

followHim: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith and John Bytheway

EPISODE 3, PART 1: JOSEPH SMITH HISTORY 1:27-65

INTRODUCTION

Hank Smith

(00:02)

Welcome to Follow Him, 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 followHIM.

Hank Smith

(00:22)

Hello, my friends. Welcome to our third episode of followHim, a podcast devoted to helping individuals and families with their *Come, Follow Me* study. My name is Hank Smith. I'm here with my co-host, John Bytheway. Welcome, John.

John Bytheway

(00:37)

I've got my pencil in my hand ready this time because I took so many notes the last couple of times.

Hank Smith
(00:43)

[crosstalk 00:00:43]-

John Bytheway
(00:43)
So I'm ready.

Hank Smith
(00:44)

Today we are going to study the second half of Joseph Smith-History. And I looked through my list of friends and people who owe me favors, and I found the exact person I want to talk to about this. We're going to interview today one of the Church's foremost experts on this part of this section of Church History--the 1820s. His name is Dr. Mike MacKay. Welcome, Mike.

Dr. Michael MacKay
(01:09)
Thank you.

Hank Smith
(01:09)

One of the kindest, most faithful people you will ever meet. And he is brilliant. I know Mike, you worked at the Joseph Smith Papers Project, right?

[2021. *Josephsmithpapers.Org*. <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/articles/journals-volume-1-1832-1839>.]

Dr. Michael MacKay
(01:19)
Yeah.

Hank Smith
(01:20)

How long did you do that?

Dr. Michael MacKay
(01:21)

A little over three years, the earliest period of Joseph Smith's revelatory production is what I worked on at the Joseph Smith Papers.

Hank Smith

(01:29)

The book that got me really hooked on Dr. MacKay was a book called *From Darkness Unto Light*.

[MacKay, Michael Hubbard. n.d. *From Darkness Unto Light*. 1st ed. Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, BYU, Provo, UT.].

He wrote that with Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat, who's also going to be one of our guests soon. Joseph Smith's Seer Stones was another book. And I've recommended that to many students who say, "I want to know more about seer stones." I'll say, well, there is a book for you, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*.

[MacKay, Michael Hubbard, and Nicholas J. Frederick. 2021. *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*. 1st ed. Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, BYU.].

THE STORY OF THE RESTORATION CAN CHANGE LIVES IN MINUTES

Dr. Michael MacKay

(01:48)

That's just one of the ways that God reveals his word to his prophets. I was so interested in that, like how does a single item become the mechanism that brings forth God's word? And so I'm really interested in that. I'm especially interested in his revelations, but can you imagine the revelation that's being produced in the Restoration? So prolific. In part, it's because you've read God's word, and it works within you, and you want to be a part of it. You want to find a way to follow God more. When I read these things, it's not like a normal book. You're talking about something that sometimes, even in its most dull moments, it has the ability to really inspire and change our lives in a matter of minutes, make us into better people, which I just don't find other things in my life that enables me to change so readily than these God revealed in the Restoration.

John Bytheway

(02:43)

I was thinking of the words of one of the verses of the "Spirit of God," like a fire is burning, and we get used to singing it. But think about what we're singing, "the visions and blessings of old are returning, and angels are coming to visit the earth."

[Phelps, William W. 2021. "The Spirit Of God". *Churchofjesuschrist.Org*.
<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/music/library/hymns/the-spirit-of-god?lang=eng>].

It's happening. And that's what's happening in this time period, especially right here.

JOSEPH SMITH AGES 15-18

Hank Smith
(03:02)

I have my scriptures open to Joseph Smith—History, and the manual has a starting out around verse 27. Now, our last discussion we had with Dr. Harper, we left off with the First Vision. Joseph says in verse 27 that he just “pursued his common vocations in life” until 1823. So it's been three years since he's had any sort of experience that he's going to record for us.

Dr. Michael MacKay
(03:31)

So Joseph Smith during those years is 15 to 18. Those of you who have a 15- to 18-year-old, or you are a 15- to 18-year-old, you can imagine the things that you're interested in. It's a formative time of your life where you're wondering what to do. You're following the influence of your parents and the environment around you. And you're hoping to kind of make something of yourself, it's times in which you're feeling around, and you're trying to figure out the boundaries of your life. And I think this is exactly what Joseph's doing. Probably the microscope that you should put on this period is we always see Joseph as the Latter-day Saint prophet. At this point in our study, this isn't a Latter-day Saint prophet. This is an individual who is not a Latter-day Saint, has not had the experiences that we usually place on him.

