

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

EPISODE 3-- PART 2: JOSEPH SMITH HISTORY 1:27-65

MORONI CONTINUES TO VISIT 18-YEAR-OLD JOSEPH

John Bytheway

(00:05)

Welcome to Part 2 of this week's podcast.

Hank Smith

(00:08)

So yeah, walk me through this, "The third visit--he ascends to heaven as before, I ponder, and then I hear it's morning" Okay. "My interviews have occupied the entire night" (JSH 1:46) Great. So then he goes to--out to work. I think it's the idea of somebody looks at him and says, "You're no use today" (JSH 1:47) Right.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(00:28)

Like angel hangover.

Hank Smith

(00:32)

Yeah. And I wonder if this happens sometimes with, you know, it happens with my kids. It's your turn to do the dishes, and he's, "Oh, I'm so tired." Right. "Go, go! You're no use today." He's hopping a fence and hits the ground, looks up, and low and behold, Moroni is back. Now, is it this point where he says, "Why didn't you tell your father? And he says, "I feared he would not believe me" (JSH 1:49)

Dr. Michael MacKay

(00:56)

Yes, but he ends up telling him.

Hank Smith

(00:59)

"He then again related to me all that he had related to me the previous night, and commanded me to go to my father and tell him of the vision and commandments which I had received. I

obeyed. I returned to my father," told him the whole thing He said it was of God told me to go (JSH 1:40). He gets a second wind. And he heads over to the hill--the Hill Cumorah right now. How far away is this from his house?

Dr. Michael MacKay

(01:22)

So, it's about three miles.

Hank Smith

(01:23)

So, he's exhausted.

John Bytheway

(01:26)

Now, go on a three-mile hike.

Hank Smith

(01:29)

What's going through his mind? It's going to take 45 minutes to walk over. What's he thinking?

Dr. Michael MacKay

(1:33)

He's been told about these gold plates, but you can imagine like the kind of practical things that he may have been burdened with. Like how do we pay for the farm? His father is struggling to provide, but also trying to provide. And so what's happening contextually in their life is economic struggle. The angel warns him even before it happens, "You're going to want to steal those plates" (JSH 1:46).

["By this time, so deep were the impressions made on my mind, that sleep had fled from my eyes, and I lay overwhelmed in astonishment at what I had both seen and heard. But what was my surprise when again I beheld the same messenger at my bedside, and heard him rehearse or repeat over again to me the same things as before; and added a caution to me, telling me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father's family), to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbade me, saying that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive than that of building his kingdom; otherwise I could not get them." (JSH 1:46)]

Hank Smith

(01:59)

He tells him before, "You're going to want to sell them."

JOSEPH'S PROBATIONARY PERIOD

Dr. Michael MacKay

(01:43)

"You're going to want to sell them. You're going to want to be able to have that money to provide for your family, but also maybe get some extra money."

We want him to be perfect like this is the probationary period. He's not very good at this yet, and so, he's finding boundaries. Like, think about how relevant this boundary is. You have a set of plates that clearly could represent income and money. But he's . . . God is turning those plates into a sacred item. By saying, "This isn't for money, this is religious. You, you need to see this as a sacred item. And until you see it as a sacred item, they'll stay in the ground."

Hank Smith

(02:37)

To me, this is also a very human thing. "Do you care more about God, or do you care more about money?"

John Bytheway

(02:45)

Well, even though the motive was to help his family, maybe, you know, "We were struggling with poverty, we're digging up stumps," you know.

Hank Smith

(02:51)

The first visit he goes, and he sees him, and Moroni is like, "Nope. I'll and I'll see you in a year."

Dr. Michael MacKay

(02:59)

It has to do with age and maturity. It has to do with experiences that push forward change. Yeah. He's still working, and they're still struggling to pay rent.

Hank Smith

(03:11)

Alvin died, which is excruciating. It's a major event for the family, right.

