



“In the Beginning God Created the Heaven and the Earth”

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:

Were the creation accounts intended to be archeological, geological, or scientific texts? Dr. Joshua Sears joins the podcast and teaches us about Ancient Near Eastern Cosmology and the purpose of creation texts. We learn what "accommodation" means when discussing scripture, and what are "the terrible questions?"

Part 2:

Dr. Sears returns and teaches how God's naming pattern helps identify a creation's purpose and how God can organize and create meaning out of chaos, and how that applies to our individual lives and trials. You will come to understand the Creation, the grand vision of Moses 1, and God's love in powerful new ways in this episode.

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- 02:04 How to introduce this lesson to students
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Part 2:

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- 57:25 End of Part II

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Biographical Information:



Joshua Sears grew up in Southern California and served in the Chile Osorno Mission. He received a BA in ancient Near Eastern studies from BYU, where he taught at the Missionary Training Center and volunteered as an EMT. He received an MA from The Ohio State University and a PhD in Hebrew Bible at The University of Texas at Austin. His research interests include Israelite prophecy, marriage and families in the ancient world, and the publication history of Latter-day Saint scripture. He has presented at regional and national meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, BYU Education Week, the Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, and the Leonardo Museum Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls. His wife, Alice, is from Hong Kong and plays in Bells at Temple Square; they live in Lindon, Utah, with their five children.

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Old Testament

EPISODE 2 • Part I



Dr. Joshua M. Sears

*Genesis 1-3
Moses 2-3
Abraham 4-5*

Hank Smith:	00:00:01	Welcome to folloHim. A weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their <i>Come, Follow Me</i> study. I'm Hank Smith.
John Bytheway:	00:00:09	And I'm John Bytheway.
Hank Smith:	00:00:11	We love to learn.
John Bytheway:	00:00:11	We love to laugh.
Hank Smith:	00:00:13	We want to learn and laugh with you.
John Bytheway:	00:00:15	As together we followHIM.
Hank Smith:	00:00:19	Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name is Hank Smith. I'm your host. I'm here with my prolific co-host John Bytheway. Hi, John.
John Bytheway:	00:00:31	Hi. Anytime somebody wants to describe me with the word pro, that sounds nice.
Hank Smith:	00:00:35	It is.
John Bytheway:	00:00:35	I'm kind of an amateur pro.
Hank Smith:	00:00:38	My amateurrolific co-host John Bytheway. We are ready to jump into the Old Testament with you in the Pearl of Great Price today. John, we have an expert with us, one of the most delightful people I know. Who is it?
John Bytheway:	00:00:54	Oh, that's great. Yes, we have Joshua Sears with us. I have a little bio here. Joshua Sears grew up in Southern California, served in the Chile Osorno mission. He received a bachelor's in

Ancient Near Eastern studies from BYU, where he taught at the Missionary Training Center and volunteered as an EMT. That is an EMT at the MTC at BYU. He received an MA, master's degree, from the Ohio State University and a PhD in Hebrew. That is so cool, at the University of Texas at Austin. His research interests include Israelite prophecy, marriage and families in the ancient world, and the publication history of Latter-day Saint scripture. He has presented at regional and national meetings of Society of Biblical Literature, BYU Education Week, the Sidney B. Sperry Symposium and the Leonardo Museum Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls. His wife, Alice, is from Hong Kong and plays in Bells at Temple Square. And they live in Lindon, Utah. They have five children from ages 12 down to two.

Hank Smith: 00:02:01 BYU is lucky to have Joshua. And I know his students adore him.

Hank Smith: 00:02:04 Josh, this week's *Come, Follow Me* lesson is a lot. We have two chapters from Genesis, two chapters from Moses, two chapters from Abraham. Let me first ask you, when you're teaching your students at BYU, how do you have them approach texts like the Old Testament, The Pearl of Great Price? How do you introduce them so they're coming at it in the right way?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:02:29 I guess for me I like to start with the biblical text, like Genesis, look and see what that does. That's been around the longest. That's our common ground with other Christians, with Jews. So start with that as a foundation. Then I would look at the Moses and Abraham text as being modern revelation coming through the prophet Joseph Smith where he's taken that Genesis base text and he's expanded it, he's reworked it, he's given new insights, he's given commentary, he's given us a lot of great stuff to work with for a Latter-day setting. So starting with Genesis is your first step there, and then you branch out from there into these amazing things that Joseph gave these new spins on it.