Dr. Michael MacKay
(04:23)

And so you kind of get to see what does . . . Joseph Smith does before he's the Joseph Smith that we know, and you get to see him trying to find boundaries. Boundaries are good for everybody. And so imagine him groping around trying to figure out what his boundaries are. And you literally get almost six years of him doing this, especially these three years between the first vision and the first time he sees Moroni. This is Joseph Smith saying it in his own words. He says, "Mingling with all kinds of society, I frequently fell into many foolish errors and displayed the weaknesses of youth and the follies of human nature" (JSH 1:28) which I don't know that he's totally regretting this. He's actually saying, "You know what? This is how I figured out who I was. I worked to know the boundaries.

Dr. Michael MacKay
(05:12)

It's not like I tried to breach them and constantly knock down the boundaries. I was trying to find out the appropriate way to be a good person. And in the process, yeah, I made some missteps, but he does say they weren't too bad.

Hank Smith
(05:26)

When you said ages 15 through 18, I thought of my judgment day. When that part comes up on the video screen, I will be like, "Fast forward, fast, forward, fast forward that. You got to skip that." Right?

Dr. Michael MacKay

(05:35)

Like one of the passages Joseph Smith says, he says, "I fell into jovial company" (JSH 1:28), Right? And I think, well, I've been trying to fall into jovial company my whole life. These people are fun.

John Bytheway

(05:46)

Hank Smith is a pretty jovial person.

Hank Smith

(05:49)

[crosstalk 00:05:49]

--say, "Don't suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins" (JSH 1:28). I was so impressed when Dr. Harper mentioned this, and I want to see what you think about this, Mike. He talked about how this certain account that we have here was written in the late 1830s and how they're going through some of the most severe persecution. Maybe the hardest year of his life is 1838 into 1839. Liberty jail, seeing his family and friends all being kicked out of the State of Missouri. And he mentions in verse 28 that he was "being persecuted by those who all ought to have been his friends." And if they really think he's deluded, why didn't they come to reclaim him "in a proper and affectionate manner?" What do you think about that idea of his current circumstances of the late 1830s influencing this storytelling?

Dr. Michael MacKay

(06:37)

I usually think it's defensive. I don't think he's taking the offense. You never hear him say names. You never have him identify specific people. And in reality, he's gone through this very serious tough time. You have hundreds of people that leave after this economic crisis and this troubled time in the Church. And so this time period, he actually has the most ammunition to fire at people who are, in many cases, demonstratively lying about him. And when they're not lying, they're misinterpreting him.

Hank Smith

(07:12)

How quick do I on social media, "Oh yeah, let's see if I can hint at who's really bugging me here, who's really treating me badly." To me, that was one of the most enlightening ideas is when we read what Joseph Smith writes, we have to take into account his current circumstances.

John Bytheway

(07:30)

Do you know what I like here too, is Elder Neil L. Andersen talked about, talked those who actually knew Joseph. And he says in a couple of places here, "A disposition to commit such sins was never in my nature. And at the very bottom, this will not seem very strange to anyone who recollects my youth and is acquainted with my native cheery temperament."

[Anderson, Neil L. 2021. "Joseph Smith". *Churchofjesuschrist.Org*.
<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2014/10/joseph-smith?lang=eng.>]

I love that phrase, but he's talking about well, people know me, the people that know me, know me. I like what you said, Mike, about that he's a gentleman here, and the way he described that it really gives us an insight into his disposition and character there.

Hank Smith
(08:06)

Yeah. I like that, John. I like that idea of, if you want to get to know Joseph Smith, let's read his own words and those who knew him best. Let's get back, Mike. What do you think when he says, "I was guilty of levity?" (JSH 1:28). I don't want to spend too much time on these, what he sees as his sins. But when he says he's guilty of levity, I'm like, "Oh, me too, brother, me too."

Dr. Michael MacKay
(08:25)

There could be different readings of this. I looked up in the 1828 dictionary what it meant.

["Websters Dictionary 1828 - Webster's Dictionary 1828 - Levity". 2021. *Websters Dictionary 1828*.
<http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/levity.>]

But if I were to read it straight out of its context in the sentence, I would say something like, "lightheartedness." I think that's probably true of Joseph throughout his life. He's guilty of lightheartedness. And I think sometimes this is that character trait that we love about Joseph is he is relatable. He isn't distanced. I don't imagine him distanced and not approachable. You see him wrestling. You see him guilty of levity. I think he says this, and I would imagine even in 1839, as a 34-year-old, he still feels guilty of this. Just to be frank, I love Joseph. And this is part of the reason is you get a real person struggling with life.