[<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/alvin-smith>]

Dr. Michael MacKay

(03:14)

Alvin dies, which is a security of Joseph and the rest of the family. Alvin is one of the main breadwinners within the family, which is fairly normal when you have like the idea of an apprentice and a journeyman, and Alvin is, is very productive here. And so there's this deep struggle, absolute deep struggle that happens right after he has the first visit.

Hank Smith

(03:36:)

Fascinating idea. You know, we think the dark times come before the visitation, right? And here we learned another pattern that you have these incredible, incredible spiritual experiences. And then, man, you can go dark.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(03:54)

Publicly, too. People are calling foul. And, and so the family, too, is having this public struggle with Alvin's death and a very personal struggle with Alvin's death.

And you can't underestimate the death of Alvin. On January 21, of 1836, Joseph Smith has this vision, and Alvin's in it (D&C 137). He's still struggling with the Alvin was never baptized. Right. And Alvin, you know, in this vision, he realizes he's in the Celestial Kingdom anyways. And there's this representation of . . . of inclusiveness, which goes back to this same stuff we've been talking about with Moroni, and you see that Alvin is going to make it. Like he's thinking about Alvin until the day he dies. This is one of the most traumatic and important events of Joseph Smith's religious life--not just family life, religious life.

Hank Smith

(04:45)

Yeah. Steve Harper said he worships his older brother.

Okay, what do we know about that second visit to the Hill? He's now 19.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(04:52)

Then, the second annual visit, he comes and then near after that. So you have these times like November, right after September, there's always something that happens, 'cause there's another shift. 1823 is the first visit, and then the first annual visit . . .

Hank Smith

(05:06)

--is 1824 . . .

Dr. Michael MacKay

(05:07)

So, this is that point, you know, in Joseph Smith history, it says and the angel, "Added a caution to me telling me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father's family), to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich" (JSH 1:46).

So, you have the death of Alvin, which is an economic problem. You have the next year where the angel adds to what he was saying to him and says, "You're going to want to steal the plates." And he actually does try to steal the plates.

Hank Smith

(05:36)

And his dad is putting a lot of pressure on him on this, this first anniversary, right? "You got to get them this year. You got to get them."

Dr. Michael MacKay

(05:43)

Yes. So you have pressures all around.

Hank Smith

(05:48)

And he comes home without them.

JOSEPH MOVES TO PENNSYLVANIA

Dr. Michael MacKay

(05:50)

You can imagine some disappointment. Like we don't know a ton about all of these years, we just, some of these things we're estimating when they happen. But in the next year, 1825, this is the year that he goes south with Josiah Stool and his father. And they're going to try to find silver in Pennsylvania.

Hank Smith

(06:06)

It's like a hundred miles away. So he goes down there to work for him. And he says . . . he basically tells the man, Josiah Stool, "This is not going to work."

Dr. Michael MacKay

(06:15)

And who knows how much digging they do, but they're looking for that buried silver. They're looking for silver to . . . to make money. And what it looks like is kind of a joint stock agreement. So they have diggers and they have Joseph, who's supposed to find it. And Josiah Stool, who's going to fund it. And you get this little agreement between them. But essentially, you get Joseph

Smith, Senior, who is pushing Joseph to do this, saying, "He's using his gifts for the wrong purpose." And so you get Joseph Smith, Senior saying . . . this, this seems to be a notion and a point at which Joseph gets another one of those steps of maturity and boundary-making. Where he sees what positive boundaries are and negative boundaries are. And he separates his religious gifts from that, which may be secular economic gifts. And he is closer to become a prophet than he was before.

Hank Smith

(07:08)

He's closer to what Moroni was hoping for.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(07:09)

Yeah. And I think it's partly because of this misstep--it's clearly a misstep.

