

EPISODE 16 • PART II

Dr. Susan Easton Black



D&C 37-40

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| John Bytheway: | 00:02 | Welcome to Part II of this week's podcast. |
| Dr. Susan Easto...: | 00:06 | Yeah. Well, I just wanted to say that Section 39 and 40, if you were to look at all the Doctrine and Covenants, these are the only sections where they're back-to-back given to the same man. |
| John Bytheway: | 00:17 | Really? |
| Dr. Susan Easto...: | 00:18 | So you look and then as you look at it given to the same man, it's given to a man named James Covill, that if we were to look at the 135 individuals mentioned by name in the Doctrine and Covenants that were contemporaries with Joseph Smith, he's the one man we know the least about. And so you go, are you kidding me? Here's the man, he gets two Sections in the Doctrine and Covenants. We waffle on being able to say his birth and death. We can't name who he's married to, so just even vital statistics. And although the section starts out introduction saying he was 40 years a Baptist Preacher, we've got other scholars that say, "Oh no, no. I know for sure he is a Methodist." |
| Dr. Susan Easto...: | 01:11 | And so what we've got is we've got one man who no doubt will ultimately join the Church after Section 39 as we read Section 40. But we really can't tell much about him. But what we do know is that he sure knows a lot about Christ, right? I think I'd hate to do a Bible bash with him. I think he could tell us about Bethlehem, Garden Tomb. He's got it down, but in reality, I think Section 39 and 40 are probably the saddest sections in the whole Doctrine and Covenants because of who they're given to and his response. |
| John Bytheway: | 01:57 | I noticed this too, that we don't even know how to spell his name. Because in my 2013 Edition, I've got Covell, C-O-V-E-L, but I picked up my quad because I used him in a PowerPoint and I've got C-O-V-I-L-L. And that's what it is in the earlier... And then I noticed the earlier version has him who had been a |

Baptist minister, and my newest version says who had been a Methodist minister.

- Dr. Susan Easto...: 02:24 Right. If you're looking for a man that's got question marks all over him, he's your guy.
- John Bytheway: 02:30 And maybe it's because he came and went so quick.
- Dr. Susan Easto...: 02:33 What I find on these two sections, if we were... The first Section says, "Wow, the Lord knows who he is." Even though we can't really know who he is, right? The Lord knows who he is. So I like that. The Lord knows who he is. He tells him literally, "Hey, your deliverance has finally come. You've been a preacher all these years and lucky you, guess what? You're about to be blessed. All you have to do is repent and be baptized." And it seems so simple. And then the promises, "You're going to get greater blessings from heaven than you've ever known."
- Hank Smith: 03:13 Oh, wow.
- Dr. Susan Easto...: 03:14 And you'd go, wow, he is such a lucky guy. And what's going to be his blessing? He's called to preach the gospel to recover the House of Israel. And he is called as a missionary basically to go to the Ohio's. He gets to be a missionary. And then he's told in this revelation that he is to cry with a loud voice that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and to say, "Hosannah, bless it is the name of the most high God." In other words, do you see what he's become? It's like, he's told, "You get baptized, buddy and I tell you what's going to happen to you, we're going to take all that knowledge you know about the Savior's teachings. We're going to send you on a mission, and you're going to prepare the way of the Lord. And those riches of eternities, right? That Hank was talking about, you're you're going to receive. It's just waiting right out there for you."
- Dr. Susan Easto...: 04:06 It's almost like getting a patriarchal blessing, where he can see the course. You have two paths to take in life and he can, like the, I don't know, Alice in Wonderland [inaudible 00:04:19], sees the Cheshire cat. "What do you think?" And the Cheshire cat goes, "Hey, it just doesn't matter. Any path is going to get you there." But in this case, and James Covill, the path he chooses, he can choose greater blessings. And notice he's an older man. If he's been a preacher 20 years, he's got to be, what? Going into his 60s or later, right? It's like, he's told, "Be baptized and you get to be a senior missionary. And that's going to be your great blessing." He's not told, "You're going to get all this wealth we've been talking about."