Dr. Michael MacKay
(09:10)

But quite frankly, enjoying the patterns of joy that come with life also not being able to be so downtrodden by economic disaster, downtrodden by friends who are mean, or frankly violent, which happens throughout his life. He seems to be able to overcome that. So, here's a character trait that he can call a sin, and I'll call what it looks like to be a saintly man.

Hank Smith
(09:36)

I remember someone visited my class at BYU and said, "You don't talk like a professor." And I was like, "Oh, you're right."

Dr. Michael MacKay

(09:42)

Thank you very much.

Hank Smith

(09:43)

Yeah. All right. So he says, "I often felt condemned for my weakness and imperfections" (JSH 1:29). I'm going to let you tell the story here, Mike, tell me what happens next. It's been three years since the First Vision. What does he decide to do?

SEER STONES AND CULTURAL SPIRITUALITY

Dr. Michael MacKay

(09:57)

He associates some of this with falling into the norms of society. He's apparently gone to some revivals, and he's also working in manual labor. So he's digging wells, and he participates in even the folklore of the day, which seems to be very Christian. Willard Chase, the conjoining farm next to theirs, accuses him of being a money digger. And what he doesn't mention is that he's a devout Methodist, and he too was participating in these kinds of cultural activities. Quite frankly, they are representative of their kind of spirituality, too, like reaching out for supernatural experiences that could be framed as spiritual or discovering something and giving credit to God or a supernatural agent. And so these are things that he participates in, that's for sure.

Hank Smith

(10:45)

So you said he was out digging wells. That's where he finds his first seer stone. How do I explain that to my daughter? And you've already gotten into that a little bit, that it's a different time and that this idea of seer stones and magic culture is very much a part of the way they've experienced religion. Why would he even notice a seer stone? Why would that be something that he would be on his mind at all?

Dr. Michael MacKay

(11:06)

I think this is an extremely relevant question for understanding Joseph and Revelation. When I go to the temple, the temple is a place that I find my most religious environment and a place where I meet God, and it's sacred to me. But it's just plaster and boards and even gold statues, right? So there's this very material world that is so caught up with my communication with God. I go in there, and there's a quiet, sacred environment. And I'm actually the one that created it into a sacred environment. We are as a community, and yet it's still just a building. And so you think

about this, and it becomes relevant when you think about like in ancient scripture, whether it's the stones that Mosiah the Second had, or it's this two stones we call the Urim and Thummim for the High Priests in the Bible, you have a tangible reality that represents something deeper.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(11:59)

The reality of the tangibility isn't as deep as what you really feel and what you know, but it's a good representation. And it allows us to communicate about it. I often struggle, so what's the most spiritual experience you've had? Well, if I tell you about it, then it actually isn't as good as it was. So it's this struggle. Joseph called it the "prison of language."

[Bushman, Richard. 2021. "The Little, Narrow, Prison Of Language: The Rhetoric Of Revelation". *Scholarship @ Claremont*. https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgu_fac_pub/423/.]

And the prison of language can often be bridged with something physical. There were items in the Old Testament, there were items in the New Testament. There are all kinds of items, whether the words that appeared on the Liahona. And so the reality that comes forth with Joseph, let's be honest, it could have just been a rock, and it could just be a building, but sacredness is built upon and represented by the material world whether we like it or not. Joseph was just very good at this. He realized how it could happen.

Hank Smith

(12:57)

And I think God speaks to us through our language, right? And this is part of his language. So how was he when he finds this first seer stone? Is that before Moroni, right?

Dr. Michael MacKay

(13:09)

1822 is the marker. There are arguments that he found one as early as 1819, but they're hard to argue that. So there's a debate about when he finds them, but he has these two. One he finds culturally through his neighbor, and he goes to the Great Lakes, and he finds it on the shores. And then he finds another one digging in a hole next to his property, on the Chases' property. And so now you get this kind of device that communicates for God, but it becomes very powerful. Think about all of the representations of God's word that's more sure. So how do you make God's word absolutely sure? Well, God writes it in stone tablets for Moses, right? He puts the words on the stones. And now that's even an American idiom. It's written in stone. And so this security of God's word being inscribed in stone this is not just a metaphor; it's Joseph's reality of revelation.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(14:07)

And so this becomes a very sound way for God to communicate with him. God could have done it . . . You want to know the very most convincing way to translate the Book of Mormon? God's hands break through the veil and hands Joseph 600 pages of the Book of Mormon already

translated by God, right? He's got it. He's like, "Yes, I got it." But the point is the whole process, and the experience of having God reveal the word to him is essential, essential part of the foundation of the Restoration.

