

EPISODE 49



Dr. Steven C. Harper

D&C 137-138



“The Vision of the Redemption of the Dead”

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

Follow Him: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Sunday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions:

Part 1:

What is the soteriology problem? Dr. Steven Harper returns to discuss Doctrine and Covenants, Section 137, and the centuries-long question of who gets saved by God. We discuss the nature of God, the redemption of the dead, and the reality that death isn’t a deadline to determine a person’s salvation.

Part 2:

Dr. Harper returns to discuss Doctrine and Covenants, Section 138, and the historical background regarding Joseph F. Smith’s revelation, 80 years after the revelation in Section 137. We consider the love the Father and Son have for every person and how mercifully they extend the opportunity for celestial glory.

Timecodes:

Part 1

- 00:01 Welcome to followHIM Episode 49, Part I
- 01:58 Biography of Dr. Steven Harper
- 06:22 Background to Section 137 and 138
- 10:11 The Soteriological Problem
- 12:03 *Rescue for the Dead* by Jeff Trumbower
- 17:25 Joseph sees his brother Alvin in the Celestial Kingdom
- 21:06 Douglas Davies writes about the Restored Gospel and the Sovereign God
- 27:02 St. Augustine's influence on Christian thought
- 28:20 Where does Joseph Smith get his ideas from?
- 32:34 Everyone who would have accepted the gospel will be in the Celestial Kingdom
- 40:39 Who would receive the gospel?
- 45:28 God is "mighty to save"
- 47:05 Section 76 ties into Section 137
- 48:51 God will consider our genetic make up, our situations, etc.
- 50:44 The age of accountability
- 54:48 End of Part I

Part 2:

- 00:03 Welcome to Part II
- 00:07 Joseph F. Smith and the background to Section 138
- 01:54 Joseph F. Smith's traumatic childhood is full of death
- 02:44 Joseph F. Smith sent on a mission at age 15
- 04:47 Joseph F. Smith's first marriage failed and had 13 children pass before he died
- 07:36 The Pandemic of 1918 and World War I have the world considering those who have died
- 10:37 LDS Scholar George Tate's essay about the background of Section 138
- 12:40 Joseph F. Smith's reaction to being in Carthage Jail
- 14:48 John shares story of where his dad may be serving in the next life
- 17:58 The conditions in which Joseph F. Smith prepared to receive revelation
- 23:28 Jesus doesn't go to the wicked in Spirit Prison but organizes missionaries
- 31:44 Eve and others part of God's All-Star Team
- 35:58 Six weeks after this revelation, Joseph F. Smith dies
- 39:45 2 Nephi 9 is the O and Wo Chapter
- 41:22 The intertextuality between Abraham 3 and Section 138
- 45:46 Don't make missionary goals based on other's agency
- 47:43 Dr. Harper shares how his faith and scholarship combine
- 55:23 End of Part II

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Biographical Information:



Steven C. Harper is a professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. In 2012 Steve was appointed as the managing historian and a general editor of *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*. He was named editor in chief of *BYU Studies Quarterly* in September 2018. He served in the Canada Winnipeg Mission (1990-1991) and married Jennifer Sebring (1992). They graduated from BYU (1994). He earned an MA in American history from Utah State University, where his thesis analyzed determinants of conversion to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the 1830s. Chapters were published in the *Journal of Mormon History and Religion* and *American Culture* and awarded by the Mormon History Association with the T. Edgar Lyon Award for best article of the year and the Juanita Brooks Award for the best graduate student paper. Steve earned a PhD in early American history from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. He began teaching courses in religion and history at BYU Hawaii in 2000 and joined the Religious Education faculty at BYU in 2002. That year he also became a volume editor of *The Joseph Smith Papers* and the document editor for *BYU Studies*. He taught at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies in 2011–2012. His first book was *Promised Land* (Lehigh University Press, 2006), a study of Lenape or Delaware Indians’ responses to a fraudulent 1737 land deal in colonial Pennsylvania. He also authored *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Deseret Book, 2008), *Joseph Smith’s First Vision* (Deseret Book, 2012), and *First Vision: Memory and Mormon Origins* (Oxford University Press, 2019), along with dozens of articles.

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EPISODE 49 • PART I



Dr. Steven C. Harper

D&C 137-138



Hank Smith:	00:01	Welcome to followHIM, a weekly podcast, dedicated to helping individuals and families with their <i>Come, Follow Me</i> study. I'm Hank Smith.
John Bytheway:	00:09	And I'm John Bytheway.
Hank Smith:	00:11	We love to learn.
John Bytheway:	00:11	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:	00:19	Hello, my friends. Welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name is Hank Smith and I am here with my "O, Come All Ye Faithful" co-host John Bytheway. John-
John Bytheway:	00:33	Oh, come on..
Hank Smith:	00:33	"Oh, Come All Ye Faithful." It's that time of the year, John.
John Bytheway:	00:37	Oh, come Hank, oh, come Hank.
Hank Smith:	00:39	Yes. I could have said, "My Little Drummer Boy, Cohost," but I went with, "O, Come All Ye Faithful."
Hank Smith:	00:46	Hey, we want to remind everybody that you can find us on social media. Come on to Facebook and Instagram, don't be afraid. Come find our pages. Jamie Neilson runs those. She has a bunch of extras on there. So you're going to want ... to want to find those. You can subscribe to, rate and review the podcast. If you're like Hank, John, what could we do for you? You could subscribe to, rate, and review the podcast. You could watch the podcast on YouTube. We'd love for you to come see our happy faces. Right, John? John always says we have faces made for-

John Bytheway: 01:18 -you might like for, yeah.

Hank Smith: 01:18 Yeah. We have a face perfect for audio.

John Bytheway: 01:22 Great face for radio, right?

Hank Smith: 01:24 Yeah. You can come to follow him dot CO, followhim.co for show notes, transcripts. And you can even read the transcript in French, Portuguese, and Spanish now. Wow, we're covering the globe here, John. We have really one final episode to talk about the Prophet Joseph Smith, before we move on to a different curriculum. So John, we brought in, I would say the world's expert on Joseph Smith, he would say one of the world's experts on Joseph Smith. He might even not call himself an expert, but talk to us, who's here with us today?

John Bytheway: 01:58 We are so glad to have Dr. Steve Harper back again. I've got a couple of books of his on my shelf. One, that long before I really met Steve personally, I'd read Joseph Smith's First Vision, where he talks about all the different accounts. We know there were different accounts. People heard Joseph talk about it, write it down, he wrote some and put those all together beautifully. There's another book called, *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants*, which I have used a lot this year. And so we're just glad to have him back. And I got a bio from the Religious Education website and we'll let him update this if he needs to.

John Bytheway: 02:38 But Steven C. Harper is a professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. In 2012, Steve was appointed as the Managing Historian and General Editor of *Saints: the Story of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. He was named Editor-in-Chief of *BYU Studies Quarterly* in September 2018, served in the Canada, Winnipeg Mission and married Jennifer Sebring in 1992, they graduated from BYU in 1994, and I love that they graduated in 1994. So was that a dual graduation, Steve, at the same time?

Dr. Steven Harper: 03:11 Yeah. She in Art Education, me in History.

John Bytheway: 03:14 At the same time, that's great. He has an MA, master arts in American History from Utah State, his thesis analyzed determinants of conversion to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the 1830s. When you hear this, it's going to sound really cool, he earned a PhD in Early American History from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. But it sounds... You get Lehigh, you got Bethlehem, that sounds really... But it's Lehigh, H I G H Lehigh, like high up. He began

teaching courses in religion and history at BYU Hawaii in 2000, that's a rough assignment. Joined Religious Education faculty in 2002. I mentioned a couple of books, dozens of articles. We're just really glad to have you back, Steven. I'm so excited and ready to take notes.

- Dr. Steven Harper: 04:07 It's thrilling for me to be with you again, you guys are doing immensely important work and the vast number of people that are paying attention are a testament to how important it is and how far-reaching.
- John Bytheway: 04:22 Thank you.
- Hank Smith: 04:23 Well, Steve, we are lucky to have you and I promised him I wouldn't gush, but I just need to say... He's going to be like, "Ah, you promised." I just need to say the first time I saw Steve Harper speaking on Joseph Smith. My first thought was no one this good looking should be this smart. Wow, this guy knows his stuff. And I also didn't realize he's going to become my friend and he and his wife are as faithful and as good and as wonderful as you'd hope them to be from someone who knows so much. So I'm done gushing. That was just a quick gush. It was a mini gush.
- John Bytheway: 04:58 On a previous podcast, I think, I don't know if it was part of the recording or not. But I asked Steve, so were you on the offensive or defensive line? And he said... What did you say, Steve? I think this is kind of fun for people to know.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 05:11 I can't remember.
- John Bytheway: 05:13 I think you said I was a mediocre quarterback.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 05:16 Well, that was an overstatement John, that was a radical overstatement. Mediocre is a compliment. That's an insult to all the other mediocre quarterbacks out there.
- John Bytheway: 05:31 Was it President Eyring that said, "There were two of us in our deacons quorum back in New Jersey and that may be an exaggeration."
- Hank Smith: 05:40 That's funny.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 05:42 I have a terrible arrogance problem and this is good for it or bad, I don't know.

Hank Smith: 05:49 I remember you saying that in one of your talks, "My wife says I have an arrogance problem. I don't, obviously. I don't know what she's thinking." Yeah. This week, I like how the manual starts out. "We have two revelations that are separated by more than 80 years and 1500 miles." So, who's better to walk us through these revelations, [Section] 137 and [Section] 138 than Steve Harper. So Steve, we're going to kind of turn it over to you and we'll just kind of be the sideshow as we... Take us along with you.

Dr. Steven Harper: 06:22 Well yeah, Sections 137 and 138. They come at the back of the book, even though Section 137 was revealed on the 21st day of January 1836 in the temple at Kirtland, Ohio.

Hank Smith: 06:36 So we're jumping back in time?

Dr. Steven Harper: 06:37 Yep. All the way back to the months before the dedication of the temple. And then Section 138 comes as a series of visions to Joseph F. Smith, the prophet's nephew. Who's now the prophet himself, aged 38, prophet just one month from his own death. And the revelation comes on the third day of October 1918. We'll talk about the significance of that year and the weeks surrounding it. So why don't we put Section 137 where it belongs chronologically, which would be right between Sections 108 and 109. I don't know, I mean, certainly wasn't part of that decision, but one thing that would happen if you did that is every footnote you've ever written or referenced in any manual to Sections 109 through 136 would be bumped.

Dr. Steven Harper: 07:39 So in 1976 the prophet proposed to the Saints that we canonize these two revelations and we did, so we put them in the Pearl of Great Price for a few years. And then in 1979, I think tacked them on at the end of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Hank Smith: 08:01 So there's going to be some of our listeners who remember this?

Dr. Steven Harper: 08:04 Oh yeah, some of us were alive in those days.

Hank Smith: 08:07 Yeah.

Dr. Steven Harper: 08:07 In the old days.

Hank Smith: 08:09 John, you don't remember this.

John Bytheway: 08:11 I was there. I was about 13 and I remember that was momentous. I mean, my dad couldn't stay seated on the couch.