Hank Smith

(07:13)

His dad ends up going home, right? But he ends up staying down with the Stoals, because he's met another family there by the name of the Hales. And he's also met the Knights. Yeah. Right. This is all in that area.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(07:27)

Yeah, so Joseph Knight hires him to do some work disassociated with the Stoyal work, but just some manual labor. Josiah Stoyal sets him up to stay at the Hale's house in Harmony. So he's staying with the Hales. And three months later, he meets Emma, and they feel like their soulmates. The Hales are very religious. These are very good Methodist people. Now, the issue you have here, though, is Isaac Hale doesn't want them to get married. He sees Joseph as a problem. And so he says, "You can't get married." And they just . . . they elope. They go off, they get married, and they move back up to Palmyra.

Hank Smith

(08:04)

This is just so real to me. This is so human. The father-in-law who doesn't like this, the boyfriend. Right. And you've got Josiah Stoyal and the Knights who are kind of helping him court, Emma, right. They're saying, "Yeah, you can borrow my wagon. Yeah. I'll support you in that."

THE LORD IS RAISING UP FRIENDS

Dr. Michael MacKay

(08:20)

Joseph Knight, Sr is highly supportive from the beginning. He sees in Joseph something that's remarkable. Now, Joseph Knight, Sr is one of these people like, like Steve Harper wrote this article about those who joined the church, and he published it in a very high academic journal.

[\[https://stevencraigharper.com\]](https://stevencraigharper.com)

But it's essentially asking what kind of people were interested in Joseph Smith's religion. And he looks at all of the different people who join--

Hank Smith

(08:46)

--those early, early joiners--

Dr. Michael MacKay

(08:48)

Yeah.

And so you look at people like Joseph Knight, Sr, who is educated, has money, very responsible, very religious. Martin Harris is a similar kind of person. You think about the Whitmers. The Whitmers are these Lutherans. They're Reformed Lutherans and their parents, like David Whitmer, Senior--his first language is German. They are, they're highly educated. They're smart. They're determined. They're a major part of society. W.W. Phelps is one of the most famous newspaperman. And you get these people who . . .these are dupes, who are seeing the prophetic nature of this young man, Joseph Smith. These are people who are smart, who know the Bible, who understand the concept of Restorationism. And they see Joseph Smith. Not because . . . of . . .he's just charismatic, but because of the outcome--revelatory outcome--the outcome of the Book of Mormon, these are people who are willing to put their own social status on the line and participate in this early church.

John Bytheyway

(09:57)

Thank you for saying that. I love that idea. These weren't gullible, uneducated fools. These people that joined, and the way you put it, they must've seen the fruits. It was, "Look at what has--this has produced!" Yeah. And that helps my testimony. These were not idiots. They were smart people.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(10:18)

David Whitmer meets Joseph. And he's like, "Whatever this guy is crazy." Right. And then David Whitmer meets the money diggers Joseph Smith knows. And they take him to the hill. David Whitmer writes this in his own book. "They took me to the Hill Cumorah, and they showed me the stone box that the plates were placed with them."

[\[https://www.amazon.com/Address-All-Believers-Christ/dp/B00EU86IKO\]](https://www.amazon.com/Address-All-Believers-Christ/dp/B00EU86IKO)

Like these are people who are making extra effort. They're not just being duped. Like he actually went to the hill. He's like, "He found it on the hill, there must be a hole." He goes up to the hill, and he finds this . . . this stone box, that's cut out. And he's like, "What?" And that's his first notion of, "Okay, I'm going to take this seriously," because before, he did not take it seriously. And so you have him associating himself with a teacher, Oliver Cowdery, and you get this notion of this boy prophet with no confidence in what he's doing, exuding something that draws the attention of people who love God and are educated, good, outstanding citizens.

And that's where you get--

Hank Smith

(11:21)

The Lord is raising up friends. So in 1826, he goes back, he's already met Emma, but he comes back from Pennsylvania just for the visit.

Is this where he's told, "This is it--this your last year? If you're not ready by 1827 next year, we'll go find someone else."

