17, underline how important the actual record was itself. That it wasn't just a divine revelation, as wonderful as those are most of the Doctrine of Covenants is a divine revelation that it's a translation of an ancient record and the plates were physical. And that's an important fact to us.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [33:17](#) Now, I wish to high heaven that we have the Plates, but if you can't have the actual physical record, having 11 people that have seen it and eight of them that have actually physically held it is the next best thing. I mean, that hold up in just about any court of law that I'm aware of. Some people might be thrown off a little bit by the similarity between Section 15 and Section 16. They're almost identical.
- John Bytheway: [33:41](#) We haven't addressed that.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [33:43](#) And that is really unique in Joseph Smith reveal. Section 15 and Section 16 are the only place where that happens. They're both very brief. They say the exact same thing and that could throw a couple of people off, but I wanted to read this quote I found from John A. Widtsoe where he commented on the similarities. He said this, "The Doctrine of Covenants is a compilation of the revelations received by Joseph Smith, to individuals, for guidance in the church. For the first years of the work, the prophet kept every scrap of paper pertaining to the progress of the work. In fact, this care of things that must have seemed trivial is one of the evidences of the sincerity of the man. For example, when John and Peter Whitmer asked for help, he received for each of them, a revelation that's substantially the same. This simple revelation is directed to the individual. And at

first sight has no permanent value for the church. Yet, as a revelation from God, it was preserved and published."

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [34:35](#) "An insincere man would have eliminated this and other similar revelations as of little consequence, not so with Joseph, the Lord had spoken, the words were part of building the Kingdom of God, and the same advice would be useful to many men then, and now." So, I just thought other words had an interesting perspective that the two, the similarities between Section 15 and Section 16 are a witness of how sincere they were. Like Peter Whitmer, whose Section 16, is given to never leaves the church. He dies in the faith before the Whitmer family takes off. And to him, that was a revelation. It's kind of like, I think of all those people that get a patriarchal blessing and it's really short or something like that. I had a companion on my mission that I walked into his room to borrow some toothpaste and his patriarchal blessing was out. And it was literally two sentences long.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [35:24](#) So, while I was grabbing the toothpaste without realizing it, I read his patriarchal blessing. And I came out and said, "Do you ever feel cheated that your patriarchal blessing was only one or two sentences?" And he said, "That's a revelation from God to me, it doesn't matter how long it is. It's a big deal." And I'm guessing both John Whitmer and Peter Whitmer would say, "It doesn't matter if they were identical. It was a revelation from God to me. And it's significant." And it's neat that Joseph Smith and the council that put together the Book of Commandments and Doctrine and Covenants, both felt, "Even though these are the same and they say the same thing, let's put them both in, just so at least there's a witness there that the Lord spoke to Peter Whitmer and John Whitmer, even if it's back to back and says the same thing."
- Hank Smith: [36:09](#) That's beautiful. It really is beautiful. The idea from Widtsoe, this idea of him being he's sincere, he's like, "Well, [crosstalk 00:36:18]."
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [36:18](#) Every scrap of paper.
- Hank Smith: [36:19](#) "I'm going to put it in there. The Lord said it. I mean, if you ever have problem with it, take it up with him, but I'm going to put it in." That's fantastic.
- John Bytheway: [36:27](#) But the overall message is this book was translated by the power of God. Oh, so, so great. Thank you.

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [36:34](#) Well, and even your lady, that's calling David Whitmer a liar. I hope push back against her a little bit and saying, "Hey, David Whitmer was testifying of a miracle. He was sincerely trying to get people to believe that he had seen a miracle."
- Hank Smith: [36:47](#) When they write me that I think the Lord liked him, right? The Lord like David Whitmer. He chose him.
- John Bytheway: [36:54](#) I mean, I've got my Joseph McConkie and he was David Whitmer was not a reliable witness. I mean, he says it right out there. And I guess because of later antagonism or whatever, but that's kind of the tack this lady was taking too, is that we can't trust anything he said.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [37:15](#) Well, and Joseph McConkie was my teacher and Craig Ostler, his coauthor is one of my dear friends. I think both of them would say, "Just be careful with what David Whitmer said." That his witness, his witness, like I said, was written later on in his life it's decades later. He did have an axe to grind against Joseph Smith at that point in time. And so, they're probably correct in saying the top tier of witnesses are Joseph and Oliver, but then we've got all these lower tier witnesses that are important to them.
- John Bytheway: [37:45](#) Yeah. I just love the way you said it. Joseph and Oliver always talked about Urim and Thummim or Nephite Interpreters. And I sometimes get to the point in my classes where I want to say, "We report, you decide." One school of thought says this and other people said this and leave it and go, "Huh."
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [38:04](#) Yeah. And I like how Casey did that. Yeah. That's all you can do with the sources at again, accepting that the big message David Whitmer probably didn't want us to get caught up in the sea or stone. He wanted us to understand this was divine, so did Emma, so did Martin, so did everybody that was involved in translation.
- John Bytheway: [38:22](#) And that beautifully done.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [38:22](#) They were trying to describe a miraculous process and you've got to, like I said, not miss the forest for the trees here. The forest is, this was a miracle. The trees are, "Hey, sometimes he used to seerstone and sometimes use Nephite Interpreter."
- Hank Smith: [38:36](#) I do the same thing in the New Testament where you got Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who sometimes don't agree on the details, but the message is the same.