He was, look at this and they even gave us a little insert that we printed on the same type of scripture paper to stick in there. I wish I had that now. I've upgraded I guess, but I remember that. And then I remember when they moved it to the Doctrine and Covenants.

Hank Smith: 08:42 Wow, John.

John Bytheway: 08:44 Pretty cool.

Hank Smith: 08:45 We have Church History on our podcast right now. We're interviewing someone from Church History, we have finally come up to your life.

John Bytheway: 08:52 I was in seminary when they said turn in your Bibles and they handed us all a new one and I will never forget opening it up and seeing footnotes to the Book of Mormon in my Bible. That was a moment I won't forget as a sophomore in seminary. Yeah, it was pretty cool.

Hank Smith: 09:10 That's awesome, John. And you don't look it, that's the good thing. You do not look it, you don't look a day over 80.

John Bytheway: 09:17 I was friends with David O, McKay and we worked on...

Hank Smith: 09:21 Well, when Wilford and I roomed together at BYU.

John Bytheway: 09:24 Yeah, so this is-

Hank Smith: 09:25 Sorry, Steve.

John Bytheway: 09:25 Yeah, we're getting off track here.

Hank Smith: 09:28 Yeah, sorry. Go back to, so it was '76 and then what did you say? '79?

Dr. Steven Harper: 09:32 I was around then too, but John was paying better attention than I was. I remember when Elvis died I thought that was the President of the church, I was confused about all these things. So it wasn't as well informed or faithful.

Hank Smith: 09:50 Well, since we're admitting things, I remember thinking Orville Redenbacher was in the Quorum of the Twelve, because he looked like Marvin. J Ashton. And I just could not tell you the two apart. So I thought, why is that Apostle selling so much popcorn? Sorry yeah, we can go through... That's an honest mistake, thank you yeah.

- Dr. Steven Harper: 10:11 Well the thing about these two revelations though they're far separated into time is that they both address what in Christian Theology is called, "The Soteriological Problem." And so let's start with that, a soteriology is theology that is about salvation. Who gets saved? How do you get saved? And Christians debate soteriology endlessly. In Joseph Smith's day there's a serious soteriological problem, Christianity has it to this day, continues to be debated, but Sections 137 and 138 solve it. They resolve it.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 10:58 The problem has three premises. And the problem is that these three premises can't all be reconciled, apparently. Let me see if I can remember them first is that God presumably loves all His children and desires their salvation. He didn't create anybody to be damned. Second is that salvation comes only through one's knowing willing acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior. And then third is many, maybe most people live and die and never know, never have any idea that they should or could accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. So this is a terrible problem, is God too shortsighted or too narrow-minded or, what's the nature of this problem? And the debates go back and forth.
- Hank Smith: 11:56 Right. Sending most of His children to an eternal hell does not sound very loving.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 12:04 Yeah. I remember Joseph Fielding McConkie talking about this once, he was a mission president in Scotland and he said that he spoke to a minister there about the soteriological problem, the fate of those who never heard as some people put it. And he said, the minister responded, "That's their tough luck." And that just makes me sick inside. I don't worship a God of tough luck. That's no kind of planning God and thankfully the God of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ is not the God of tough luck. He's the God of a perfect plan that resolves the soteriological problem. And there's a great scholar named Jeff Trumbower, he's not the only one, but he's written the most interesting and compelling book about the history of this issue. The book is called *Rescue for the Dead*. Not a Latter-day Saint and doesn't have a dog in the fight, doesn't care that the Restored Gospel has come back. He's interested in it as a scholar, he's written about it, but-
- Hank Smith: 13:20 What's the book called again?
- Dr. Steven Harper: 13:23 *Rescue for the Dead*. And it's about the idea of posthumous salvation. Can people who have died without becoming Christian be saved? What's the history of thought about that question? That's what the book covers. Prestigious press,

Oxford University Press, really well done. And talks about the Restored Gospel in it. But the most interesting thing I learned from this book is that the early Christians did not make the assumption that makes the soteriological problem, a-

Dr. Steven Harper: 14:02

That makes the problem, the soteriological problem, a problem. In other words, the problem didn't become a problem at the time of Jesus. Peter didn't have the problem. Paul didn't have the problem. It becomes a problem four or 500 years later because Augustine and others have a powerful influence in turning Christianity to the idea that death becomes a deadline that determines a person's salvation. That's not in the Bible. Paul preached that baptism could be done for the dead. And he took it for granted that it was, and that it was a legitimate part of the gospel of Christ. Peter taught, as you all know, that Jesus visited the spirits of the dead so that they could be judged just as justly, as people who lived here on earth. So the first Christians, the heirs of the New Testament, don't assume that death is a deadline that determines your salvation. It's not this arbitrary deadline. If you're saved by the time you die, you're in. If you're not, you're out. But as you know, that becomes a determinative throughout much, if not all of Western Christianity. And it remains that way until January 21st, 1836, when Joseph Smith is high in the temple at Kirtland, he is up on the top floor in the garret office, on the far western end. He's there with his father, with the two bishops, his counselors, some others, leaders of the Church. And they're having a really beautiful meeting anticipating the solemn assembly that's going to come in March and the endowment of power that the Lord has promised. And they're praying, they're giving each other priesthood blessings and then the heavens open and that's how Section 137 begins. Section 137 is a text from Joseph Smith's journal for that day, January 21st, 1836. It's a little different in our Doctrine and Covenants because it's been rendered into the first person. In Joseph's journal, it's written in third person by his scribe. "The heavens were open upon us, and they beheld," but we published it as if it's Joseph's first person voice in the Doctrine and Covenants. "I beheld the celestial kingdom of God and the glory thereof, whether in the body or out, I cannot tell." Here he's echoing Paul who saw the heavens. I saw the transcendent beauty of the gate through which the heirs of the kingdom of heaven will enter, which was like circling flames of fire. The blazing throne of God whereon was seated the father and the son. I saw the beautiful streets of that kingdom, which had the appearance of being paved with gold. He sees Abraham and Adam and his mom and dad. So this tells us that the vision is in the future, his father's sitting by him in the room. So this is a preconfiguration of what will be.

Dr. Steven Harper: 17:25 And he sees Alvin, his oldest brother, who's been dead since 1823. He's been dead almost 13 years. Now, this causes Joseph to marvel, as our listeners may know, Alvin dies long before the Church of Jesus Christ is restored. He dies just a couple of months after Joseph learns about the Book of Mormon plates. And so as far as Joseph knows, Alvin has gone to hell. That's what the Reverend Stockton said when he preached at his funeral and Joseph didn't like it then, he doesn't like it now. It seems utterly unjust and unmerciful. How could someone with Alvin's character and disposition, his goodness be consigned to hell, just because of the timing of his death? What kind of a plan is that? What kind of a God would do that? Yeah. Tough luck, right?

John Bytheway: 18:23 Tell us a little bit about Alvin, Steve. Just for those who maybe don't know much about him, what did they say about him?

Hank Smith: 18:28 Good idea.

Dr. Steven Harper: 18:29 He was heroic to Joseph. Joseph wrote in the book of the Book of the Law of the Lord, there's a beautiful entry in there where Joseph says Alvin was the oldest and noblest of my father's family. He was one of the noblest of the sons of men. My heart broke when he died. It was tough. It was tough on Joseph. Alvin was one who looked after Joseph. He was the consummate big brother. He was a great big brother. He looked after his parents. He sacrificed quite a bit. He put off starting his own family, his own marriage and so forth to make sure his parents were looked after as they aged, to make sure they had a home. And the whole family loved him. Lucy, his mom and her memoir goes on at length too about his role in their family and about his goodness to all them.

Dr. Steven Harper: 19:24 So it was heartbreaking and it was devastating to have a religious authority condemn him to hell, just didn't make sense to Joseph. And yet he feared it was true, right? Joseph feared for a long time, that Presbyterianism was true. That meant that God was arbitrary and sovereign and damned most people to hell for no reason that you could fathom. It was his inscrutable sovereign will, said the most famous Presbyterian minister in American history. So that's what you've got to work with. Even into 1836, if you're Joseph Smith. By now, the Book of Mormon has said that unaccountable infants are not damned just because they die. But as far as Joseph knows, there's no salvation for Alvin. There's nothing in the Restoration to this point that says that Alvin and the millions of others like him have any chance.

John Bytheway: 20:30 Even Section 76, right? I mean, 76 came what year?

Dr. Steven Harper: 20:34 '32.

John Bytheway: 20:35 '32. And they saw-

Dr. Steven Harper: 20:36 1832.

John Bytheway: 20:37 ... The heavens, but no indication of those who had died.

Dr. Steven Harper: 20:41 Yep. There's nothing in the text that I can see that answers the question, what about those who never heard? What about rescue for the dead? So the Lord is letting this go on and the Lord must have a sense for a dramatic tension, right? This is brilliant if you're a...

John Bytheway: 21:02 That's a great line. What's Alvin doing here?

Dr. Steven Harper: 21:06 You're writing the narrative arc of the Restoration. Let's say you wanted to give the authors of *Saints*, some real opportunity to have some dramatic tension and tell a true story. This is the way you would do it if you were the creator of the world. You would let Joseph wait and stew about this terrible problem, the problem of death and the disruption it causes to your cherished relationships. This is the problem that afflicts every family, every person who ever lived. It's the awful, terrible problem of death. And one very fine scholar of religion, the British scholar, Douglas Davies has written a couple of books about the Restored Gospel. And he says that the brilliance of it is this story it gives for the conquest of death. Latter-day Saints don't typically use those words, but all he really means there is that the theology of the Restored Gospel has a better plan of salvation that solves the problem of death than any other. And he's exactly right about that.

John Bytheway: 22:20 Hey, Steve, I could use... I listen to Christian radio a lot when I'm driving. And sometimes, I hear that phrase that you use, "The sovereign God." And it's not one that we use that much and I thought, "Oh yeah, I guess that's true." When you use that right now in talking about a kind of a predestination philosophy, what did you mean?

Dr. Steven Harper: 22:42 This is a great question. So you will hear many Christians, especially certain wings of Protestantism, put a lot of emphasis on the sovereignty of God. And that's an important doctrine to them because what is at stake is God's power. And it's oftentimes understood in terms of contingency. Is God

contingent? Is God influenceable? Is there anything that could happen that could make God anything less than absolutely, completely and totally sovereign? So think about that. Yes, in control. So a person who puts highest value on that attribute of God is not inclined to like things like the restored doctrine of agency, for example.