Hank Smith

(14:39)

So Joseph Smith and others like him would say, "Okay, I've got this seer stone. I can find buried treasure. I can find things that maybe native Americans have left or Spanish explorers." Is that the idea? Is that I'm going to go, or I can find a lost cow. Right? You lost your cow, it wandered off, I can find it.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(14:58)

Yeah. Within the Palmyra newspapers, there are legitimate discoveries within the soil in the area. And even there are legitimate stories of finding a pot that's associated with the Smith family. And so this isn't abnormal like there are people finding buried native American items, and there's the legendary silver that was placed there by the Spanish. And so you have this kind of common agrarian practice that's associated with spirituality, supernaturalness. And they are inevitably right in the middle of that.

Hank Smith

(15:32)

Right. This is their world. By 1826, dad and Joseph were saying, "Maybe this is going to be not exactly what we thought." He's going to use this for more spiritual--

John Bytheway:

(15:43)

[crosstalk 00:15:43]-

Dr. Michael MacKay

(15:43)

Imagine, like in your own world, there are things, superstitions, and premonitions, and we try to distinguish those from spirit field revelation that are good. And then there are those things that are good for religion. Most people struggle today to find the boundary between science and religion. Some are comfortable with an overlap between those two cultures. And so boundary making is still essential to being a faithful God believing individual in all of the world. And so to see their struggles because they're different than ours as bad is probably a misstep. See this as a very clear way of Joseph trying to be good. The process from 1820 to 1827 is Joseph maturing and trying to make better decisions.

MORONI VISITS: JSH 1:27-49

Hank Smith

(16:32)

I don't want to get too bogged down because I want to talk about these visits from Moroni. So he says, "It's September 21st, I'm about to go to bed. So I decided I needed to know my state," in verse 29, right? "My state and standing before God. I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation as I had previously had one." Is there any particular reason that it's September of 1823 that he's like, "I really . . ." Or do you think this is just something that's been brewing for a while? "I need to find out more."

Dr. Michael MacKay

(17:04)

I was contemplating this at one point. There is a change of season. So, November is a major part in the adjustment of crops and what you go do. And Joseph, in November, seems to go do manual labor during the winter months. So September is a marker of the end of a season, right? So you've been doing something all summer long, reaping the crops, for example. So that agrarian marker becomes the exact time when Moroni comes, and Moroni comes every year on the 22nd. Right? That becomes the pattern. I'm not sure if it originally it's just because he was contemplative after a particular time period, which we go through this, right? Times of putting our head down and then lifting it up and being very contemplative. And I think-

Hank Smith

(17:49)

For you and I, it's the end of the semester.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(17:52)

Oh yeah.

Hank Smith

(17:52)

Right? Yeah. We drive hard through this semester. We put our head down in September, and we put our head up the second week of December and go, oh, right?

Dr. Michael MacKay

(18:01)

Yeah. So just like in his First Vision, he's like, I wanted to know if God was okay with me. And so, after three years of sort of maybe not being that devout, he wants to ask God--he is trying to do better. Now to be fair, he doesn't do that much better for a couple of years. I always call it the Probationary Period. Now, remarkably, guess when he gets ready--when he gets married. He has these sort of stability factors in a life that begins to emerge. And by the time he gets them and he's gone through some struggles, he's ready to get the plates.

Hank Smith

(18:36)

Yeah. I've always said that. What happens between the third and the fourth visit is it's Emma, right? She seems to change everything for him. So he said, "I was in the act of calling upon God. I discovered a light appearing in my room. A person had appeared at my bedside, standing there for his feet did not touch the floor" (JSH 1:30). I've always pointed that out to my daughter, saying, "Well, if Moroni appeared, he couldn't even see the floor in your room because it's covered in dirty clothes. So now I've always thought that his description is him saying, "Look, you didn't think my first vision was real. So I can give you a description here. So you can't tell me, 'I didn't see it.' " Is that probably what he's doing? I've always assumed that. But what do you think? He gives a long description of his clothing even.