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [38:45](#) And that disagreement is a sign that it's authentic. It's organic. If everybody's telling the same story with exactly the same details, that means they got together and made it up on their own. On the other hand, human beings are complex, they see things, they misunderstand things. That's a sign that it's genuinely authentic. That's part of the reason why probably it's a relief to me that the first vision accounts aren't all the same. If Joseph Smith was lying, he would have told the same story on every single occasion. But if he's telling the story organically and genuinely, he's like, "Oh, and you know what? This will help you too. Let me add in this detail."
- Hank Smith: [39:21](#) Yep. Because I've done that before, where I tell a story and then that becomes the way I tell that story. And I'm not reminiscing. I'm not digging my mind for details. I'm just telling a story because that's the way it's told.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [39:35](#) Yeah. And one time, Hank, I was at EFY and I told the story of our first child being born. We had all these complications, my wife was there with me. It was the first time as a session director. And at the end, she was like, "You got so many details wrong." And I go, "Well, you were on drugs. You didn't even know what was happening." And she was like, "Yeah, but it just showed that like 10 years later, I mean, an authentic story does have little things creep in."
- Hank Smith: [40:03](#) All the time.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [40:03](#) My wife and I don't tell the exact same story because first of all, we're experiencing it from different vantage points. And like I said an authentic story, isn't going to be 100% consistent because of human nature and the way things work.
- Hank Smith: [40:18](#) And there's also a complexity in the reorganization and the kind of the feud between the two and Joseph Fielding Smith saying anybody who's involved with the reorganization is terrible and awful and not reliable. And then Elder McConkie is a son-in-law to Joseph Fielding Smith. And so, there's some loyalty there.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [40:41](#) And like I said, that's totally fine. Our narrative, the established narrative in the church was created at a time when those things really were fresh in everybody's mind. But now that we're getting centuries later, we can look at someone like Emma or David Whitmer and say that they really weren't trying to say that it wasn't miraculous, in fact, quite the opposite. So, let's take what they have to say and accept it for what it is and put it in the historical record and not make judgements. Let's just-

- John Bytheway: [41:09](#) And just say, "This is what they said. This is what they said."
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [41:13](#) That's exactly what we should do.
- Hank Smith: [41:15](#) These are human beings. I love when someone says the church lied to me, I'm going, "No, no, no. You just don't understand Joseph Fielding Smith, the feelings he had for his cousin, Joseph Smith III and how he kind of said, 'This is going to be our narrative,' because these are really rotten people who are trying to say that polygamy never existed." And there's so much complexity going on.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [41:36](#) And even the narrative that the church is hiding this stuff. No, Joseph Fielding Smith and B.H Roberts were arguing all the time over what sources they should use. If you read comprehensive history of the church, B.H Roberts was using David Whitmer and Emma Smith and all these records with the seerstone. And sometimes like I said, the argument gets carried through generations and we can back off a little bit and say, "All right, let's overlook the tails. Let's look at the overarching message here." And David Whitmer later on said, "Joseph Smith was a religious and straightforward man." He had to be for, he was illiterate and could do nothing himself. That's the other thing that bothers me is everybody feels free to say, "Yeah, Joseph was illiterate." They never qualify that he had to trust in God.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [42:22](#) He could not translate unless he was humble and possess the right feelings towards everyone. To illustrate so you can see, "One morning when he was getting ready to continue the translation, something went wrong about the house. And he was put out about it. Something that Emma, his wife had done. Oliver and I went upstairs and Joseph came up soon after to continue the translation, but he could not do anything. He could not translate a single syllable. He went downstairs out into the orchard and made supplication to the Lord. Was gone about an hour, came back to the house and asked Emma's forgiveness and then came upstairs where we were. And then the translation went all right. He could do nothing save he was humble and faithful. At times when Joseph Smith would attempt to translate, he would look into the hat which the stone was placed and found he was spiritually blind and could not translate."
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [43:08](#) "He told us that his mind, well, too much on earthly things and various causes would make him incapable of proceeding with the translation. When in this condition, he would go out and pray. When he became sufficiently humbled, before God, he could then proceed with the translation. Now, we see how very