- John Bytheway: 23:48 Okay. That's what I thought. Yeah. The idea that we can act and have free will to them is a threat to God's sovereign entity.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 23:57 Right. Who knows if it might, you know, if Hank's decision to do something might upset God's plans, right. Hank might be predestined to do one thing by God and then he does something else and all of a sudden God's whole plan is upset.
- Hank Smith: 24:16 He didn't see it coming. Yeah.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 24:17 Yeah. And so they can't imagine that and they don't allow for it. So Martin Luther wrote about, "the bondage of the will," for example. And certainly John Calvin probably for most is those who emphasize the sovereignty of God. So it's followers of those traditions, especially the Calvinist tradition who will not like any part of the Restoration that says, "God is passable." Passable is another word you'll sometimes hear. Meaning, God has passions, right? The Presbyterian Creed, the Calvinist Creed says, "God is without body parts and passions." And Latter-day Saints know and talk a lot about, oh, "He is with body and parts. Joseph saw him in the vision," but at least as important theologically in the earliest days is, and still is passions. Is God able to feel love? Is he influenced by love, by mercy? Are his heartstrings ever pulled?
- John Bytheway: 25:32 Yeah, Enoch saw him weep.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 25:34 Right. That is the foremost text of many and the restored scriptures that testify that God is indeed passable. But if so, then that may mean he's contingent. And if so, that may mean he's something less than absolutely sovereign. And if so, that may mean he is not God. Not at least in the Greek philosophical sense where God is the one thing that really exists and he's wholly and entirely and completely other than us. He doesn't have passions because that's what humans have. That's what the Greek gods had. And the Neoplatonic Greek philosophy reacts against that and says, that's not God. Anything like the Greek gods of mythology is no God at all. And so the earliest Christians adopt the Greek Neoplatonic idea as an attribute that that's how their God forms up in their imagination. And those ideas pervade early Christianity. Augustine who defines

soteriology largely for the Protestant tradition has those views and Joseph Smith just breezes them in. He doesn't know any different until the 21st day of January 1836.

- John Bytheway: 27:02 And let's let people know, Augustine is... Oh, sorry, Hank, what about the fifth century?
- Dr. Steven Harper: 27:07 Yeah. Fourth and fifth century. I can't remember his exact years, but Christian Northern Africa and the Roman Empire.
- John Bytheway: 27:18 And a huge influence on Christian thought after that. So what was the book? *Confessions of Saint Augustine*. Yeah.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 27:26 Yeah. Which is an unbelievably brilliant book. It's so deeper, so much deeper than anything before. Everybody should at least read some Augustine and I'm not saying you're going to figure him entirely out. He's a complex, wonderful character. Wrote the City of God and his confessions is his memoir, his autobiography. A huge influential figure in Christian theology. He had a huge influence on the Protestant reformers and they had a huge influence on the world into which Joseph-
- Dr. Steven Harper: 28:03 They had a huge influence on the world, into which Joseph Smith launched the restoration and the Restoration is a response against and alongside and with these ideas.
- Hank Smith: 28:20 Steve, I've heard critics of the Church say, "Oh, Joseph Smith is just borrowing from the ideas around him. He's just grabbing from the ideas around him." And from what I'm hearing from you and from others that I've listened to, these are not common ideas around him. He's going completely opposite of some of the common ideas around him. Is that true?
- Dr. Steven Harper: 28:41 Well, yeah, it's a great question, Hank. So where does the Restoration come from? And if you're not willing to be open to the possibility that it comes from God, then you have to explain it. It exists, right? I mean, you can't pretend the restoration doesn't exist. So the way you explain it is to say, "Well, it's just in the air."
- Hank Smith: 29:05 He's just grabbing it.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 29:06 It's everywhere. And Joseph is just clever enough to grab it and paste it together. And that works if you are not really, really interested in the answer to the question, in my opinion. But it doesn't work if you want to know in your bone marrow where the Restoration comes from. It's an answer that satisfies your

need to know, and you can sort of put the Restoration behind you, but I can't do that. It doesn't work for me. Doesn't satisfy me at all.

- Hank Smith: 29:49 The evidence is just not there.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 29:51 Not for me it isn't. There's just too much in the Restoration. I mean, I've read everything Joseph wrote that's still on record, 1,588 pages of his journals, his letters. And his revelation texts are deeper than he is. They're more profound. They're beyond him. When he got done with Section 76, he said, "Dang." He says, "That revelation is so far beyond the narrow mindedness of man, I am constrained to explain it came from God." He marvels at his own revealed products. He's not the originator of these ideas.
- Hank Smith: 30:32 Yeah.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 30:33 Anybody who supposes so should read his earliest autobiography. It's easy to access. If you Google circa summer 1832 history, it will pull it up first thing. It's on the Joseph Smith Papers website, six pages long, two sentences. And there you'll get a sense for what it's like to listen to Joseph Smith write his own stuff.
- John Bytheway: 30:58 Two sentences, six pages.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 31:00 Two sentences. Yeah, he was economical with his punctuation. He was sparing.
- Hank Smith: 31:05 He was sparing.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 31:07 And then if you think two and a half years before he wrote that with his own hand, he dictated the Book of Mormon in a single spring. And then if you'll pay serious attention to the Book of Mormon, you will like Joseph say, "Dang, that came from God. There's no chance that he is the originator."
- Dr. Steven Harper: 31:26 And I don't want people to misunderstand. I'm not saying he's dumb. He's anything but, but he is not the mind that gave us the Book of Mormon or Section 76, or even Section 137. Section 137 was foreign to Joseph. He wasn't expecting it. It caused him to marvel. He had not thought of the idea. He had not realized that the soteriological problem was based on an assumption that nobody was identifying, was hidden in plain sight, that the whole Christian world was assuming that death was a deadline that determined everything. And Jesus had to show Joseph a

vision of his big brother in heaven to get Joseph to be open even to the question or to the insight to the revelation he needed. And as soon as Joseph says, "I'm marveling. How is it that Alvin could be there?" The Lord says, "Ah, I was hoping you would ask. I've got some restoration to do."

- Dr. Steven Harper: 32:34 The dramatic part of Section 137 is the vision of Alvin in heaven with a host of VIPs. But the most important part of the revelation, the part that's vital, the part that Jesus wanted Joseph to know at this point, is in verses seven, eight, nine. "So the voice of the Lord came to me saying everyone who's died, not just Alvin, but everybody who's died in his situation without a knowledge of the gospel who would've received it if they had been permitted to, will be heirs of the Celestial Kingdom. And that's true for everybody in the future in that situation too, because "I, the Lord, judge everybody according to their works, according to the desires of their hearts, not the timing of their death." What a person does with the Savior's Atonement when they know it is the determining factor of their salvation, and everyone will know it.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 33:36 Now [Section] 137 doesn't tell us everyone will know it yet. You'll see that Joseph has already begun thinking that way. He wrote a newspaper article not long after this, where he said the gospel will have to be taught to the spirits who are dead. But it'll wait until Section 138, the Joseph F. Smith, before we have a prophet who elaborates how the soteriological problem gets solved, the mechanisms that Christ put in place, the process, the plan that resolved the problem. So [Section] 137 says the problem is going to be solved. The Lord always had in mind that this would be part of the plan and [Section] 138 tells us how the problem will be solved.
- Hank Smith: 34:31 Okay. So this revelation is a, I wish I had the right words. This is a ray of light that just cuts through.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 34:44 Oh man, every family, every family in Joseph Smith's time, the soteriological problem affects them personally. Joseph and Emma and their babies, the Book of Mormon was huge for them. Every family has lost to death. And this revelation is the beginning of the Restoration of knowledge that gives my family and every other family, a great big sigh of relief and praise the Lord for his great plan.
- John Bytheway: 35:20 But this precedes baptism for the dead in Section 124, right? So they were so excited about that, too.

- Dr. Steven Harper: 35:29 Very much so. What's the next step? This revelation comes 1836 and then the world falls apart. Joseph ends up out of Ohio into Missouri, out of Missouri into Illinois. And just about as soon as he can, when things get settled enough in Illinois, he will restore baptism for the dead there. And that's the trajectory for the rest of his life.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 35:53 He's implementing the knowledge and power he receives in the Kirtland Temple for the remaining few years of his life, amid a massive onslaught of opposition against him. Years ago, I remember reading an essay that said, "Well, yeah, Joseph came up with the very comforting doctrine in Section 137 because he was hurt by Alvin's death." And I thought that's a *non sequitur*. It does not necessarily follow. That's just a person who doesn't believe, explaining the fact that Joseph is devastated by Alvin's death so he invents the doctrine of redemption for the dead.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 36:43 Okay, that's one conclusion you could draw. Why not though, just as easily and more faithfully, decide every family is afflicted by the problem of death, including Joseph's and he seeks and receives a divine revelation that is the solution to the problem? I favor the second interpretation of the same fact. I don't know why we can't believe that
- John Bytheway: 37:11 The statement that I believe Joseph Smith made and you can tell me if I got it right, but didn't he say, "I can taste the principles of eternal life and so can you and good doctrine taste good." and isn't this one as one of those that you just hear it and go, "Of course, the God that I love and the God that I worship, of course it would be like this."
- Dr. Steven Harper: 37:33 Yeah, compare that to the God of tough luck or to the God of arbitrary, sovereign will. Think about that, arbitrary will, God's inscrutable will. There's no method to the madness, no plan, at least not one that we can know or discern. It's just God, in all his power, we are powerless pawns, and most of us damned to hell for reasons we can't fathom. Some of us are arbitrarily saved. Man, if that's God, I just want to throw my hands up in the air and quit. But that's not the God of the Restored Gospel.
- John Bytheway: 38:16 It kind of reminds me of the Zoramites. We have been elected to be saved and you haven't, and there's no explanation, no reason. It's just, "For which holiness, oh God, we thank thee," which is almost laughable when you read it. We're elected to be saved. You're not. And it sounds arbitrary, like you said.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 38:35 Arbitrary. Arbitrariness and God seemed to me antithetical to each other. We believe in a planning God, a loving God, a

capable God. The revelations of Joseph Smith do something more profound than Luther or Calvin ever accomplished in my opinion, or Augustine. Those theologians who were way smart, I mean much, much smarter than me by many times, they could not conceive, and this is partly because they're still looking through neo-platonic Greek, philosophical lenses. They could not conceive of a God who could be completely sovereign and decide to use that sovereignty to endow his children with agency and provide a plan for them and say, "Here's the plan. And if you decide to go this way, this is what will happen. If you decide to go this way, this is what will happen and if so, will provide a Savior and bring you back through redemption and resurrection." That kind of God who can think of endless permutations to the plan and provide everything you need without stealing your ability to determine your own destiny, that's a great God.

- Dr. Steven Harper: 40:03 That's why I'm a Latter-day Saint. That's the only gospel I know that reveals a God who is powerful enough, loving enough, capacious enough, to endow all of his children with agency and still be able to say the works and the designs and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither will they come to not.
- Hank Smith: 40:31 He reveals it all through a 30-something year old farm boy.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 40:34 Yeah, a kid, right? A kid, he's young.
- John Bytheway: 40:39 That was beautifully articulated. And I underlined three statements in seven, eight, and nine that kind of say, "Okay, who would have received it?" Verse seven, "Who would have received it?" Verse eight, "And according to the desire of their hearts. We worship a God who can read our hearts and knows where we're at." And those lines give me a lot of comfort, because I do stupid things, but the Lord knows I love him. The Lord knows I regretted that. Okay, that was dumb. I'm sorry. People don't think maybe I'm a Christian because of whatever, but God knows I'm a Christian. Jesus knows I rely on him. He knows my heart. And I love that he could say that he would've received it. Well, how do you know that? Because I know men's and women's hearts and I can read them.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 41:33 You sound like Nephi, right? "I'm a wretched man, easily beset by sins. But I know, in whom I've trusted."
- John Bytheway: 41:40 "In whom I have trusted."

Dr. Steven Harper: 41:40 My God has been my support. My desires are right and he knows it. And even though he watches me sort of falter, he knows the desires of my heart.