Hank Smith: 04:54 I often refer to James Covill as “the great might have been,” right? What he could have been, he could have been for the church with all his Bible knowledge and experience. We might be talking about James Covill University here in Provo. We might be talking... Oh, he could have been so much. There's an old story that will interest our younger readers. There was a man in the 1980s who played college basketball at the University of Maryland. All of his stats were better than Michael Jordan. He was better than Michael Jordan in every way. In fact, Michael Jordan went third in his draft. This man went second in his draft. Yet he never won an NBA basketball game because the night he was drafted, he tried drugs for the first time and he died. His name was Len Bias. You remember that name, John?

Dr. Susan Easto...: 05:46 Mm-hm (affirmative).

Hank Smith: 05:47 His name was Len Bias. He had better stats across the board than Michael Jordan. And yet, because of that one choice, like you said, he had some choices in front of him. He made that choice. He was drafted by the Boston Celtics, second in the draft and ended up going into cardiac arrest because of those drugs he had tried for the first time.

John Bytheway: 06:09 Wow.

Hank Smith: 06:10 And I compare him to James Covill, the great might have been. Right? Oh, what could have been, right? With James Covill? What could have been with Len Bias? And then we ask our younger listeners, “Do you want to be a Could Have Been, right? You don't want to end up as a, “Oh, the Great Could Have Been” because of your choices.

John Bytheway: 06:34 I would love my own Section in the Doctrine and Covenants. [crosstalk 00:06:38]-

Hank Smith: 06:38 Especially if it sounds like this. Right?

Dr. Susan Easto...: 06:40 Okay. But when I think of him, I sing that song, “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.” And then there's a part of the song that says, “Those who reject this glad message shall never such happiness know.” And I think that about James Covill. He's right at his end and you think, trust the journey.

Hank Smith: 07:04 Right. Oh.

Dr. Susan Easto...: 07:05 Press forward, press forward. You're getting towards at least the last third of not less of your life. It's out there. The Lord has

promised you all these blessings because of your faithfulness. And they did not go. So I don't know if I could be a little bit personal, but I was teaching at BYU, I loved it. I thought I was at the top of my game. Retirement was a choice. Right? And I taught, I don't know, not quite 1,000 students a semester. Those big pit rooms with kids all over and loved what I was doing. Then the question was, could I give it up and sacrifice and perhaps not have the same influence or the same numbers and go on a mission?

Dr. Susan Easto...: 07:49 And as I thought about it, I tried to rationalize. There were still more books to write, they're all these things and opportunities everywhere. And then I started thinking about it and I go, "Well, what would I miss if I didn't accept that first mission call? And I go, "You know what I'd miss, I'd miss my mission. I'd miss the Senior Mission." And I can now look back and COVID hit pretty much on middle of our fourth and we're all kind of... I can now look back and COVID hit pretty much on middle of our fourth and we're all kind of locked down, right? Not even the gym wanted me.

Dr. Susan Easto...: 08:33 So I'd say, what would I have missed? Oh, the friends I made, the people that entered baptismal waters, the opportunity to speak. I can remember being introduced, George and I, in St. George. And the man, the Visitor Center Director stood up and he goes, "I think every seat in the building is taken in this Stake Center." And he goes, "Except the ones in the restroom." And somebody yelled out, "Even those are taken too." Okay. I would have missed that. So I look at James Covill and I think, what could he have been? And maybe you're right. Maybe a university would be named after the man. He's like Sidney Rigdon, they both were preachers, and both knew the Bible probably backwards and forwards better than me, but he missed the chance.

Hank Smith: 09:28 He missed it.

John Bytheway: 09:30 There's that little couplet of all the words of-

Hank Smith: 09:34 President Monson loved these ones.

John Bytheway: 09:35 "Of all the words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, it might have been." Is that the one?

Dr. Susan Easto...: 09:40 It might have been.

Hank Smith: 09:40 That's it, that's it.