strict the Lord is and how he requires the heart of man to be just right before he can receive revelation from him. Again, Whitmer is saying this isn't an academic process because, "Hey, I can go in and do academics when I've been in a fight with my wife, I don't have to have the spirit necessarily to do those." Joseph couldn't translate if he wasn't in harmony with his family members. I remember reading this story as a young seminary teacher. And that morning I got into a fight with my wife, went into teach my first class and it was lousy.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[43:53](#)

There was no spirit there. So, in the break I walked in, I called Liz and apologized to her and sincerely expressed my regret for some of the things that I'd said, went out and taught the next class and the spirit was back. I mean, this isn't a normal translation process. Your relationship with your wife shouldn't affect your ability to translate, but Joseph has to have the spirit with him. And the way that he treated his loved ones was a big part of him having the spirit and us having it as well. So, that as much as anything has shown me, that if I want to have the spirit, I want to go out and teach with power and the Holy Ghost, I've got to do as much as I can to be in harmony, not just with God, but with the people that he's placed in my life to assist me along the way.

John Bytheway:

[44:41](#)

I found the same thing and probably you did too, Casey, when you were a Bishop, if everything was okay at home, I could be a really mediocre Bishop. If these were not good okay at home, I couldn't do anything. And it really became foundational. And it really became emotionally foundational. I'm so glad everything is okay in my marriage because the other stuff I'm dealing with is really hard.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[45:09](#)

I was so surprised when I got called as a Bishop that I received very little counsel about the word and a lot of council about my home. Like, "Hey, you put your family first, make sure that your wife and kids aren't neglected. You do those things first and your calling will kind of fall into place." And I saw that again and again, if I started to get out of balance between home and church and work. I would really struggle in my spiritual part of my calling. It's same thing with Joseph Smith. I mean, that's just reassuring to me. That's one of those imperfect stories about Joseph Smith that gives me real hope for myself.

John Bytheway:

[45:45](#)

I loved what you said. "I want to be like Jesus, but I identify with Peter." Because when we get to Section 19, I'm going to tell people, I identify with Martin Harris. I worry about money. I mean, Section 19, there are so many cool things in there. So, but anyway, Casey, that was just awesome.

Hank Smith: [46:06](#) One of the messages I receive from the story of Martin Harris is that the Lord does not define us by our mistakes that he allows us to make mistakes. And then He says, "Let's move forward." And allowing Martin to be one of the three witnesses is a message to all of us. I think that, "Yes, you're going to make mistakes along the way and no, you're not done." But there's more to be done and I don't condemn you. Dr. Griffiths thanks so much for being with us today. It's weird for me to call you Dr. Griffiths, you're Casey to me.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [46:39](#) Just is Dr is fine, Hank.

Hank Smith: [46:41](#) Yes. Thank you, Dr. You are a historian and a scholar, you know as much about Church History as anyone. And I know you're going to say, "Well, no, there's people who know it better than me." But I at least can say you know Church History, as well as any critic of the church in any critic of Joseph Smith, yet here you are. There's a myth out there, I think, among people that the more you get to know Church History, the more likely you are to, "Oh, no, this is all not true. And I'm going to get out of here." But yet here you are, you've been studying and teaching this for 25 years now, 20 to 25 years of your life.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [47:23](#) Yeah.