Hank Smith: 41:52 Yeah. There's this great moment at the end of the New Testament where Jesus says, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter, his actions have not said that I love you, if you take the denials to be...

Dr. Steven Harper: 42:03 ... that I love you, right? If you take the denials to be moments of weakness. His actions haven't said it, but Peter says, "Search me. You know everything. Lord, you know all things. And since you know all things, I know that you know that I love you." I mean, that is, "Search me, search my whole soul, and you'll find that every ounce of me loves you, even though sometimes my actions don't reflect that."

John Bytheway: 42:30 There's just great comfort in that who would have received it. I love that. He knows us and He knows since, what 100 AD to 1831, none of this was on the Earth. He can read their hearts and it's like, that's being sovereign.

Dr. Steven Harper: 42:51 That's sovereignty, right? He's got a plan for that.

Hank Smith: 42:55 Oh man.

Dr. Steven Harper: 42:55 He's got a plan for that.

Hank Smith: 42:57 And we can ... then that penetrates, like you said, Steve, every family who has this problem. I think of those who have lost sons or daughters or a spouse to suicide and to think, "Oh, well, they must be ... that action is ... they must be going to hell." And God's saying, "No, I know them. I know them. I know them inside and out." I just think this doctrine, this kind of sovereign God is the God that can calm your fears.

Dr. Steven Harper: 43:30 He may be the only being who knows the despair of a person who takes their own life and therefore, can relate and redeem that.

John Bytheway: 43:43 What comfort that is.

Dr. Steven Harper: 43:44 I'm heartened by that.

John Bytheway: 43:46 What comfort, a God that has justice and mercy perfectly. What comfort to know that's the one who's going to judge me, my relatives who have passed, those who have made mistakes. And

I remember on my mission once somebody treated us really rudely, and I remember leaving and saying to my companion, I mean, I'm 19, "Do you think that was their chance?" Because you always say they have a chance. And I thought, if they believed what most people believed about us, maybe they wouldn't want to listen to us anyway. And I don't think that was their chance because they don't know. And that gives me comfort too, the Lord can read that. A lot of people, it's not what they know, it's what they think they know that isn't true. And the Lord can sort that out too. Great comfort in 7, 8, and 9, for me.

- Dr. Steven Harper: 44:41 It's a beautiful revelation, isn't it? Unbelievably profound, powerful, and tastes good. It is the Restored Gospel.
- Hank Smith: 44:50 I had a friend say to me once after leaving the Church, she said, "I now get to believe that everybody's a good person. I now get to believe that non Latter-day Saints get to go to Heaven." And I was so frustrated going, "You didn't leave that church because that church doesn't exist. The church you're describing, I'm not a part of." Steve, you've said it before, Section 76 and now Section 137, Section 138, opens up Heaven and makes it huge, available to everyone who wants it.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 45:28 I believe the same thing as the good sister, except exactly the opposite. I believe almost everybody's a wretched person, including myself. An animated God from the Fall, who wants to become a Saint through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. And I believe He's mighty to save all, as He puts it repeatedly in Section 76. And I believe that the Restored Gospel as taught by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only consistent theology that has Christ at the center of that redemption for everybody, and still leaves people to choose. A Universalist would say, "He's going to save everybody whether they want to be or not." The Restored Gospel says, "He's going to save everybody who desires His salvation." And to a degree of salvation that they choose, that they want. That's pretty darn great.
- John Bytheway: 46:24 That's the Section 76 thing. And I've circled in verse seven, in verse eight, in verse nine and in verse 10, the word all. "All who have died, all that shall die, the Lord will judge all and beheld all children." That's really inclusive. And really merciful.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 46:41 Latter-day Saints tend to get a bit of a whipping for being exclusive. And then individual Latter-day Saints, like my sometimes rotten self, might deserve that. But the Restored

Gospel does not teach that. That is not the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Hank Smith: 46:58 If someone were to just listen to Steve's episodes, I mean, listen to how they connect. And we didn't mean to do this on purpose.
- John Bytheway: 47:05 Yeah. Section 76 connects to this.
- Hank Smith: 47:07 Right. We did Joseph Smith's first vision with him and Alvin's death with him. Then we did 76 with him. And now we're doing 137 and 138. It's almost as if there was a hand behind this saying, "If someone just is a Steve Harper fan, is not going to listen to any others, they're going to get the whole thing, the whole set in those three episodes." So Steve, we think you're inspired. That's all.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 47:34 Well, I'm pleased to be here. And this whole thing is inspired. It's brilliant work.
- John Bytheway: 47:41 You've articulated some things just beautifully. That soteriological problem, this is just great. Let's keep going.
- Hank Smith: 47:49 I was going to mention that, look at verse nine, "I will judge you according to your works-"
- John Bytheway: 47:54 Comma.
- Hank Smith: 47:55 "... and the desires of your hearts." According to the desires of your heart. So I'm going to find my Elder Ballard quote, it's taking into account everything that went into your decision making.
- John Bytheway: 48:08 Yeah. Well, I put a footnote there to Section 46, verse 9, which does have the word and, "According to the works and according to the desire of their hearts." And our friend and colleague, Brad Wilcox used that in his General Conference talk about the kid who says, "I'm just too much of a hypocrite." And he says, "Well, you're a hypocrite. If you hide it or lie about it or blame the Church for having high standards. But if you confront it and are trying to do better, that's not a hypocrite, that's a disciple." And then he quoted, I think it was Section 46, verse nine, which sounds just like this. I mean, and there's another text in the Book of Mormon that has that idea of commandments and the desires of their hearts. And I can't remember where it is right now.

Hank Smith: 48:51 Let me read this and then we'll turn it back over to Steve. This is Elder M. Russell Ballard. "I feel that judgment for sin is not always as cut and dried as some of us seem to think. I feel that the Lord recognizes differences in intent and circumstances. When he does judge us," Elder Ballard says, "I feel he will take all things into consideration. Our genetic and chemical makeup, our mental state, our intellectual capacity, the teachings we have received, the traditions of our fathers and our health and so forth." That to me is a sovereign God, who can know all of that and make decisions based on all of that information.

Dr. Steven Harper: 49:33 That's the God of the Restored Gospel.

Hank Smith: 49:36 I misstated that. Let me read verse [Section] 46, verse 9. "Verily, I say unto you, 'They are given for the benefit,'" commandments." No, see what's given. The gifts.

Dr. Steven Harper: 49:46 The gifts.

Hank Smith: 49:47 "The spiritual gifts are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, and him that seeketh so to do." And that's a good parallel text for this, I think

Dr. Steven Harper: 49:58 One way to read these passages is the Lord saying, look, your works might be amateur or juvenile or half, but I can see the desire that's motivating them, and I will take that into account too. That, to me, is very comforting and powerful.

Hank Smith: 50:25 Yeah. Comforting and powerful, absolutely. It calms your fears and say, "You know what? I'm willing to put my judgment in those hands. I know that that judgment will be just. It'll be right."

Hank Smith: 50:44 Do we want to talk about the last verse before we move on? "All the children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven." Did they realize what that meant at this time, 1836?

Dr. Steven Harper: 50:57 They do realize what it means, because Joseph has received a couple of revelations before this. Section 29 talks about the way people become, what I call a fully developed free agent. It talks about the four components, you might say, that you have to have to be a fully developed free agent. There has to be a law in the universe that says this choice is wrong and this choice is right. You have to have knowledge of that. Just because the law exists, if I don't know it, I'm not able to act on it of my own free will. So I have to have knowledge of it, I have to have power, I

have to have the ability to choose between the alternatives. And that requires also, as Section 29 says, and 2 Nephi says, an opposition, a bitter and a sweet, some force influencing me to pick the wrong choice, as well as the enticement from the Lord to pick His. When all those things are present, you've got a fully developed free agent. And Section 29 teaches them. And then it says, "Children begin to become accountable." This doesn't happen miraculously at midnight.

- Hank Smith: 52:13 12:01 AM. On their birthday.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 52:14 Right. But generally speaking, around eight, kids are capable of this kind of agency and they grow into it. Then Section 68, if I'm remembering right, says Joseph, it's age eight, when you can, generally speaking, count on kids to be able to exercise their agency, sufficient that they can choose to make the covenant for themselves. When verse 10 of Section 137 says, "Years of accountability," the Latter-day Saints know that that means around age eight. And this is an incredibly comforting doctrine. There's almost none of these families that have not lost infants or children before age eight, including Joseph and Emma Smith over and over and over. And it's really beautiful to them, to know that their children are not damned, as much of the Christian tradition would have them be, if not for this restored truth.
- Hank Smith: 53:22 Wow. This had to be fun for Joseph's dad, who was a Universalist. He'd be like, "Oh, I was so close. I was onto something there."
- Dr. Steven Harper: 53:34 Yeah. He was onto something. He and his ancestors swung to Universalism from Calvinism, which said just about everybody's damned by God's arbitrary sovereign will. And then Universalism says everybody's going to be saved by God's arbitrary sovereign will. And the Restored Gospel says, well, it's more complicated than that. God's will is not arbitrary. It is sovereign. He has decided, in His master plan, to make his children agents so they get to pick for themselves whether they want to be saved or damned. It's their will, not just His, that matters to Him, and that is the best gospel. And when Joseph, Sr. heard that gospel, he said, "Ah, that's the one. That's the one that tastes good. That's what I've been waiting for."
- Hank Smith: 54:25 Yeah. That's fantastic. I've heard you say before, "To Joseph's mom, "Any church is better than no church," and to Joseph's dad, "No church is better than the wrong church." Right?
- Dr. Steven Harper: 54:38 Right.

Hank Smith:	54:38	And that's a perfect tension for Joseph to be a part of growing up.
Dr. Steven Harper:	54:43	That gives us the Sacred Grove, the kid in the Sacred Grove.
John Bytheway:	54:48	Please join us for Part II of this podcast.

EPISODE 49 • PART II



Dr. Steven C. Harper

D&C 137-138



John Bytheway:	00:02	Welcome to Part II of this week's podcast.
Dr. Steven Harper:	00:07	Joseph F. Smith's an old man in October 1918 when he sees the series of visions that we have described for us in Section 138. In fact, he'll pass away about six or seven weeks after this revelation is received.
Hank Smith:	00:30	Steve, can you give us a little history of Joseph F. Smith? Tie him to the Missouri period a little bit, if that'd be okay.
Speaker 1:	00:37	Yeah. Who's his father again, and all that stuff.
Dr. Steven Harper:	00:40	Joseph F. Smith was born in 1838 in what was at that point the worst year in the life of his father, Hyrum Smith. He was blessed by his father while his father was in jail at Liberty, Missouri, as an infant. His mother Mary took him to the jail where his father blessed him. His uncle, Joseph, the prophet, was there.
Dr. Steven Harper:	01:08	And Joseph F. Smith grows up maybe more wounded by death than just about anybody that I know of in history. Think about it this way. He's five-years-old when he sees the bullet-hole in his father's face, sees him lying there in a pine box, and I mean, you can smell his decaying body by now. And they've tried to shove cotton in his cheekbone, but you don't get over that sight. That's such a traumatic experience that you don't get over it.
Dr. Steven Harper:	01:54	And it's not very many years later that his mother passes away. They make it safely across the plains with Joseph's siblings, but his mother passes away when he is in his early teens. She gets a lung infection and it takes her. So by his early teens, he's an orphan.
Hank Smith:	02:13	That's Mary Fielding, right, Steve?
Dr. Steven Harper:	02:15	Yes. Mary Fielding Smith, a heroic figure in the Restoration: the mother of a prophet, the grandmother of another. What a woman. And she instills her son with some serious feistiness

that is one of his best attributes. But before it becomes a strength, it is a weakness for him, and he does not get along well with others, always.