Dr. Michael MacKay
(19:24)

I think there's a couple of things going on there. So let's think about when he writes it. When he writes it in 1839, this is a moment when he is contemplating the nature of God. And so this is a time of theological expansion from 1839 all the way to his death. At one point, I was there at the site, and the missionary was trying to explain how his brothers and sisters were all there in the room, and it was a kind of vision. Right? And so it was a theory rather than physical. And so you think about this, like, is he not trying to demonstrate our nature and the way we communicate, how an angel might communicate? And so this is extremely relevant. So we have this really, really late, this is more interesting than fact-based, but you have this really late notion of the endowment, for example.

Dr. Michael MacKay
(20:16)

A woman explained that her mother told her this story, that the person who created the first temple clothing sat there with Joseph, and Joseph explained what the temple clothing would look like. And his explanation was, "Well, I know what it looks like because Moroni was wearing it." Right?

Hank Smith
(20:34)
Oh.

John Bytheway
(20:36)

I think he's given me exactly that I would want, though. Really, what did he look like? Wait, he didn't have shoes? What was it? I would want to know exactly all those details. So I love that he's . . . no, really, this is what he looked like, and this is, I could see his hands, his wrists. I could see . . . I love the detail there (JSH 1:30).

Hank Smith
(20:56)

What I'm hearing from you, Mike, is this is not just the 14-year-old boy describing his experience. This is also the prophet of 1839 teaching about angels.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(21:06)

Yes.

Hank Smith

(21:06)

--About experiences like this.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(21:08)

Yes.

Hank Smith

(21:09)

I tweeted about this the other day. I wonder if they still get together, right? Moroni and Joseph Smith, every September 21st, 22nd, in the spirit world, they get together, "Hey, how are things? This is our weekend."

Dr. Michael MacKay

(21:22)

I imagine Moroni kind of goading him and being like, "You remember when you tried to take the plates? That wasn't appropriate, Joseph."

Hank Smith

(21:29)

"Yeah. I do remember that."

Dr. Michael MacKay

(21:30)

"Do you remember that?"

Hank Smith

(21:31)

So let's keep going. And I want to hear about this.

So, he says his name is Moroni and that, "My name is going to be heard for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, tongues." We talk about that in the Church all the time. It's one of our ways of dealing with the idea that there are people still today who hate Joseph Smith, who make it their full-time, almost a full-time job to tear him down online. That's one of the first things he says, too, "God has a work for me to do and people are going to hate me" (JSH 1:33).

Dr. Michael MacKay

(21:59)

The 15-year reminiscence. Why would he remember this notion? Adding to what you said, I'd like to suggest the notion that Joseph remembers this because he knew he lacked confidence. He knew that he thought it was impossible for him to be the person that is bringing forth the Restoration. Now, you think about this as like an 18-year-old, like him sitting there wondering why this is happening to him. And then you get this dominant, very powerful angelic figure sent from heaven who comes down and says, "Everyone's going to know who you are," and Joseph thinking about it going, "Well, that would be remarkable." So the confidence of an angel invested into a boy who had no confidence that he could bring forth the Restoration is a powerful notion.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(22:54)

And I can see why Joseph remembers this 15 years later. I'm sure he's a little bit resentful that his name may be had for bad and good, but the fact of the matter is this angel has just told Joseph Smith that he can do it and he's going to do it. That's powerful, right? For an 18-year-old. When I was 18, maybe I had more confidence than I should have, but I certainly didn't have that much confidence. I didn't know that I was capable of just about anything. And so here's Joseph finding out that everyone will know who he is.

A WORK TO DO

John Bytheway

(23:30)

That phrase that "God had a work for me to do" is so incredibly empowering and must have been for him (JSH 1:33). Here he is talking about his weakness and foibles and stuff. In the *Come, Follow Me* manual, it has a whole paragraph on that. God has a work for me to do, and I'm reminded of the new Aaronic Priesthood Theme starts. And this is the way to apply this verse, that "I am a beloved son of God and He has a work for me to do."

[\[https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/aaronic-priesthood-quorum-camp-guide/quorum-theme?lang=eng\]](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/aaronic-priesthood-quorum-camp-guide/quorum-theme?lang=eng)

And for every young man, you weren't just sent to earth, well, maybe you'll make a contribution. We're just going to watch and see what happens. Or maybe you can just pass the time. But God has a work for you to do, the same words that Joseph Smith used. And I want to quote president Russell M. Nelson here. This is from the manual.