- John Bytheway: 09:42 Yeah. Ooh. And also I think about one of my favorite quotations of President Benson that, "Men and women who turn their lives over to God will discover that he can make a lot more out of their lives than they can." You don't sacrifice anything when you're giving your life to God, he'll make a lot more out of you than you could by yourself. And boy, these promises that he had here. Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 10:03 President Hinckley would say, "What you think at first is a sacrifice will turn out being an investment, right? Which will pay you dividends for years to come." Verse 11 reminds me so much of President Nelson today. "I have prepared thee for a greater work, preaching the gospel and recovering the house of Israel." Is that not a 2021 Russell M. Nelson message? And he said to the youth today, "You have a chance to be a part of it." Almost like you are James Covill. "You have a chance to be a part of this if you choose. If you choose." Right?
- Dr. Susan Easto...: 10:39 Yeah. It comes down to choice. The blessings come from the choice to follow the Lord. It's just that simple. It won't always be convenient. Right? And it sure wasn't for him. I think if you go to Section 40, he rejected the opportunity. Although notice it keeps saying, he made the covenants and he broke those covenants. Oh, you don't want to do that. But I think it's like, do we bash him? I'd say no, because notice how the Lord says, "Hey, I know him. He's..." In other words, it's in the Lord's hand. We don't need to be judgmental, but we sure can feel sorry for the man.
- John Bytheway: 11:22 This was kind of shocking to me because another thing the 2013 Edition did was put an exact date on Section 40. Whereas before I think it just said January 1831. Now it says Section 39 was January 5th and Section 40 was January 6th. This happened in one day?
- Dr. Susan Easto...: 11:42 In one day. And if you look at, here's the General Conference, right? The third General Conference, and you get it on the 2nd of January. So three days later, here's Covill getting this amazing call. And then like you say, John, the next day, wow, he's rejected. Perhaps some of us have seen missions where you worked so hard and you share the gospel and you're gathering Israel, and they come into the Church. And then the next thing you hear about them, they've stopped coming. And I have had people say to me, "Hey, they're leaving the Church because they have so many questions." George and I like to say, "We're staying because we've found so many answers. So what's up with these guys?" You got to work harder to know what's true.

Hank Smith:	12:34	Yeah. I am appreciating these sections of the Doctrine and Covenants more and more just because I think they're so applicable to today. Someone might ask, why did James Covill fall away? Well, the Lord flat out tells us in Section 40 verse two, "Here's what pulls people away. Satan tempted him, fear of persecution and the cares of the world caused him to reject the word." This is applicable to everyone listening.
John Bytheway:	13:00	And it gives me a question too, because I had done some reading on this and I'm sure that our guests will know, was he baptized or not? And it says, if he made a covenant, was that the covenant it refers to?
Dr. Susan Easto...:	13:14	Right. And in other words, I've seen it like you have, depending on which historian is writing about it. No contemporary writes about it. So it's all of us that have muddied the water. But it seems to me when it says covenant, how do you make covenants? But you participate in ordinance such as you are and it's a baptism.
Hank Smith:	13:36	In verse 17, the Lord says to James Covill, "Lay too with your might and call faithful labors into my vineyard that it may be pruned for this last time." And I thought exactly of Jacob, Chapter five, and we've mentioned this before on the podcast, where they go call the servants. And there's just such an interesting word. In Jacob 5, verse 70, it says, "The servant did as the Lord commanded him and brought the servants and they were <i>few</i> ." And that's just not the word that you think is going to... Right? That they were amazing. They were numerous.
John Bytheway:	14:11	Powerful.
Hank Smith:	14:11	Powerful. Nope. They were few. The Lord tells us in Section 121, why is it just a few? And it's the same reasoning as Section 40.
John Bytheway:	14:21	Hm. [crosstalk 00:14:21].
Hank Smith:	14:21	"Many are called, but few are chosen. Why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world." So to you both, what does that mean? The cares of the world or the fear of persecution, or the things of this world? What is that to you? What should we be watching out for?
Dr. Susan Easto...:	14:43	Well, I don't know. I guess I could say that being a senior missionary, right? As James Covill would have done, maybe he didn't think he could find a good doctor in Ohio. It's like when

people talk about, "Hey, I've got this latest illness," or maybe he's got family surrounding him. Right? Leave those grandkids. I think they can all leave their kids as the grandkids. Right? And maybe they have their house, their friends, things they've known. And do they have the confidence to really trust in the Lord that he'll care for them and care for their loved ones while they're gone and that things will work out?