- Dr. Steven Harper: 02:44 And he is a traumatized youth, and his stepdad, Heber Kimball, and Brigham Young, the prophet, they know who he is and they love him and they look after him. And as you know, at age 15, when he's 15, that is, they send him on a mission with an older family member to look after him. They send him to Hawaii.
- Hank Smith: 03:10 Is it true that he beat up his teacher, and they said, "We got to send this boy somewhere with all this energy"?
- Dr. Steven Harper: 03:15 Yeah. It's disputed a little bit. The exact nature of the fight with the principal, I don't know for sure, but I'll tell you this: he is an angry kid. He is an angry teen. He is angry at the wagon company captain who said his mom and the kids were just going to be a burden on him for the rest of his life. I mean, I think when he is an old man and a prophet of the Church, he's still mad at the guy.
- Hank Smith: 03:46 Wow..
- Dr. Steven Harper: 03:46 Yeah. So I like that about him. I like that Joseph F. Smith becomes... I mean, nobody is more hurt, traumatized, devastated by death, and therefore nobody is more blessed, strengthened, hopeful by Section 138. Do you see how it works? If anybody longed deeply for this revelation, it was him, and so I just love that the Lord gave it to him. And I love that he could grow into the long-bearded old prophet who has such a tender heart, from the long-haired, angry-look-on-his-face youth who Brigham Young sent on a mission to Hawaii so he could learn the Gospel and learn to grow up.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 04:47 And it took him a while. He was a violent and frustrated young man. His first marriage did not work out because he was immature and unprepared and needed to grow up. And he did. He continued to grow up, and continued to apply the principles of the Gospel. He married again, married wonderfully well, and began to have children.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 05:16 Some of his children died. In fact, I think 13 of his children passed away over the years. And in the early days of 1918, early in that year, a young apostle and a recently returned mission president from the European mission, Hyrum Mack Smith, Joseph F.'s oldest son, has an appendix burst and dies. And not long after that, his wife dies, leaving several children.

Dr. Steven Harper: 05:51 And this is devastating to Joseph F. Smith, and it's just one more in a long life of devastating deaths. And he's on record saying how much these deaths of his loved ones hurt. And we might think, "Well, wow, you know the plan of salvation. Why do they hurt?" But they do. He's wounded by death in a way that I have experienced a little bit in this last year of my life, so I'm beginning to have a little better sense for what Joseph F. is saying, but I'm sure I haven't even come close yet to the trauma and the woundedness, the pain and grief...

Hank Smith: 06:31 Over and over.

Dr. Steven Harper: 06:32 Over and over. So here he is now, late in life. He's the mature prophet, and he knows very well that God has a plan to save those who never heard. He knows that Joseph Smith has taught that. He knows that Brigham Young taught it. He knows that Wilford Woodruff taught it. But he also knows that there's not a lot of revealed knowledge about it, and he wants to know. He wants to know exactly what the situation of the dead is. Where are they? What are they doing?

Dr. Steven Harper: 07:07 He has some questions, including, as he reads and rereads the scriptures very carefully, how in the world did the Savior preach the Gospel to the dead and have any kind of success when he was there for hours and his three-year ministry on Earth yielded comparatively few converts? That's one of the questions he has after he sees his First Vision, we might say, of redemption for the dead.

Dr. Steven Harper: 07:36 So that's the setting for 138. It comes the day before General Conference in October 1918, and he's been sick for almost half a year. Nobody expects him to show up at [General] Conference, and he does the next day, speaks briefly and says, "I have not been alone. I have lived in communication with the Spirit of the Lord," which is a massive, wonderful understatement given what we now know about what he'd been seeing the day before.

Hank Smith: 08:10 And Steve, I think the Saints of 2020 have at least somewhat of an idea of 1918, right, because there was a pandemic.

Dr. Steven Harper: 08:22 Yeah. The last time there was a global pandemic, before ours, was in 1918. This era that comes at the end of World War I was called, at the time, the Spanish Influenza. And all due respect to COVID-19, the Spanish Influenza was exponentially more devastating. Conservative estimates say 50 million deaths worldwide. There's almost nobody who doesn't know somebody who's taken by it. There are children who walk the

streets alone, orphaned overnight because their parents have been taken, and it kills people badly too. It's a real devastating toll.

- Dr. Steven Harper: 09:13 And this of course is on the heels of the First World War, which kills 9 million or so people. This is devastating. Think about it this way. The day that the prophet Joseph F. Smith receives this series of visions is the day that the German Chancellor communicates with US President Woodrow Wilson, seeking an armistice, right? That's how closely connected the end of World War I is to this series of visions. The world has been afflicted by death and devastation in a way that, to that point in time, had never happened before, at least not in recent memory. And October of 1918 is the deadliest month in American history still to this day: almost 200,000 people wiped out in one month of American history.
- Hank Smith: 10:09 And the population of America compared to-
- Dr. Steven Harper: 10:13 --comparatively smaller.
- Hank Smith: 10:14 ... compared to now. Yeah, just this much smaller population. Oh, goodness. As of this recording, COVID-19, we hit 5 million deaths, and you said 50 million deaths and that's a conservative estimate.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 10:27 Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 10:28 My goodness. Death is everywhere.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 10:31 It is everywhere, and everybody's thinking about it, right? Everybody's wondering, where are the dead? As George Tate, this wonderful humanities scholar at BYU has shown in a brilliant essay he wrote about it, everybody on the planet, almost, is wondering about death. It's not just Joseph F. Smith. But the answers that people come up... For most people, there are no answers.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 10:57 And many of the dead, there's no closure in that sense we talk about it, because lots of these World War I casualties are never recovered. There are people dead at sea. There are people blown to bits. There are thousands upon thousands of people on the battlefields of Europe who are never, ever recovered. Families never see their loved ones again in any form. They don't get to bury them. They don't get to visit their graves. They don't even know where a grave, if there is one...

Dr. Steven Harper: 11:29 So there's this terrible, gnawing feeling of a void caused by death and disease, war, and everybody is feeling it in one sense or another. This is the same year that Arthur Conan Doyle in Britain will write a book called *New Revelation* where he'll advocate spiritualism. He'll propose a solution to this gnawing absence by saying you can commune with your dad through spiritualism, and smart and talented and great people will be drawn to that very much.

Dr. Steven Harper: 12:11 It's understandable, but it's not the revealed answer. Right? Joseph F. Smith at the same time is seeking and receiving much more Christ-centered revealed answers to the terrible questions that everybody is asking: where are the dead, and what processes and plans has the Lord put in place for their salvation and redemption?

Hank Smith: 12:40 Truman Madson tells a great story about Joseph F. Smith visiting Carthage Jail as an adult, and just breaking down and saying to Charles Penrose, "Get me out of here, Charlie. Get me out of here." The blood of his father is dried into the floor. And everyone listening has been affected by death in some way. You don't have to feel like, "Oh, I haven't been that affected." Right? But everybody has felt this. The wonderful Sorensen family, who sponsors our podcast, had this occur in their family in January. John lost his mom recently. I lost my brother and my father in the last year. Steve, you lost two brothers.

Dr. Steven Harper: 13:30 I did, over the last several years, and my father earlier this year, and when my oldest brother was killed, surprisingly, in a terrible car accident, I found myself in a deep longing for knowledge. I read Section 138 over and over and over. I wanted to know where he was and what he was doing, and I to this day am incredibly consoled by verse 57 in this section: "I beheld that the faithful elders of this dispensation-

Dr. Steven Harper: 14:03 In this section, "I beheld that the faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from this mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption through the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those who are in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead. And then listen to this line, "The dead who repent will be redeemed through obedience, to the ordinances of the house of God." That is a really beautiful, restored truth.

John Bytheway: 14:35 Wow.

Hank Smith: 14:36 And that can fill the void. You talk about Arthur Conan Doyle, who just wants to fill the void, but can't, and this revelation can fill the void. Sorry, John, what were you going to add there?

John Bytheway: 14:48 I think it was at the funeral of elder Richard L. Evans, who used to be the voice of "Music and the Spoken Word". He was actually a member of the Twelve, but he was the Lloyd Newell of the time. That was the voice of "Music and the Spoken Word." And I think it was Joseph Fielding Smith that said that... I just remember the one phrase, "They are simply transferred to other fields of labor when they die." And, that sounds like they continue their labors. And, before my dad passed away, he had Parkinson's disease and some other things. And when he could still talk to us and communicate pretty well, I remember giving him a blessing once and he turned around and looked at me and said, "John, I think I'm going to hell." And I couldn't tell if he was joking or what. And I was like, "Dad", and he said to teach and I was like, "Oh, okay, yeah, that's a good one, dad." And I--

Hank Smith: 15:47 --He did, really?

John Bytheway: 15:48 Oh, my dad had such a sense of humor. But, I think that he was so looking forward to continuing his... Because he loved it, he was a convert to the Church, but he loved teaching and he was looking forward to being able to do that again.

Dr. Steven Harper: 16:04 That is a great story. I love that is-

Hank Smith: 16:08 John, I have the quote here. You're right. It's the funeral for Richard L. Evans. You can find it on the Church's website.

John Bytheway: 16:14 "In the case of the faithful Saints. ..." I think it starts like that.

Hank Smith: 16:18 Yeah. He says, "Life and labor and love are eternal. And Brother Evans is now assigned to continue his work in the Spirit World. Until that day, when he shall come forth in a glorious immortality to receive his place. He held the Holy Priesthood in this life and was ordained to ... a special witness of the Lord's name. And may I say for the consolation of those--"

John Bytheway: 16:38 That's it.

Hank Smith: 16:38 "...who mourn and for the comfort and guidance of all of us that no righteous man is ever taken before his time, in the case of the faithful Saints, they are simply transferred to other fields of labor. The Lord's work goes on in this life, in the world of the

Spirits and in the kingdoms of glory where men go after their resurrection."