John Bytheway

(24:17)

And he gave this invitation to every young person, "Ask your Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus Christ how he feels about you and your mission here on earth. If you ask with real intent, over time, the Spirit will whisper the life-changing truth to you. I promise you that when you begin to catch even a glimpse of how your Heavenly Father sees you and what he is counting on you to do for him, your life will never be the same." And that's in the manual. But that phrase,

"God had a work for me to do," he's telling him, "You can do this." And in fact, God has something for you to do.

[<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/come-follow-me-for-individuals-and-families-doctrine-and-covenants-2021/02?lang=eng>]

Hank Smith
(24:55)

I thought of my own experience getting my patriarchal blessing. And Mike, I had a lot of unearned confidence, and I think the Lord in my patriarchal blessing could have just told me the truth, which was, things don't look good, right? You've got a lot of unearned confidence. You've got some serious issues. Instead, my patriarchal blessing is much like Moroni here. "God has a work for you. You are going to do it. You're going to be amazing." And I think the Lord realizes in order for us to succeed, we've got to have some confidence. Joseph, you are going to be known for good--you have a work for you to do. Okay. "All right, I can do it." And I wonder part of Moroni, in the back Moroni's head, he's going, "Oh, it's going to take us a while to get there."

John Bytheway
(25:35)

I don't know how many young people in 1821, whatever, had written a book later on in their life that we are still talking about today. That you're sitting on a bus and a kid says, "You know what? In 200 years, every nation, kindred, tongue and people will be talking about me." And you'd probably move to another place on the bus, right?

Hank Smith
(25:54)
Right.

John Bytheway
(25:55)

Joseph didn't say this about himself. He may not have believed it. An angel told him that. And now here we are talking about it. The angel nailed it because we are here talking about it right now. That's fascinating.

Hank Smith
(26:08)

I want to start this next section, Mike, by saying, I think it's Hugh Nibley. You'll know this quote. "People want angels to appear to them, but all angels do is quote scripture."

[Nibley, Hugh. "Gifts," BYU lecture, 13 March 1979, in *Approaching Zion*, vol. 9 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book Company and Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989), 87.]

So just read your scriptures, right? Because that seems to be what Moroni does from here on out, Old Testament prophets. Why insert all of this? There's got to be certain a point in him in 1839 telling us all this, right?

THE PRIESTHOOD, THE TEMPLE, AND DISPENSATIONS

Dr. Michael MacKay

(26:28)

We always associate, like he quotes this concept of Elijah returning (JSH 1:38). I'd like to emphasize that. He starts saying, "Well, there's this Priesthood." And the Priesthood is a group of people. It's an order, not an entity, but something you join instead of something you possess. And when you join that, you have joined an order that Adam is part of, and Abraham is part of, and Paul is part of, and Joseph Smith is part of. Now when you're talking about the sealing of these dispensations together, you start realizing why the Priesthood order was so important. Because it's that one space in which we are all combined together. And we do the work of salvation to connect each other to each other, and we start understanding Malachi even better.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(27:17)

And you get this sense of what it is to be sealed. And you get this grand arc narrative that D&C 84 describes, D&C 107 describes, D&C 68 describes, and D&C 27 especially describes in which all of those ancient patriarchs will help restore the next dispensation, then the next dispensation. And in fact, the person who started it will end it, and Adam will return in it, Adam-ondi-Ahman. And when he returns, Christ will take over. But what are we going to do with the Millennium? Well, we're going to baptize the h--- out of everyone, quite literally and metaphorically, right? And so here we have this connective tissue in which dispensations become a central focus of what ceiling and what Latter-day Saints do as a people. Why we are that true church is because we can seal all those people together.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(28:18)

And the adjustment of Malachi in that verse says, "If it were not so, God's plan would be destroyed," the plan for us to come to earth would be destroyed if we don't connect ourselves all the way back to Adam.

Hank Smith

(28:33)

I've never thought about that. But I love that idea because you just said, "Listen, when you create division, you create problems." This idea, but God's going to tear down the divisions and connect us all.

John Bytheway

(28:45)

Moroni just gave this amazing testimony of the Old Testament and of the Bible. And Moroni didn't come and start quoting, "Here's how you'll know the Book of Mormon is true. Open up Ezekiel 37 or something." He's talking about these dispensations. I'm going to tie the whole big picture together. I love that a lot. And the fact that Malachi ended in what? 430 B.C. or something, he quotes the Malachi there. And I hope we get to talk a little bit about some differences in Malachi with what Moroni actually said. And that's a question that comes up with my students a lot is why are they different? How come this in Malachi, even in the Book of Mormon, is different than what Moroni said?