Dr. Michael MacKay

(11:42)

Yeah. This, this is sort of the Mendoza line--that line in the sand that says, "It's either this or that." Like, "You're, you're going to walk away, or you're going to do it, right." What's remarkable about that is he's had all of these experiences, and he is pretty ready. But the last sort of straw was to marry Emma--even the association with the Hale family--which was really positive. They're good people and the association with Joseph Knight--they are very good people.

JOSEPH GETS THE PLATES

Hank Smith

(12:08)

Back to the hill in September of 1827. Does he know he's going to get them? I mean, he's had this Young Men's President, basically in the angel, this Bishop, who's interviewing him every year.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(12:23)

He was supposed to not . . . tell . . . to tell anyone, but his family clearly knows. Josiah Stool clearly knows Joseph--Joseph Knight clearly knows. and they show up. Right. And so the other thing is that tells you that the whole town knows is he doesn't bring them home that night. He receives them and hides them. He thinks a marauder in the night is going to take them from him and so he doesn't bring them home. He actually just hides them in a log.

Hank Smith

(12:53)

Has he been changed, Mike?

I mean, in this four years, he's changed.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(12:55)

He's been working hard. Just the hard work that he's done would have changed him. He gets the idea of having to step up because his brother died. So Alvin matures him pretty well, there. He gets the notion that his neighbors aren't trying to help him. He learns about good friends, Josiah Stool.

Hank Smith

(13:15)

That's interesting. He had his group of friends before he gets a new group of friends. And I think he realizes, "Man, those weren't the greatest influences."

THE CHURCH IS FOUNDED BY BOTH EMMA AND JOSEPH

Dr. Michael MacKay

(13:23)

And so he's . . . he's had the . . . the maturity of working with his father-in-law. His father-in-law is a good man. He does go to church more during this period--that's clear. We have record of him being at a church. He's been told not to join any of them, but he sees the value of them. He's meeting with this angel, who's sitting there going, "No, not yet." Right. Just the rejection. Each year of the angel probably matured him. There's a huge change after 1826, when he realizes we're not just joking around the gifts that he has. He realizes they are gifts to bring forth the Restoration and follow God. They're religious and not secular. And then, of course, Emma, Emma is his rock and always will be his rock. We can't underestimate the foundation of the church under Emma. Emma is always there by the first months of when the church has established, D&C 25, she feels like she's like, "I don't get to see angels, but I'm doing all the work." That's, that's her notion, right? 1827, she's still doing all the work. She's still the educated side. Even when he starts translating, she invests all of her time to writing. She's the first scribe. You can't underestimate how the Church was founded by a woman. Like if you don't understand that, you don't understand how this shared responsibility is on the shoulders of men and women from the beginning.

John Bytheway

(14:52)

I'm glad you pointed that out. And I'm also trying to think of how in their courtship he told Emma, "Well, this is what's been happening to me." I had a hard enough time convincing my wife, but I didn't have a story like that either.

Hank Smith

(15:06)

They're so human, and it's so real. I mean, just the fact that they elope and move to New York, that's got to break her dad's heart.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(15:16)

Isaac Hale shows absolute poise through all of this. We throw him under the bus, but they eventually go back down there, and he gives them a farm--a well-developed house that his other son used to live in. He's a very good man. It's clear that he's struggling with this, and unfortunately, it doesn't work out. If they had joined the Church and we would have tied the bone out of that story, but I would argue that Isaac Hale helps shape Joseph as a good person, not as a bad person.

Hank Smith

(15:45)

Ooh, I really liked that. I really liked that, Mike. One of the things I love to tell my college students is because they're such procrastinators the day before he's looking for a box to put them in. And it always makes me laugh because it's like, "You had four years, and it's the day before!" You're like, "Oh no, I better have something to put them in." And my college students always relate. They're like, "I've had all semester." And it's the day before where I'm like, "I got to do this." He's so real and so human. So he takes Emma to the Hill that night, right?

Dr. Michael MacKay

(16:14)

Yeah.