- John Bytheway: 16:57 So I like to joke that my dad is serving in the Hell, Spirit Prison Mission, and that my mom joined him last December and now they're companions, so. And the work goes on. They just got transferred.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 17:13 Yeah. I bet he was pleased about that companion reassignment.
- Hank Smith: 17:18 Yeah, I think so. I've always thought that Nephi and Isaiah must be teaching together and Isaiah's like, "Kid, you got to stop the gushing. Right. I've signed everything. You've seen, you've given to me. Let's just keep teaching, okay?"
- Dr. Steven Harper: 17:36 Or maybe Isaiah starts and he does the First Principle and then Nephi has to translate it for the investigators, to make sure it makes sense.
- Hank Smith: 17:47 "What did he say?"
- Dr. Steven Harper: 17:48 "Let me say that a little more plainly."
- Hank Smith: 17:52 All right. Well, let's go back to verse one. Walk us through this revelation, Steve. I'm excited now.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 17:58 Well, there are two sections of the Doctrine and Covenants like this. And what I mean by that is most of the sections don't tell their own story. You have to have a heading to figure out the who, when, where. This one tells its own story, right? On the 3rd of October, 1918. And, that's because the two sections that do that are not revelation texts that are somehow conveyed by the Savior into Joseph's mind or Joseph F. Smith's mind. Their visions, their series of visions. So what you have here is the visionary describing the series of visions and they're delightful. I mean, these are great sections. So-
- Hank Smith: 18:42 So, 76 is the other.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 18:45 So, Joseph F. Smith is sitting in his room at his home, downtown on South Temple Street in Salt Lake City, pondering over the scriptures. These first several verses tell us what the recipe is for revelation. If you want to get revelations, here are some things you should do. Immerse yourself in the scriptures, ponder them, reflect on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the redemption of the world. Think about the love that was manifested by the Father in sending his Son to redeem the

world. So that, through the principles of the gospel, mankind might be saved. When you do that, you situate yourself for more light and knowledge. Joseph F. Smith knew that well, and he knows how to do this recipe.

- Hank Smith: 19:43 If someone says to me, how come this doesn't happen to me? Well, when was the last time you were sitting in your room, saturating yourself in scripture, reflecting on the great Atonement of Christ, right? When's the last time you took time away from Netflix? And, when was the last time you took away from ESPN to sit and just ponder and immerse yourself. John would say, marinate yourself.
- John Bytheway: 20:07 Marinade in it. Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 20:08 Marinade in it. So, I love this. Steve, it's a recipe for revelation and it's a pattern. It comes in Nephi's life, right? I sat and pondered and I was carried away by the Spirit.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 20:20 The Lord maketh no such thing known unto us. Well, have you asked him? No.
- Hank Smith: 20:27 Have you tried the recipe?
- Dr. Steven Harper: 20:29 No, I didn't think about that. Notice verse 5, right? He was engaged. He uses powerful verbs throughout. I was engaged in this thinking and my mind brought back to my thinking, scriptures that he'd read over and over. He's read about Peter and about Paul and what they've taught about redemption for the dead. And, he focuses specifically on The First Epistle of Peter and a couple of key passages there that he paraphrases and quotes from about how Christ went to the spirits of the dead, taught them so that they could be judged just like they were living in the flesh, even though they weren't anymore. But, these are a few words in 1 Peter, what do they mean?
- Dr. Steven Harper: 21:21 Joseph F. Smith knows that the gospel is somehow preached to the dead, but he wants more than the few verses in 1 Peter. He really wants to know the details and he's seeking that more than ever before. And he's pondering these things he says in verse 11, and as he puts all this together, his past scripture study, immersing himself in the scriptures and in the Savior's Atonement and in God's love, a seeking and now he receives. The eyes of his understanding are opened. The Spirit of the Lord rests upon me, verse 11 says, and he sees, "The hosts of the dead, small and great." He sees they're gathered together in a place, an innumerable company of righteous dead." These are

people who are faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived on earth, they have offered sacrifice in the Savior's, in similitude of the Savior's Atonement.

Dr. Steven Harper: 22:27

They departed this life firm in the faith of a glorious resurrection. They were filled with joy, gladness and rejoicing because they realized that the day of their deliverance had come. They'd been waiting for the Savior to come and rescue them. And, here it is, right? So Section 45 of the Doctrine and Covenants tells us that, even righteous people who die think of the period of time between their death and resurrection as bondage, apparently because they don't get to progress, they don't get to go on to the next phase. So, even those who live in the hope of a glorious resurrection, it's sort of like us in a holding period, right? We don't want to stay there forever. We know it's not forever, but we're eager to get on. So, these folks are very, very happy and they rejoice. In verse 18 says, that, "The hour of their deliverance from the chains of death, the son of God appears and declares liberty to the captives who had been faithful."

Dr. Steven Harper: 23:28

He preaches the everlasting gospel. And then one of the key insights of Joseph F. Smith revelation is verse 20, to the wicked, he did not go. He doesn't go to the wicked nor to the rebellious. There are a whole bunch of people left in a prison part of the world of the dead. And this leads Joseph F. Smith to think more, wonder more, right? Verse 28 tells us, I wondered at the words of Peter when he said that the son of God preached to the spirits in prison who were disobedient back in the days of Noah. How is it possible? Joseph F. Smith wonders for him to preach to those spirits and perform the necessary labor among them in so short of time. And here he is thinking, the Savior was preaching on earth for three years and had relatively few converts. How is he supposed to go for less than three days into the Spirit World, and make any headway among the infinite, leaving more vast number of people there.

Dr. Steven Harper: 24:37

And that's when the next chapter of the revelation comes to him. He realizes as the Lord reveals to him that Jesus doesn't go himself to the wicked and disobedient. But verse 30 says, he organized his forces and appointed messengers, "Clothed with power and authority commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them who were in darkness, even to all the spirits ... and thus was the gospel preached to the dead." George Tate, who I mentioned earlier, in his really brilliant article about this revelation in the various contexts of it. He drew attention to the way that verse uses what we might think of as military terms. Right? Imagine that the world has just

declared. Not yet, even in fact, we're a month and a week away from declaring our ministers to World War I, when this series of visions is given. And so, we've got armies all over Europe that have been commissioned and.

- Hank Smith: 25:42 Organized.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 25:43 Organized.
- Hank Smith: 25:44 Yeah.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 25:44 And I think brother Tate was particularly sensitive, Professor Tate. I thought it was insightful the way he said, look at that language and notice that Jesus is putting together his army to do his work in a way that contrasts with the way the armies of this world go about their work.
- Hank Smith: 26:05 Yeah. It's an army of construction, not an army of destruction. Right?
- Dr. Steven Harper: 26:12 Very cool. Isn't it? An army of salvation, I like being part of that army. I like going to the temple and feeling like I'm in this battalion and I'm called to the work. And, I would curl up in the fetal position if I was actually asked to go to any sort of a physical battle, but I'm all in the war that we're anxiously engaged in for souls and for redemption. And, the war that manifests the love of God and the redemption of Jesus Christ, that's my kind of warfare. And I'm excited that we've got a prophet here who's seeing the visions of the Lord revealing this campaign.
- Hank Smith: 27:00 Yeah. And your temple clothes are your uniform, clothed with power and authority, right? I'll put on the uniform. That's great.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 27:08 Indeed. Truly. The chosen messengers, verse 31 says, "Went forward to declare the acceptable day of the Lord and proclaim liberty to the captives," right? They're going to liberate the Spirit Prison, lots of prisoners of war being held, and these soldiers are going to let them go free. That's their great work is to liberate the captive. Isaiah taught about this, he prophesied this great day. And, as you know, Section 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants, Joseph F. Smith, exults that the Lord has ordained before the world was a plan that would make it, so that the prisoners could go free. And this is not long after he's emerged from months in that hell hole in Liberty, Missouri. He knows better than ever in his life what it's like for the prisoners to go free. And, there's this wonderful medieval Christian

tradition about the harrowing of hell. And this is where Jesus goes into the world of the Spirits and-

- Dr. Steven Harper: 28:03 And this is where Jesus goes into the world of the Spirits and breaks down the prison door and punches Satan right in the face, and liberates the captives. The art that depicts this is really great stuff, and I love it. There's this wonderful tradition of artwork that shows hell sometimes in the form of a giant monster or a dark prison, and Jesus goes into it and opens the monster's mouth or breaks down the door. In one painting Satan is being squished under the door of the prison and the captives are being liberated by Jesus.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 28:44 And this teaching is pervasive in medieval Christianity. It survives Augustine. He can't kill it. But it doesn't survive very well with the Protestant Reformers, and it takes Joseph Smith to say, "You know, that gospel that was taught by Peter and Paul, that was right." And this vision, this series of visions restores that truth and then expands greatly what we know about it. It tells us so much more than we knew before, about how the gospel is preached to the dead and who does it.
- Hank Smith: 29:23 I've wondered, Steve, if someone on the other side, someone in Spirit Prison thinks they're in hell. Maybe thinks there's no out of this. I am here for eternity, and maybe there is no one who knows that there's no way out of here. This is hell, this is forever, and to have that moment where hell opens up and says, "You can come out. Come out of there." I just think maybe in Spirit Prison, they didn't know it was coming. And to think of that moment, when you find out that there's a way out of here.
- John Bytheway: 30:04 Speaking of doctrines that taste good, right? Section 19, I remember as a teenager reading that. "I did not say the punishment would have no end. I said it was endless punishment because endless is my name."
- Dr. Steven Harper: 30:19 Oh, yeah.
- John Bytheway: 30:21 This idea of burning in hell for a trillion years, I mean, the worst way I could think of to die is to burn to death and then to the trillionth power and it goes on forever. And it's Section 19, oh, and this same kind of a thing that you just mentioned, Hank, is-
- Dr. Steven Harper: 30:38 Here comes the Lord. Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 30:40 Doctrines that really taste good.

Hank Smith: 30:42 I think that's why we... Steve is ... about a great movie. And I think this is a great movie. This is where the door is kicked open and there's Gandalf riding over the mountain on the third day, and here comes salvation.

Dr. Steven Harper: 30:57 I'm with you either way, right? Whether these folks have no hope whatsoever, total despair, no knowledge that redemption is on the way, that redemption has got to be the greatest. And let's say they do, somebody has informed them rescue is on its way, but think how long they've been there and how much despair. It is like a prisoner of war who's been there a mighty long time and you could easily just lose hope and become completely in despair. And then here comes the forces that have been organized by the Son of God, preaching redemption and resurrection.

Hank Smith: 31:38 It's the All-Star Team.

Dr. Steven Harper: 31:39 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 31:40 The All-Star Team, right?

Hank Smith: 31:42 And we start finding out who's on this team.

Dr. Steven Harper: 31:44 "Our glorious Mother Eve, with many of her faithful daughters," verse 39 says, "Who had lived through the ages and worshiped the true and living God." That is a restored truth that is very delicious. That's uncommon as you both know. The rest of the Christian world does not talk about our glorious Mother Eve. Eve is the problem. And I'm thankful to know. I'd like to know who these faithful daughters are. We get a lot more men named by name, Noah, Seth, Abel, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Ezekiel-

Hank Smith: 32:22 Oh my gosh.

Dr. Steven Harper: 32:23 ... Elias, Elijah, Joseph, Hyrum, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and other choice spirits who are reserved to come forth.

Hank Smith: 32:32 All the prophets who dwelled among the Nephites.

Dr. Steven Harper: 32:35 Yeah. Right? I mean, all those Book of Mormon prophets.

Hank Smith: 32:41 A veritable who's who.

Dr. Steven Harper: 32:41 Yeah. My goodness.

Hank Smith: 32:42 I read those passages and I think, "Yeah, that's impressive. I don't belong there." But verse 57-

John Bytheway: 32:51 Dad, who's your mission president? I wish I could ask him.

Hank Smith: 32:53 Yeah. Who's your zone leader?

Dr. Steven Harper: 32:57 As I was saying a bit ago, when I get to verse 57 I think, "Those are my people. That's where I fit."

Hank Smith: 33:06 I want to line up with that group.

Dr. Steven Harper: 33:08 Yeah. Let me be a junior companion in that company-

Hank Smith: 33:11 For those men and women. Yeah.