Hank Smith: [47:23](#) I would just love to hear your thoughts, your personal thoughts on Joseph Smith, the restoration and what it's done for you personally having the background that you have.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [47:35](#) Well, when it comes to Church History, I will say that my fear isn't that people know too much it's that they know too little. I love the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is what converted me to Christ and helped me gain a testimony of the resurrection and the divinity of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. That said the Book of Mormon tells the story in black and white. It's got good guys and bad guys, and it's very, very direct as to who they are. And there's complexity there for sure. But one of the reasons why I've always loved Church History is it's not a simple story. It's really not. You can spend your entire life reading about the people that participated and the context that they existed in and the events that they talked about and still learn new things.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [48:26](#) It's messy is what I would say. And that isn't something that any student of the history of the church or the scriptures should be afraid of. Hank, you teach the Old Testament. That is a messy book, right, so is the New Testament, and to a certain extent, the Book of Mormon, even though the Book of Mormon had an

incredible editor. The guy who really knew what he was doing. There's indications there of messiness, chief among them, the editor keeps complaining about how messy the book is and apologizing, even though he did a fantastic job. Church History is the messiest of all of them. And that complexity really isn't something that you should be afraid of, it's something that you should embrace. To me, it's a mark of this sincerity and authenticity of these people, that they weren't perfect, that they messed up, that they stumbled, that they fell, but sometimes they were ex-communicated from the church.

Hank Smith: [49:17](#)

They had conflicts.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [49:18](#)

They had conflicts with each other. They weren't perfect people. To me, that just really makes me, I'm sorry to say, feel good. It doesn't disturb my testimony because when I can look at someone like David Whitmer or Oliver Cowdery or Martin Harris or Joseph Smith and see how much they struggled, it makes me feel a little bit better about myself. I used to always tell my kids when I read the New Testament, I want to be like Jesus, but identify with Peter. I'm more of a, would sink to the bottom of the ocean rather than the stand, walk-on-the-water type of person. And seeing the flaws that these people had and yet what they accomplished in spite of it, to me, is very, very heartening and encouraging. And like I said, I would say to any person studying the Doctrine and Covenants this year, just embrace the complexity, celebrate it.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [50:12](#)

You don't get to just read the Doctrine and CovenantS, you can read half a dozen books on the Whitmer family, or Mark McConkie is Remembering Joseph or any other thing out there and just get more and more details and intricacies and complexity of what was happening there. At the same time too every once in a while, you've got to pull yourself back and look at the big picture and say, "Hey, the story here is that Jesus is still an active participant in the lives of men and women in our day. And that angels and miracles and gifts and revelation are the same as they were anciently." That what we're being told is a consistent story through the Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon and Church History, that there is a God who loves us and a savior who is resurrected for us. And He and His angels are there to help and assist us along our way as imperfect as we are.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [51:06](#)

So, maybe I'm messed up, but I've never wanted my heroes to be marble statues that have no flaws. I've always loved the fact that Mary Whitmer was overwhelmed having Joseph Smith, that maybe Joseph Smith wasn't the best house guest. Maybe that's

the message you get from that story or that Martin Harris wasn't perfect when he walked out to have that witness experience and deliberately withdrew because he wasn't. That the Lord saw each of these people in their weakness and not only saw their weakness, but saw their potential. He not only saw them for what they were, but for what they could be, and that he lifted them up and made them into something bigger than they were. That to me is just really, really encouraging.

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [51:50](#) And like I said, I sincerely 100% believe that I've walked in places where angels have stood. And I love that. I mean, I want to be part of a sacred story. I want there to be miracles because ultimately that means that as confusing as life is, there's a higher purpose and meaning to it. And that's one of those things that gets me out of bed every day and helps make it through the day.
- Hank Smith: [52:14](#) Dr. Griffiths Casey, thank you so much for joining us today. John, I can't say enough about the experiences we get to have with these incredible minds.
- John Bytheway: [52:25](#) Yeah. And I want to go back and listen to Casey again. I'll fast forward through me, but I want to hear Casey again, on some of those wonderful things you said about translation. It was really great. Thank you so much.
- Hank Smith: [52:38](#) Yes, I was so touched. Thank you.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [52:40](#) Thanks for having me. Yeah, it's great to be here.
- Hank Smith: [52:43](#) Thank you to all of you who stayed with us today and who listened to the podcast episode. We're especially grateful to Steve and Shannon Sorenson who are our producers, along with our production team Lisa Spice and David Perry. And I also need to throw out a thank you to my teaching assistant, Maddie Flinders for some of the help she gave me. Maddie served her mission back in the New York sites. And so, I was texting her this morning, saying, "Hey, Maddie help me out with a couple of these stories." So, thank you to Maddie. So, my friends join us on our next episode of Follow Him. We'll be back with another of, one of the church's great minds and some of the churches just minds, me and John. Some of the churches minds. Join us next time. Thank you so much.