Hank Smith

(29:25)

Let's focus in on that one statement because it is the one that's found in Doctrine and Covenants, Section 2, which is part of the lesson for the week. It's also one of the only scriptures that I know of that's just found throughout the standard works in its different versions, right? Doctrine and Covenants, it's in the Pearl of Great Price here what we're reading. The Savior himself quotes it in 3 Nephi, and of course, it's in the Old and New Testament. So why does this one become so important to Latter-day Saints? Well, Joseph Smith specifically and then important to Latter-day Saints.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(29:54)

Okay. So let me be specific. Instead of "smite the earth with a curse," "it will be utterly wasted" (JSH 1:39).

[“He also quoted the next verse differently: *And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.*”]

Hank Smith

(29:59)

That's verse 39. Yeah.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(30:01)

Those are two very different outcomes. One is a punishment, and the other is that this won't work. The earth life that we are participating in will have failed if we can't connect them back together. And so you think about . . . like . . . what Latter-day Saints are doing right now is they're building resources. We're not even close to have sealed and endowed and baptized all people. We've done this very little, teeny bit of this, but what we have done is we have in pre-millennial fashion. We have created the resources so that in the 1,000 year period, we can actually accomplish the whole of Malachi's promise. Right? And so the Millennium is essential to what we're doing now because we are premillennialist, and that was Joseph's emphasis is that we are to prepare the world for the Second Coming and by building almost 200 temples now.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(30:55)

If you do the math, every year when we get new temples, I start doing the math. How long will it take us now to baptize?

Hank Smith

(31:02)

Then every temple we build becomes an investment in the Second Coming, in the Millennium.

John Bytheway

(31:09)

I think as a teenager, I pretty much thought we're going to go do the missionary work so that everybody will believe when Jesus comes. There's a lot of work to be done in the Millennium. And I've heard it said, "We are gathering the gatherers" because we'll still be doing this work in the Millennium. So I like that perspective, and it helps me to know that the Second Coming is the beginning of a lot of work that we have to do. You know what else, Hank, it reminds me of? Just the one by one nature of--there's not a blanket ordinance for everybody, but when Jesus came one by one, visited everybody in temple work, each individual is important enough--that one at a time.

Hank Smith

(31:46)

And he's kind of expressing this to Joseph Smith, this idea of we're going to include everyone, Gentiles and Jews, right? He quotes that from Joel. The fullness of the Gentiles was soon to come, right?

Dr. Michael MacKay

(32:00)

Yes, and that's a really good point--the Joel passage, especially representing the inclusion of Gentiles. This is an absolute notion of inclusion. Christianity in itself as it emerges and spreads to the enabling Gentiles to become part of that covenant, this is just a small notion. Just the point that's being made from Judaism to Christianity in the Book of Mormon especially, think about that on its broadest scale, in which we care about every brother and sister. Our doctrines of the pre-existence enable us to value every person. In fact, every Hindu, every Buddhist, every Jehovah's witness in the pre-existence already chose Christ. It was essential to even come here. They have made the commitment and an eternal commitment to Christ even though they're not a latter-day saint.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(32:57)

That's a kind of inclusion that the temple caps off and enables us to demonstrate why there are so few Latter-day saints. Latter-day Saints aren't few because we are elitist or exclusionist. We are few because we are those who Malachi is speaking to, enabling us to be inclusive.

Hank Smith

(33:17)

Be inclusive. And this to me then bridges right over to my kids of we've got to be inclusive in our family, in our ward, in our friendships, right? We have got to be people who make the tent bigger, as Isaiah would say, right? Enlarge the tent and allow people in. I can automatically make that bridge.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(33:39)

Janet Riess has recently done this big gathered data about Latter-day Saints. And one of her conclusions was that at least for Gen X-ers, the number one reason that people leave the Church is because of its exclusive nature. It doesn't include other people.

[Riess, Jana. 2021. *Amazon.Com*.

<https://www.amazon.com/Next-Mormons-Millennials-Changing-Church/dp/0190885203.>]

And so this is actually a moment where we as Latter-day Saints need to ask the question. If this were an exclusionary church, then why am I baptizing the dead? The fact of that matter is we believe all people are God's people. And the Priesthood, as Malachi said, enables us to enwrap everybody within God's family. Again, that is not exclusive. That is completely inclusive. And the temple demonstrates that through and through, which addresses a major issue we're having today.