Hank Smith: 00:03:09 Okay. I like that idea. And then maybe you could even say, "Okay, here's what the book of Moses added. Here's what the book Abraham added." And then you could even say, "Here's what prophets today maybe have even added." So you give them in the order they came.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:03:24 Yeah. And that's a great thing about scriptural text. Is they're not static and frozen, they're dynamic. They can change and evolve and meet new circumstances, new needs as different prophets are interpreting, expanding, revising. So that's the wonderful thing about the Word of God being living. Is that, it

has this flexibility to speak to people in different ways at different times.

- John Bytheway: 00:03:43 Isn't that one of the main tenets of textual criticism? Is the earliest text is the most accurate? But when we believe in living prophets, a prophet can come along and say, "Let me clarify that, or let me expand that." And that's another way we can say it's dynamic, isn't it? Which is a whole different way of looking at it.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:04:06 Yeah. President Oaks talked about that in the *Ensign* several years ago, that it's important to look at the meaning of what it meant back then, but a text isn't, he says, limited to just what it meant back then, but it also includes what it can mean for us today.
- John Bytheway: 00:04:20 And I like that you said we share this. So the book of Genesis we share with our Jewish friends. So they're looking at the same text we are out of the Torah. And I suppose there's as many creation stories as there are cultures on earth. I think we're looking at creation stories in Genesis and in Moses and even some in Abraham today, aren't we?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:04:47 Yep. We are. That's why we have stuff from Genesis, Moses and Abraham, because they're all parallel. They're all telling the same story in different ways.
- Hank Smith: 00:04:56 Josh, I want to squeeze a little more out of you here. So you're a Latter-day Saint at BYU, then you go through this massive biblical studies education. How do you look at Genesis differently than when you say you were just home off a mission?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:05:15 That's a great question. I would say that biblical scholars in general look at Genesis very differently than we did a couple 100 years ago. And sometimes people frame this as, "Oh, you've got what Genesis means versus new stuff like science and things that are challenges there." And that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the fact that in the last couple of 100 years, we have basically rediscovered Genesis's cultural environment, the Ancient Near East. So these are all Israel's neighbors; Egypt, Babylon Assyria, Canaan.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:05:45 We have done a lot of archeology, so we've dug up these sites. We have discovered thousands of documents, texts from the ancient east, from inside Israel, from around Israel. We've deciphered scripts that had been lost that we've learned to

read, like we've learned to read Egyptian in the last 200 years. We've learned to read the Cuneiform script, the little web shaped things that write in the clay tablets in Mesopotamia. And we've learned to read these languages and we can read these documents. And that's just led to this explosion of new understanding of what Genesis and the rest of the Old Testament is talking about. Because the Israelites don't live in a little bubble, they're not in a vacuum. They participate in a broader pop culture. And so there's inside references and frameworks and common understandings that they share with all these people. And now that we can see all the stuff going around, we can better understand the Old Testament. We see the conversations that we're participating in.

Hank Smith: 00:06:35 I think that is a crucial understanding, because if you don't, you're going to look at Genesis from a 2021, let's put it against evolution. Let's put it against biology, but that was not their world. They lived in a world of cosmologies of Babylonian cosmology, Egyptian cosmology.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:06:56 Yeah. And they make references to things that these other cultures believe in and think about. And you see general conference speakers doing this today. President Uchtdorf made a joke about Chewbacca, remember? A few years ago, about your family member who wore the Chewbacca costume. He gave a talk all about Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*. You remember President Faust gave a talk based on that book, *The Little Engine that Could*, Thomas S. Monson gave a talk and talked about the movie *Home Alone*. So they do this. And we have references to prom and other things that are just modern stuff. So they're always assuming that their audience understands these things because it's part of our common frame of reference and the Israelite prophets are writing doing the exact same thing. They're making references to stories and events and just worldviews that their neighbors have. And they're participating in all this dialogue. So now that we can see so much more of what was going on. All of a sudden things in the Old Testament that didn't make sense, just pop out and you go, "Oh, that's what they're talking about."