Dr. Steven Harper: 33:14 And I will be grateful for the assignment.

Hank Smith: 33:17 Yeah. Who's your zone leader? Who's your sister training leader?

John Bytheway: 33:19 Oh, just Esther.

Hank Smith: 33:24 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 33:24 Yeah.

Dr. Steven Harper: 33:26 So think about verse 39, "Our glorious Mother Eve with many of her faithful daughters who had lived through the ages." One of those I would guess is Susa Young Gates. She was a dear friend of Joseph F. Smith and a couple of weeks after the revelation she visited him at his house and he said, "Susa, you gotta see this." And he showed her the text of the revelation. She was thrilled with it. She felt it was a great privilege to see it before the whole world got to see it. And she wrote about it beautifully and talked about what a difference it would make. She had her own frustrations trying to persuade the Saints how important it was for them to find the names of deceased ancestors and do their temple work. And she thought these series of visions would be the greatest impetus, she called it, in getting them to see the vision, to catch the vision. I can't imagine that she's not one of the faithful daughters over there, continuing the work she did here on earth for decades. And she's just one of many undoubtedly.

Hank Smith: 34:35 Makes you want to get to the temple, doesn't it?

Dr. Steven Harper: 34:37 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 34:37 And line up with these people and help them out and-

Dr. Steven Harper: 34:40 "Shall we not go on in so great a cause?" This is the cause that was being talked about. And certainly it's what President Nelson keeps emphasizing to us, the gathering on both sides of the veil.

John Bytheway: 34:53 The cause.

Dr. Steven Harper: 34:53 This is it.

John Bytheway: 34:54 Yeah.

Dr. Steven Harper: 34:56 This is it.

John Bytheway: 34:57 The greatest work you could ever do. The reason you're here. Yeah. President Nelson, I love how he has been emphasizing over and over the work of salvation. This is the greatest work you could be involved in. This is why you're here.

Hank Smith: 35:12 Wouldn't it be cool? And look at verse 51. These are the people the Lord taught. So imagine Isaiah being taught, Ezekiel being taught, Eve being taught by the Lord and gave them power and they are going to go on and continue their labor. That's just so beautiful. Such a fun revelation.

John Bytheway: 35:38 Oh, I think I was exactly thinking that surrounded by so much sadness related to death, Joseph F. Smith, to see all of this and what this must have done to his heart and his spirits, the hope, the joy, the anticipation all coming together. Yeah.

Dr. Steven Harper: 35:58 So it's November 19th when he makes the journey between the world he was in and this world, six weeks after these visions. Nobody knew better what to expect and nobody, I'm guessing, was more delighted to get involved in the work on that side.

Hank Smith: 36:17 He had a tour before he went.

Dr. Steven Harper: 36:22 And like me, I think he's saying, "These are my people. Those are my people." I'm looking forward to the day when it's my turn to get a call to that field and to go to work there.

Hank Smith: 36:35 Yeah. Man, it is a wow, John, it's a wow section.

Dr. Steven Harper: 36:44 Let's say a couple more things about it. It's really beautiful to me that the gospel that is taught to the dead is the exact same

gospel taught to the living with this wrinkle that the ordinances are offered vicariously and the covenants are available. You can make and keep them on the same terms and conditions you can make and keep them in mortality. So exact same gospel, no difference except that the work is done... The ordinance work done by proxy. And then maybe one of the most vital things about this section is how Christ-centered it is and how potent Joseph F. Smith's witness of the Savior is. I was saying earlier that there were lots of people, C.S. Lewis is writing poetry at the same time, expressing this longing for the dead. He'd been in World War I, He'd been injured in World War I. Arthur Conan Doyle, lots of people, lots of people. Some of the poetry, *In Flanders Fields*, and lots of people are coming up with... They're either expressing the longing or they're offering a solution to it of some kind or other.

- Dr. Steven Harper: 38:09 And of all those possibilities, Joseph F. Smith's is the most Christ-centered, and it declares his witness over and over. And it's a sensory witness, right? If we read every verse, we'd notice him saying things like, "I saw. I heard. I beheld." And then at the end here, he says, "I bear record and I know that this record is true, through the blessing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Even so. Amen." This is a series of revelations. Jesus Christ is at the center of them. He is the answer. He's the resolution to the problem of death.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 38:54 His plan is the one that resolves the problem of death. He's the one who organized his forces and commissioned his officers and sent them into the world to preach his gospel. It's His Atonement that redeems the dead, as well as the living. It's His ordinances and covenants that provide the redemption, and Joseph F. Smith never lets us forget that. The other alternatives, Arthur Conan Doyle's book *New Revelation* is hopeful. Its goal is to satisfy that longing for some answer, for some voice from the dead, but it doesn't offer a Christ-centered plan of redemption like Section 138 does.
- John Bytheway: 39:45 I was just thinking of a phrase Sheri Dew used in a talk once, where she said, "The gospel reaches across the street, across the world and across the veil." And that we can have an impact here in temples. That we can have an impact over there is kind of an amazing thought, isn't it?
- Hank Smith: 40:10 It reminds me of 2 Nephi 9, when Jacob finds out that you don't have to stay dead forever. He just exclaimed, "O, the greatness of our God."
- John Bytheway: 40:21 "O, the greatness of our God."

Hank Smith: 40:22 There's so many exclamation points in that chapter, right?

John Bytheway: 40:25 I call that the "Os and Woes Chapter."

Hank Smith: 40:28 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 40:28 Because it starts with a bunch of "Os" and then it goes to a bunch of "Woes."

Hank Smith: 40:32 Right.

John Bytheway: 40:32 But that's one of the doctrinal, 2 Nephi 2, 2 Nephi 9, Alma 34. Big-

Hank Smith: 40:40 Big doctrine.

Dr. Steven Harper: 40:41 He talks chapters.

Hank Smith: 40:42 Yeah.

Dr. Steven Harper: 40:42 He talks too about, "The awful monster of death and hell."

John Bytheway: 40:46 Death and hell, yeah.

Dr. Steven Harper: 40:46 And that's exactly how medieval Christians depicted death and hell as an awful monster. And Jesus defeats the awful monster.

John Bytheway: 40:56 Hey, could we mention something? Because verse 56 kind of sounds like now we're going into the premortal existence.

Hank Smith: 41:04 Gives us a little glimpse into... Yeah.

John Bytheway: 41:07 Yeah. It gives us that past-present-future. I mean, "Even before they were born, they, with many others, received their first lessons in the world of spirits." I've heard people say you don't really gain a testimony, you remember it. That is interesting.

Dr. Steven Harper: 41:22 It is. That phrase in verse 55 about, "The noble and great ones chosen in the beginning," links us to the Abraham 3 passage. So what scholars call in fancy terms "intertextuality" here between Abraham 3. We're meant to remember what we learned in Abraham 3 and bring it forward into this text to inform what we're reading here.

Hank Smith: 41:48 Right. Steve, when you were talking earlier about the arbitrary God, if you don't include a premortal life, not only do you have

an arbitrary God, he created you to be damned. You didn't even sign up.

Hank Smith: 42:03 He created you to be damned. You didn't even sign up.

Dr. Steven Harper: 42:05 That's the sovereignty thing. I'm sorry if you weren't elected to be saved, that's tough luck.

John Bytheway: 42:11 This is serious...

Hank Smith: 42:11 And I created you only to damn you. You didn't even get a choice in the matter. At least in the premortal life, we have a God who says, do you want to go or not? There's agency again, want to have this opportunity or not? So a premortal life, though only a glimpse of it we have here, is crucial to our understanding of the character of God.

John Bytheway: 42:30 It tastes good.

Dr. Steven Harper: 42:31 Well said.

Hank Smith: 42:32 I think, Steve, it was your podcast earlier where you said, repent relentlessly. Was that you?

Dr. Steven Harper: 42:40 Yeah, I believe in that. I try to practice it as best I can.

Hank Smith: 42:46 It's not perfection.

Dr. Steven Harper: 42:48 No, this revelation, both [Section] 137 and [Section]138 teach us that it's the desire of our heart that matters. We signal to the Savior what we want Him to do for us by repenting and the living can repent. The dead can repent. It's the desire that we manifest by repenting that tells Him how we've exercised our agency. And then He applies His Redeeming Sacrifice to us in the degree and proportion that we want, that we hope for, that we seek. Never against our will.

Hank Smith: 43:30 It's a beautiful try again gospel. Try again, try again. Honestly, try again. Honestly, try again. It's not a be perfect gospel. It's not a plan of perfection. It's a plan of, it's a gospel of repentance and redemption.

John Bytheway: 43:44 I just love airplanes, you know this about me, Hank, to a degree that's kind of...

John Bytheway: 43:57 Obsession.

John Bytheway: 43:58 Yeah, I love airplanes, and so I have loved this repent relentlessly and how this relates to things President Uchtdorf has talked about or Elder Uchtdorf repeatedly. About that an airliner is off course most of the time, but it puts the wheels right on the numbers of the runway because it just keeps getting back on course. The autopilot keeps steering it back on course.

Hank Smith: 44:23 Little correction.

John Bytheway: 44:25 And it's a good analogy. Constantly making corrections.

Dr. Steven Harper: 44:29 Airplanes are repenting relentlessly.

Hank Smith: 44:37 Steve, is there anything that you had on your mind that we haven't...

Dr. Steven Harper: 44:40 Yeah, boats. Airplanes are nice, but boats, right? Jesus loved boating. Remember that.

Hank Smith: 44:48 Okay. I can talk about boats. Section 123, "You know, brethren, that a very large ship is benefited very much by a very small helm, in the time of a storm."

Dr. Steven Harper: 45:00 There you go.

Hank Smith: 45:00 "By being kept workways with the wind and the waves." Or is it Helaman, without sail or rudder or without anything wherewith to steer her. They're driftwood. They're not boats. And James, the ships though they be great, a very small rudder keeps them on course.

Dr. Steven Harper: 45:18 Very good. Now we're talking. Scriptures are full of boats.

John Bytheway: 45:22 What other vehicles can we throw in? I've appreciated verse 26 a lot. I think when I first got into my mission field, I heard a lot of my companions talking using the phrase, "Let's bind the Lord." "I the Lord am bound when you do what I say." And if we just do this and this and this, all these people will join the Church.

John Bytheway: 45:46 And we could test that theory, was the Savior perfectly obedient? Because verse 26 is sobering, and it allows for agency. "Notwithstanding his mighty works, and miracles, and proclamation of the truth, in great power and authority." I mean, who could give a sermon better than the Savior and the Spirit that accompanied him? There were but few who

hearkened to His voice and rejoiced in his presence and received salvation at His hands.