- Dr. Susan Easto...: 15:28 In other words, the Lord's in charge. I think the cares of the world is when we try to micromanage our lives and think we can do a better job. I'm in charge here. And it's like, you turn your lives over to the Lord and the opportunities are just amazing that you would never have imagined would come your way.
- Hank Smith: 15:48 Yeah. You say it exactly as the Lord does in verse 10 of Section 39, "A blessing so great-
- Dr. Susan Easto...: 15:53 So great.
- Hank Smith: 15:53 ... as you never have known. And the question is, Susan, do you believe Him? Right? Do you believe Him?
- Dr. Susan Easto...: 15:59 Oh, absolutely.
- Hank Smith: 16:02 Do you believe Him?
- Dr. Susan Easto...: 16:04 You have to believe the Lord, right? You don't second guess, you don't just suppose. Why would he say it if it were not true?
- Hank Smith: 16:12 Yep. Oh, but that's the question between the cares of this world and the promises of the Lord, which one are you going to choose? And it seems so obvious as we sit and talk, but in real life, it's a hard choice.
- Dr. Susan Easto...: 16:26 It's a hard choice.
- John Bytheway: 16:29 Hank, when you asked that question, I thought of Section 1. Sometimes I'll tell my students, "Hey, if you just want something that sounds like an awesome Conference talk, just go open Section 1. And in verse 16, this kind of hints at cares of the world. "They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way after the image of his own god whose image is in the likeness of the world. I want to be like the world and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon." But I want to follow what the world's doing, and when I see cares of the world there, I think the world is so fickle. It's going to be this, and then it's

going to be that, and then it's going to be this. And there's such a better foundation to build on.

- Hank Smith: 17:15 It's the Indiana Jones moment, remember where he asked to step out into the canyon knowing that the Lord's going to... Well, he doesn't. In the analogy, he knows that he's going to be caught. Something's going to happen. The cares of the world also come up in the parable of the sower where the Lord says, "The ground is good but there are so many weeds, right? There are so many thorns that the word or the gospel can't grow." And I wonder if that's me, that I love the gospel and the soil is good, but I've just got so many other things going on, Susan. I just can't give it the time. I've got my Netflix shows and I've got-
- Dr. Susan Easto...: 18:00 Life gets complicated.
- Hank Smith: 18:02 Yeah. I've got so much going on. And that's the soil that scares me probably the most is the one that the word gets choked out because there's just not enough room for it. That scares me that I don't make room.
- Dr. Susan Easto...: 18:16 Right. You do see that today that people have so much going on, Sunday just becomes, quote, 'the family day' as opposed to the Lord's day.
- John Bytheway: 18:25 I think that when I was a Bishop, when I tried to add up everything I was supposed to do, I thought there's not enough hours in a day. And I was so grateful I stumbled upon something that President Henry B. Eyring said, he said, "You may see so much that you have to do." And I know I'm switching gears here a little bit, but maybe I have so much to do, good things even, but President Eyring said, "Sometimes you may even be bitter." And he said, "The question to ask is just, what should I do next?" And that helped me so much that I can't do all of it. I simply can't. So heavenly father, what do I do next? That was a great blessing to me. And I think for all of us in the gospel, there is so much than what are the best things. What are the most important things? And maybe these sections help us answer that.
- Hank Smith: 19:22 I think you're exactly right, John. There's an interesting change of verbiage in verse eight of Section 39, "Verily I say unto thee, thine heart," this is to James Covill, "Thine heart is now right before me." And then if you go to Section 40 and you look at verse one-
- John Bytheway: 19:36 "And then at this time..." I saw this at this time in verse two.