John Bytheway

(34:29)

We need to talk about that more. That's awesome. That's exactly, how do we miss it? Now, if you look at what he's asking us to do.

Hank Smith

(34:37)

We include, include, open up, you're right. Let's keep going here. He says that Moroni comes, quotes all these scriptures. Even more, he says, "That I can't even offer explanations here." And then it closes, and then the light he says comes back, and the same heavenly messenger is there. "He repeats the exact same thing without the least variation, which, having done, he informed me of great judgments, which were coming upon the earth." So he repeats the same thing and then adds a tiny bit to it. Almost like he's like, "Oh wait, I forgot something. Let's start over and go through it again." And then he says, "To my surprise, the same messenger is there to repeat over again to me the same things as before. And then he adds another thing telling me that Satan would try to tempt me in consequence of my family's just really poor--of using the plates to get rich" (JSH 1:46 paraphrase).

Hank Smith

(35:31)

All right. Mike, have you thought about what the three visits here are about? What is this? Why would Joseph . . . one, why would it happen three times? Two, why would he report it?

Dr. Michael MacKay

(35:42)

Well, it ends up being four times, right?

Hank Smith

(35:44)

Four times. Yeah. The next morning, right?

FOUR VISITS BY MORONI

Dr. Michael MacKay

(35:45)

Because the next morning, it happens again. Right? Okay. So maybe this has to do with mnemonics, right? This is a device in which he wants to remember something. So if he wants me to remember this, and there are these four passages from scripture, mostly from the Old Testament. And so you get this idea where you have these prophetic notions of the Millennium and how all of these dispensations will be connected across like this is Joseph's interpretive world with dispensations. You think about this, we naturally attach the Restoration to the apostles of the New Testament, right? With Peter, James, and John. And so we emphasize this at great length that we are restoring Christ's church. While Moroni is going to great lengths to help us realize that it isn't just restoring the New Testament church. It's restoring God's church, which goes back to Adam.

Hank Smith

(36:42)

Right. This is much older than the New Testament church. But if I'm sitting around with my 16-year-old--my 14-year-old and this scripture keeps coming up over and over and over, "He shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming." And it's other forms that it's been given in scripture. How do we say, okay, this is why this matters. It's coming up over and over and over. I think as a parent, I'm a religion teacher, and I still am like, well, I don't know.

John Bytheway

(37:13)

Yeah. It's getting into the much wider view that Mike has talked about today. We're going to bind all of the families of the earth together. It's Abrahamic covenant, and what Moroni says adds a little bit to what Malachi said, or adds maybe, he says it differently for our context.

Hank Smith

(37:29)

He was like, "Why do they keep coming up with that scripture? Why is that one so important?"

Dr. Michael MacKay

(37:32)

Like what I've said previously, I think it is a central component of what we do as the Latter-day Saints. So the question is, "What does our Priesthood do that gives us our particular role in the plan of salvation? And that particular role is very clear. We are to be the thread that sews together everyone else. So this is my little analogy. Imagine if knowing the preexistent doctrines that all of these are God's people and they've already chosen Christ. And they came here in a diverse role in God's plan. Imagine all of the people around the world being represented as peoples, as beautiful pieces of fabric, each unique, each very important; some are wool to keep you warm, and some are silk to make you look good. And so here's these very different pieces of fabric that represent everybody across all time on earth.

LATTER-DAY SAINTS SEW THE QUILT THROUGH TEMPLE WORK

Dr. Michael MacKay

(38:26)

Now the Latter-day Saints and the covenant people are so small, less than 1% across earth's time. So knowing that you have to place Latter-day Saints within the plan of salvation with a specific role, and that role is not represented very well just by saying we have the Priesthood, you have to have a better analogy because that's no different. It's a difference without a distinction. And so the distinction here is we aren't a patch of material. We're the thread that sews together all of those patches into a beautiful blanket. That blanket is beautiful because it's got different patches. It's a patchwork blanket. The beauty is that it includes all of them. The role of latter-day saints, which are few, is to sew them together.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(39:14)

It's not to get rid of them. It's not to make them look less. It's not to make them feel less. It's to make them work together as you sew them together to be the comfort of the blanket, the beauty of the blanket, the power of the family. That's what we get. The sealing power that Malachi talks about is a thread, a thread that it isn't there. They will all be separate. They won't be together. That's why in the temple, you feel the way you do. That's why you feel the presence of God is because you're sewing.

John Bytheway(39:49)

Please join us for Part 2 of this podcast.