- John Bytheway: 46:16 And I think missionaries could beat themselves up. "I didn't do that well enough. I didn't do that good enough. And if I had only been this, maybe more would've listened." Well, not everybody even listened to the Savior. So you do the best you can.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 46:31 John, I think you're right on here. I remember reading Elder Oaks saying, "Be careful making goals based on someone else's agency."
- John Bytheway: 46:39 "Someone else's agency." You set goals on what you're going to do, not on what others will do.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 46:44 Yeah, he just said a missionary's goals ought to be based upon the missionary's personal agency and action, not upon the agency or action of others. Very simple statement. But I think you're right to use the Lord as an example there. He was perfectly obedient and did not, I don't think people did not listen.
- John Bytheway: 47:04 That's Elder Oaks' talk called "Timing," right? I think that helped. I sent that to my kids when they were on missions and hopefully some more will go too, but...
- Dr. Steven Harper: 47:16 Thinking if I was more obedient, I would be getting more people somehow.
- John Bytheway: 47:20 Or if I said that better, if I would have talked better. And well, some even didn't listen to the Savior in the way he would've, as he invited them to.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 47:30 That's insightful.
- Hank Smith: 47:32 Dr. Harper, Steve, you're just an incredible mind. We love having you on our show. I think our listeners would love to hear a little bit more about you just on the personal side of how do you be a faithful scholar, right? How do your faith and your scholarship come together, your education and your faith?
- Dr. Steven Harper: 47:54 That's a great question. I've been thinking lately, what is my highest value? What do I value most of anything? And I cannot, I have a prize for first place and it's truth and love. I can't put one of those in front of the other, but they're both to me the most desirable above anything else.

- Dr. Steven Harper: 48:26 I've been wanting to know the truth about the restored gospel for my whole life and had a revelation of that. The first one I can remember when I was probably 19, just about ready to go to the mission field.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 48:43 Having read the Book of Mormon for myself, I knelt and not very eloquently, but very sincerely just in my own mind, asked the Lord with real intent and faith in Christ and a sincere heart, if the Book of Mormon was true. And received an impression in my mind that said, "You already know it's true," along with a feeling in my heart that was a deep and abiding desire to affirm that thought.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 49:14 And there's never been a day since that I can think of that I have not felt to affirm that thought. I've read a hundred books since then and the Original Manuscript and the Printer's Manuscript, what remains of the original. So I know a lot more facts now. I know lots more stuff about the Book of Mormon, but the testimony of it is no stronger or weaker today than it was that day.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 49:46 And that truth is my bedrock. Joseph Smith is therefore a prophet. He was called by Jesus Christ. He was a mere kid. He didn't think much of himself, except his highest value was truth. He just wanted to know the truth and he wanted to live the truth. He wanted to be true to himself.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 50:10 And I love him for that. I think some people think I just love Joseph Smith because he's cool. He was really athletic and a good wrestler and stuff, and I couldn't possibly care less. I don't care if he has buck teeth or whatever else. Chronic halitosis, which he may very well have had. I don't know, but I don't care. I care whether he revealed Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, and his true gospel.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 50:44 And I've been on a quest to know the answer to that question for at least 30 years. And I know, I do know by the power of the Holy Ghost, that the revelations are real. They're true. I believe Section 137. I believe that he saw, Joseph Smith saw in vision his brother Alvin because Jesus wanted him to, because Jesus had some restoring to do. And he needed Joseph to ask the question that Section 137 answers.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 51:20 And I believe that Joseph's nephew, Joseph F. Smith, as an old man who lived a difficult life and one that was devastated by death over and over, I believe he was prepared by the Lord to receive a series of visions in the last several weeks of his life

that give us more knowledge of Christ's work of redeeming the dead than any other source that's ever been revealed.

- Dr. Steven Harper: 51:51 And if anybody is seeking truth, I want them to know about these revelations, these sources. They're so beautiful, desirable. And as you know, there are people who go to great lengths to undermine them, fight against them. I don't know why. I can't figure out why you would want to undermine Section 137 or 138.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 52:21 So I guess what we can say is that as Moroni prophesied, "Joseph's name will be known, is known for good and evil," everywhere. What an unlikely prophecy that was in 1823, but we live in a day where it's literally fulfilled. So even in that, Joseph is a true prophet.
- Hank Smith: 52:45 And he has, I would say, no greater defender than Steve Harper. Anyone who wants to take down the Prophet Joseph Smith has to go through the testimonies of some great people, and the front line is going to be Steve and Jennifer Harper.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 53:01 You know, you can... The thing about personal testimony is you can reject it, but you cannot refute it. I'm grateful for that. It's widely rejected, but for me, it can't be overturned.
- Hank Smith: 53:22 The blind man in John 9 said, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I know not." Here's how much I know.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 53:28 Here's what I know. Here's what I know.
- Hank Smith: 53:31 And Steve, thank you for sharing with us what you know.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 53:35 My privilege.
- Hank Smith: 53:36 How did we get this job?
- John Bytheway: 53:37 Yeah, I know. I'm so blessed. I just am thinking of my dad. You can't take this away from me. I just saw the gospel change him. I witnessed it. I watched it. I watched it change him and thinking of him now continuing his labors, as verse 57 says, just gives me a lot of hope and a lot of joy, a lot of love, like you said, and that's truth.
- Hank Smith: 54:12 Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Steve Harper and my O Come All Ye Faithful, co-host John Bytheway. Thank you to all of you for listening. We've had a wonderful year with all of you. We have a couple more episodes left for you this year.

Hank Smith:

54:32

Thank you to our executive producers, Steve and Shannon Sorensen and their wonderful children and grandchildren. Our production crew, Lisa Spice. She does so much work for us and she's all behind the scenes. Kyle Nelson, Jamie Nielsen, David Perry, and Will Stoughton. We love you, and we hope all of you will join us for our next episode of followHIM.



Hank Smith:	00:00	Hello, everyone. Welcome to followHIM Favorites. My name is Hank Smith. I am the host of a podcast called followHim and I am here with my wonderful co-host John, by the way. Hello, John.
John Bytheway:	00:11	Hi, Hank.
Hank Smith:	00:12	Everybody's favorite. And we're joined this week by the incredible and handsome and brilliant Dr. Steven Harper. Hi, Steve.
Dr. Steven Harper:	00:21	Hey, Hank. Thank you.
Hank Smith:	00:22	Yeah. We love having Steve Hopper on the podcast, don't we John?
John Bytheway:	00:27	We do.
Hank Smith:	00:28	If I can say his name right. We love having Steve Harper on the podcast.
John Bytheway:	00:31	Me too, yeah.
Dr. Steven Harper:	00:33	I was preparing to be offended there. Thanks for clearing that up.
Hank Smith:	00:35	Yeah, him too. I love that. Steve Hopper.
John Bytheway:	00:40	Welcome to both of you.
Dr. Steven Harper:	00:41	Yeah.
Hank Smith:	00:43	He's from Boston. He's Steve Happar.
John Bytheway:	00:45	Steve Happar.
Hank Smith:	00:45	All right. Hey, there are sections this week for followHIM Favorites, our Doctor and Covenants 137 and 138. You get to

choose one thing. You guys both know the drill. John, let's start with you. 137, 138,

- John Bytheway: 00:59 Hank, Steve, this just gets harder and harder to find because there's so many things.
- Hank Smith: 01:03 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 01:03 But there is one phrase in here that I just can't put enough exclamation points next to it and that is verse 39. Joseph F. Smith sees a number of characters in the next life, in the spirit world. And he mentions, "And our glorious mother Eve and many of her faithful daughters." Sadly much of the mainstream Christianity has thrown Adam and Eve under the bus. And oh, if it weren't for them, all these problems are their fault and not seeing it the way that our restored theology does. Go look at Moses 5:10-11. But this is our glorious mother Eve, a phrase you will not find many places in Christianity, I don't think at all. And many of her faithful daughters, here's a homework assignment. Go look up the daughters of Onitah, O-N-I-T-A-H and read about who they are, some of those faithful daughters and so many others. So I love that the restored gospel has given place to our mother Eve and called her glorious and look forward to that reunion. And I want to see what Joseph F. Smith saw, that's my favorite.
- Hank Smith: 02:16 Yeah. Oh John, that's fantastic. Let's return her to her rightful place, the glorious mother Eve.
- John Bytheway: 02:22 Oh, yes.
- Hank Smith: 02:23 I mean, that's a great followHIM Favorite. I'm glad you have that as your favorite. My followHIM Favorite is going to be just the idea of the two sections. 137 and 138 are both visions of the next life. And especially those of you who are a little bit younger, you may hear the idea of living after you die, is just a crazy idea that makes people feel good. No, it is not. These sections are a testimony that you will live and so will your family and friends will live after they die. And not only will they live, they are part of the same work you are, we're all on the same team, moving the gospel of redemption through the atonement forward. I got to just read one quick story.
- Hank Smith: 03:13 President Eyring said, the day his mother died, of course he was devastated. And he said, "We got on from the hospital and my father seemed upset. He went to his room and it didn't come out for a little while." And he said, "But he came out and he

looked different. And so I asked him, what happened?" And this is what President Eyring said. He said, "My father had gone to his bedroom to ask his Heavenly Father." By the way, Henry Eyring Sr, when you talk brilliance, this man is a brilliant man. So if the idea that only foolish uneducated people believe in life after death, tell them, anybody who tells you that, tell them should have won a Nobel prize, right? Everybody knew it. Henry Eyring Sr, "That man had gone to his bedroom to ask his heavenly father to have someone greet Mildred, his wife and my mother. He said, that he had been told in answer to his prayer, that his mother had been there to meet his sweetheart."

- Hank Smith: 04:15 President Eyring said, "I smiled at that. Grandma Eyring was not very tall. I had a clear picture of her rushing through the crowd. Her short legs moving rapidly on her mission to meet my mother. When I saw in my mind, my grandmother rushing to my mother, I felt joy for them and a longing to bring my sweetheart and our children to such a reunion." And part of my followHIM Favorites is my testimony that, that is going to take place. You are going to be reunited with those you have lost. So that's why I love the idea of these two sections. So Dr. Harper, let's turn it over to you.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 04:53 Okay. Very good. Did I tell you guys that my brother, Dr. Harper says that I have to be able to take someone's appendix out, before I let people call me Dr. Harper?
- Hank Smith: 05:04 Yeah. Those doctors say, "You're not a doctor."
- Dr. Steven Harper: 05:07 Yeah. Brethren, this has never meant more to me than it does now. What you just said, Hank. And John, what you said a bit ago very touchingly, because my father passed away earlier this year and not long ago, my older brothers passed away. And so my followHIM Favorite is verse 57 of section 138, where Joseph F. Smith says, "I beheld that the faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption, through the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those who are in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead."
- Dr. Steven Harper: 05:53 That's poetry to me, those are my people. I feel like there will be a place for me when I get there, a meaningful work to be done. I feel like in the meantime, there's meaningful work for me to do here and now, to cooperate with them and to bring to pass that redemption of the spirits of the dead. And I'm deeply grateful for such a meaningful, purposeful existence, both here

and here after, and for the wonderful consolation it provides me, that the people I love most are with me still and engaged in the same work. And that I'll have an opportunity to be with them in that again. I can't overstate how meaningful that verse has been to me throughout my life.

- Hank Smith: 06:43 Wow. Yeah. Especially right now. Man, it's a beautiful idea. And what's even more beautiful is, it's true.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 06:51 It's true.
- Hank Smith: 06:52 It's true. We hope you all will join us on our full podcast. You're not going to want to miss this one, you're not going to want to miss any of them, but this one especially, you're not going to want to miss this one. You can find, followHIM anywhere you get your podcast, use your Google and thummim, type it in, followHIM podcast, you're going to find us. You want to see these episodes. But we know that some of you can't do it or just won't do it. So we hope you join us next time on followHIM Favorites.