Dr. Susan Easto...:	19:40	[crosstalk 00:19:40] qualifies.
Hank Smith:	19:41	Yeah. And then he says in Section 40 verse one-
John Bytheway:	19:44	But tomorrow on January 6th...
Dr. Susan Easto...:	19:46	Oops.
Hank Smith:	19:47	Wait, listen to this language. "The heart of my servant, James Covill..." This is Section 40, verse one, "Was right before me. For he covenanted with me that he would obey my word." This is the power of agency. Isn't it?
Dr. Susan Easto...:	20:01	And see how quick you can change.
Hank Smith:	20:02	I remember one time I came out of a lesson on David--David and Bathsheba. I came out of the lesson and I was thinking to myself, well, how could David do that? How could David fall? I just think, "Oh David, what were you thinking?" And another man came out of the same lesson. He said, "Did that lesson scare you as much as it scared me?" And I, of course, was not scared at all. And so I went, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. What do you mean?" And he said, "If someone like David can fall, doesn't that scare you?" These Sections maybe are a good warning to all of us to keep our heart right.
Dr. Susan Easto...:	20:42	Keep our covenants. Stay on the covenant path. Like President Nelson says, "Stay on the covenant path."
John Bytheway:	20:47	That and President Nelson's emphasis on the work of salvation, the gathering of Israel is, it's so fun to see how prevalent these are here in these Sections and how it is still the great work. As it says there, "a greater work," in verse 11, the youth theme for this year is section 64 verse 33 about, "By small and simple things, great things come to pass." You're doing a great work and it's still the same work. We're still gathering Israel on both sides of the veil.
Hank Smith:	21:16	Susan, I have a question for you. It looks like to me, Section 40 is our last New York Section. In Section 41, we begin a kind of a new period in the Church. The Kirtland-
John Bytheway:	21:27	They actually went to the Ohio.
Hank Smith:	21:29	They actually left this time.
Dr. Susan Easto...:	21:30	They went, yes.

Hank Smith:	21:32	What does New York, even though we only spent 10 months there as a church, what is New York to our history? Right? As we shut the door on New York, what would you say to our history New York is? You love these places so much. I know you do. And I know you look forward-
Dr. Susan Easto...:	21:48	Oh, I do.
Hank Smith:	21:49	... to Nauvoo, right?
Dr. Susan Easto...:	21:50	I do.
Hank Smith:	21:50	Nauvoo is your home. But as we bid goodbye to New York, what should we remember? What should we take with us?
Dr. Susan Easto...:	21:58	All right. Well, New York is always called the "Cradle of the Restoration." That's just where it begins. When we say goodbye to New York, we say goodbye to the Sacred Grove. We say goodbye to the home where Joseph taught his family nightly truths he had learned from the Angel Moroni. We say goodbye to the hill where Joseph got the plates from Angel Moroni. We say goodbye to the... well, to Alvin Smith, who's buried there, to the Grandin Bookstore Printing Press, where the Book of Mormon comes off. We say goodbye to the Whitmer Farm, where you get the 20 revelations, three witnesses to the Book of Mormon see the Angel Moroni, the organization, the Church, the three Conferences of the Church. New York was the cradle. New York was the foundation. And now we move on to Ohio to get the law and the power, the endowed power from on high.
Hank Smith:	23:04	Yeah. And Emma's saying goodbye to her family in Pennsylvania.
Dr. Susan Easto...:	23:08	Emma's saying goodbye to her family.
Hank Smith:	23:10	I think between Section 40 and 41, you just got to pause and just see the end of a beautiful era and know that you're moving onto...
Dr. Susan Easto...:	23:19	A beautiful beginning.
Hank Smith:	23:20	Yeah. You're moving onto something, even as you said, when you retired from BYU, you decided to close the door on that period but the Lord opened a door to another period of life-
Dr. Susan Easto...:	23:33	[crosstalk 00:23:33].