And he takes a Joseph Knight, Senior's, wagon and they go. So, which tells you their intentions were to take the plates home. Well, if you look at the historical record, the most secular Palmyrans still thought the plates were . . . were real. They . . . they thought they were so real, they were going to steal them. But this is one of those investments, like . . . like you don't just take the wagon. You don't like . . . borrow your friend's wagon without telling him, right. Especially a mature gentleman . . . like right? Right.

Hank Smith

(16:43)

Unless there's real plates to pick up, you're going to risk a consequence.

John Bytheway

(16:48)

We estimate the plates. What is it six- sixty-seven, seventy pounds? What have I heard within the accounts?

Dr. Michael MacKay

(16:52)

Anywhere from 40 to 60 pounds is, is, is the estimate. They go up to that hill, and he gets them, and he likely hears something and so he hides them. He doesn't bring them back down to Emma but he does have to move this stone. And the stone, like this, is an archeological piece of evidence that the actual box that's there. And it's, it's almost 40 years after this, that there's *still* evidence of that box that came from the hill. So Stevenson, who's is a Salt Lake City newspaperman, he comes back to Palmyra, and he goes to the owner of the hill, and he says, "Well, we have all this record of people seeing the box in the past decades. Can I see the box?" And at that time, all of the trees had been taken down, and he had gone over it with a machine.

And there you could plant crops on the hill. Yeah, he totally plowed it over. And, and he's like, "Sorry, I plowed it over." So he ends up staying with the guy and becomes friends with the guy, and the guy and the owner of the hill says, "Well, there, the box is still there." And he's like, "It's washed out. I'll show you it." And he takes him over to the box. And there are these slates, which Joseph described as a kind of cement that brought them together. But there's these five slates that they put in the box together. And then there are two stones in the bottom. So it doesn't get waterlogged in it. And he takes it home. And he writes this big, big article in the Deseret News about the archeological reality of the, of the stone box.

(Project Gutenberg's Reminiscences of Joseph the Prophet, by Edward Stevenson, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/54337/54337-h/54337-h.htm>)

Hank Smith

(18:22)

Something that . . . that Tony's talked about quite a bit, I know is he says, "You know, the idea of Joseph having plates today, kind of people kind of mock the idea, but Joseph's initial problems with anyone in the first couple of years is people are absolutely sure he has them, and they want them." Right. And so I think Joseph Smith would be kind of shocked today going, "Oh, what? They don't think I had them. Well, I wish those guys back then didn't think I had them. 'Cause they cost--"

Dr. Michael MacKay

(18:47)

That . . . that like notion was this huge light for Garret Dirkmaat. You probably give credit to Garret for that idea. It is an important notion, right? This notion of the reality of the plates to these people in Palmyra.

John Bytheway

"Let's go take something from him that he doesn't really have."

Hank Smith
(19:07)

Yeah. And I think Martin Harris says, "He had the plates and I knew he didn't have enough money to buy them. He must've got them from the angel because he has no money." And there's no record of him being a metal worker. And, you know, being able to put all this together and the smoke, you know, they said, "We saw huge fires coming out of that farm. He must've been welding," right? No, there's none. There's no evidence at all of any of that.

Dr. Michael MacKay
(19:29)

But at the same time, I noticed in my classes at BYU like we want to emphasize the materiality of the plates. And if the plates are real, then the Book of Mormon is real. I actually think God was trying to do something different than that notion. If the plates are real, the Book of Mormon is real, this is a kind of an assumption that isn't actually a good assumption. The Book of Mormon is true. If it's true, it doesn't even have to have the plates you think about, like the idea of the plates die, they're gone. They aren't evidence to us. But actually, the sacredness that we hold is within the text like Joseph was called to return the plates . . . return the plates because they wanted people to know the truthfulness of it because of the text-- what is written--and that's Moroni--his promise, right? So it was never intended to be demonstrated with the physicality of the plates.