Hank Smith:	23:33	... that is absolutely beautiful. Susan, you are a historian and a scholar. You know Church History as well as anyone on the planet today. You have studied the ins and outs of Church History, its ups and downs. I don't know if anybody knows the life of Joseph Smith as well as you do. And here you are a faithful believer. I would love to know, I think our listeners would love to know, what keeps you on the covenant path and what are your feelings? What are your personal feelings towards Joseph Smith and his contemporaries and the Restoration?
Dr. Susan Easto...:	24:09	One of the things that really helped me on staying on a covenant path has that when I was young, but mind you, I look the same. And I'm sure all my students would tell you that, right?
Hank Smith:	24:21	Yes.
Dr. Susan Easto...:	24:22	But okay, when I was young, I, like many, had questions about the Church, but not doubts. And there's a difference between a question and a doubt. But I decided to take an old missionary journal. And I wrote down all my questions and literally filled it. Rather than throwing the baby out with the bath water, right? Because of questions, I decided to search to find the answers. And every Christmas I get out that old notebook now, what? 40 years old plus, and I go through to see how many questions I've been able to answer. And I got to be in the 80th percentile now. I am so glad I stayed and that none of the questions blew me out of the water.
Dr. Susan Easto...:	25:14	And none of the questions moved from a question to a doubt. And what keeps me on the covenant path? Oh, wow, I'm closer to eternity than either of you two. And I've got, oh gosh, at least half of my loved ones have already passed through the veil. And wow, I just can hardly wait to meet them. And I... Okay, sorry. I don't want to meet them having not made it to the end of the row. And you just, you can't stop off along the trail like say a James Covill. I want to make sure that patriarchal blessings are fulfilled. That I make it to the end.
Dr. Susan Easto...:	26:07	And then last, my feelings about Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith was a prophet. And can you imagine, I've got to spend a lifetime studying about a man that was a prophet. And it's not like I can name every blade of grass he stepped on, but I'm not through. It's not a good day for me if I haven't written something. And when you write something, you know your exact... you know you got it. I am so grateful for the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Because of Joseph Smith and the ordinances that were restored to the Church, I'm sealed to my family for all time and eternity. And for that, even if that were it... Because I know Joseph, I've been able to know more about Jesus Christ.

Dr. Susan Easto...: 27:04 And I want to thank you two, what you're doing for the world literally at large is phenomenal. And although we're just friends sitting and talking, wow, who's to say, but this conversation will make a difference. Maybe even a big difference in someone that we will never have an opportunity to meet in this life. But if we keep our covenants, we'll somehow be together in the next life. And perhaps I'll say, "I remember when you were sitting with Hank Smith and John Bytheway, and you were just talking, but John said something or Hank said something, or maybe I said something and their lives will be better."

Dr. Susan Easto...: 27:50 So trust the covenant path, gather out Israel wherever you can. Don't be embarrassed. You have the truth, share it. It's an amazing message. And thank you again for allowing me to participate.

Hank Smith: 28:07 Oh, absolutely. Dr. Susan Easton Black, thank you. Thank you for your time.

Dr. Susan Easto...: 28:12 You're welcome.

Hank Smith: 28:13 Thank you for being with us. John, every time... I know I say this every week, John, but every time I think, oh, those sections of the Doctrine and Covenants will never be the same to me, but I can say right now, Sections 37 through 40, I'll never look at them the same. They've become so much more personal.

John Bytheway: 28:30 What an honor. I took a lot of notes and I really don't want it to end. I want more notes. And I hope we can have you on again.

Dr. Susan Easto...: 28:41 Thank you. I'd love to.

John Bytheway: 28:42 Because it's been such a fun thing. I think one of the things Hank told me is that some of the people feel like, what did you say, Hank? That they just ran into a bunch of people talking in the hall, yeah. And I look forward to this of just talking with people that I love and respect about wonderful ideas and truths that I also love and respect. And it always lifts me up. Thank you so much for being with us today.

Hank Smith: 29:09 Thank you so much to Dr. Susan Easton Black. Thank you to all of you who listen. We're grateful for your kindness, your

support to us. We're thankful to our producers, Steve and Shannon Sorensen, and our production team, David Perry, Lisa Spice, Jamie Nelson, Will Staughton, and Kyle Nelson. And we'll see you next time on the next episode of followHIM.