Dr. Michael MacKay
(20:26)

So this is more of a historical concept rather than a spiritual, theological concept. Yes, there were like 25 witnesses of the plates--their physicality--and *From Darkness Into Light* (<https://www.amazon.com/Darkness-Unto-Light-Translation-Publication/dp/0842528881>), we kind of reveal all these people. But at the same time, I don't want that to be the reason that the Book of Mormon is true, and neither did Moroni. Moroni wasn't like, "Feel the plates and then pray about them." It--his whole point was . . . is, "Why don't you just go ahead and read it and find out that this is the word of God." That's the power--that is the essence of the power of the Book of Mormon.

Hank Smith
(21:03)

And Joseph does say the messenger called for them, "I delivered them up to him and he has them in his charge until this day, 1838" (JSH 1:60). I picture Moroni has him on his mantle. Right. Like "Those are mine, give them back. I spent a lot of time with those."

Dr. Michael MacKay
(21:23)

And every time Mormon comes over, he's like, "Well, I wrote most of it."

John Bytheway

"Yeah. I think that should be"

A HISTORIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Hank Smith

(21:28)

Yeah. There's a little argument between the three of them. You know, the people listening are going to say, "Here, this guy, Dr. MacKay has given decades of his life. He's read everything--at least from this time period of Joseph Smith's life--he's read everything there is to read. And yet he loves the Prophet"

Dr. Michael MacKay

(21:46)

I consider myself a scholar of Joseph Smith. But above that, you know, I do care about the details, and I care about what we can know. You know, ultimately, I think just like Joseph, he was always trying to turn it over to someone else. He was always trying to, you know, give someone else the priesthood, endow others with the presidency. He wanted people to see visions. He wanted people to read the scriptures. And so I-- I've done that, you know, I've read the Book of Mormon, and I've seen the change that it causes in people's lives and my own life. And I think the reason I value Joseph Smith so much is he understood his role in the plan of salvation because he believed so deeply. And that role in itself didn't empower him as a man, even though, at times, it did. But his overall, overarching reality was that just like anything, like the gospel, like the priesthood, like the Book of Mormon, like these are things that you have to offer up to someone else.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(22:54)

They are as valuable as they are because they require you to give it to someone. And part of the value of it is that you're giving it over and this represents the Atonement, especially the grace that God offers comes for the fact that . . . it . . . Christ offers it up to you. That's the beauty of it. This is like the priest and the priesthood. It only functions when you serve someone. This is like the gospel. It really functions when you offer it up to someone else. And so you get this sense of the true, the greatest part of humanity. Like this is the beauty that comes out of Joseph Smith's teaching. It isn't Joseph, particularly, that's changed my life other than the fact that he did what I hope I can do. He offered it up, and you see the beauty of service, and you see the beauty of God himself.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(23:41)

If God isn't offering up all that he has to us. I wonder why He's a God that we worship with. The fact of the matter is . . . is He loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten son. He loved the world so much that he . . . he chose to keep talking to us, to offer a plan that would

include everyone . . . to enable us to be a family in the end. I don't know about any of that, except through the teachings and the scripture that's been revealed. And Joseph Smith did a lot of that. So, and he also gave this model for it to continue today. And so this has created stability and hope and love and compassion in my own life. And I imagine that's what has made my life so satisfying. And it's something that I'll always cherish.

John Bytheway

(24:26)

Thank you so much, Mike, that was inspiring. And you opened up some new ways of thinking of things that I think will bless a lot of people.

Hank Smith

(24:33)

So do I. I'm just so impressed. We dive deep. We, and we're getting to know Joseph Smith, and because of Joseph Smith, like Mike said, "He's given us a new view of the Savior and his Atonement." So . . . I . . . that connection that Mike made there at the end was just so touching to me. Join us for our next episode of followHIM. As we continue on through the Come, Follow Me manual and taking a deep dive into these different sections with the church's experts. Thank you so much for joining us, and we'll see you next time.