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:07:51 One of the things we understand better now, looking at the Old Testament is their cosmology, which is a fancy word for basically how you the universe, how is the universe structured? So today our cosmology is that the earth is a sphere and we rotate around the sun in an orbit. We're one of nine or so planets orbiting the sun depending on the whole Pluto thing. And then we're a solar system and the solar system is one of billions of stars in the Milky Way Galaxy. And that's one of, who

knows? How many galaxies. So that's our cosmology. That's how we understand the structure of the universe today.

- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:08:25 In the ancient world of the Ancient Near East, where the Israelites live, they didn't think in those terms at all. And the way they describe their cosmology has always been in the Old Testament. But, again, some of these references to what they're talking about, pop out a little bit easier now that we can read what everybody else is saying and we see what the Israelites share with them.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:08:47 So this is going to sound a little weird at first, but bear with me while I describe this.
- Hank Smith: 00:08:52 I'm excited. I like if someone introduces it that way, "This is going to sound a little bit weird, but let's do it anyway."
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:09:00 If you Google the term, phrase, Ancient Israelite Cosmology, it'll come up with pictures and things to look at. So I'll just try to describe it here. So basically for the Israelites, the earth is flat and the universe is made up not of empty space the way we tend to think of space, there's water everywhere. Just chaos water that's not doing much. And basically we're living in a giant air bubble. It's like an inverted snow globe. So the water's on the outside and you live inside the snow globe and you've got a solid dome that's resting over the flat earth that keeps all that water that's up there from crashing down and destroying everything. Then you got these pillars that are beneath our flat earth, holding it in place so that the water underneath isn't gushing up to drown us that way. Then meanwhile, the sun, moon and stars are all underneath that solid dome, and they move in rotation underneath it to give us light and things like that.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:09:59 So that is how people in the Ancient Near East see the world. That's how the Israelites see the world, And that's, what's assumed throughout the Old Testament, many, many references that have bits and pieces of this. And that's exactly what you see going on in Genesis 1.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:10:13 So for example, in verse 6, "Let there be a firmament," that's the solid dome, "In the midst of the waters," that's because everywhere's water, "And let it divide the waters from the waters," because we've got... this is where we split apart the water to make the air pocket, so water's above and water's below.

Hank Smith: 00:10:29 Genesis 1:6?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:10:32 Yeah. And then seven says, "God made the firmament and divided the waters, which were under the firmament, from the waters which were above the firmament, and it was so." So you get this there. And when you know what you're looking for, it's pretty obvious what it's talking about. Most people though, the reason this is surprising is because our cosmology is so ingrained in our brains that when we read this, we tend to superimpose how we understand the universe onto this. So we kind of make it fit our understanding of what's going on rather than let them speak for themselves with their worldview.

Hank Smith: 00:11:08 Yeah, that is... Josh. I think you're giving our listeners, and John and I here, a skillset that is crucial going into the Old Testament. Let them speak for themselves in their world instead of super imposing your world upon it. Let's just make this clear, Josh. They truly believe, and these are not dumb people. These are intelligent people, but this is their worldview. "I live in this inverted snow globe and the stars, moon, and sun are inside of the snow globe. And outside of that is the chaos waters, below me is the chaos waters. And that's how I understand my world."

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:11:55 And I like that you point out that they're not dumb. This is based on the best that you could understand at the time because they don't have telescopes and things like that. So if you're standing out in a big field and you look around you, you're going to see the earth look like a big flat circle all around you. The sky is going to look like it has a dome shape, and you do see the sun, moon and stars kind of moving all around you. So that just makes intuitive sense that, that's what's going on. That's what they observe.

Hank Smith: 00:12:20 Yeah. I would say that you don't know how the rain is falling, so the water is up there. Occasionally it gets through, I guess?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:12:29 Yeah. Well in the solid dome, you've got these little trap doors that God can open called the windows of heaven and He can open those and let a little water down to help you there. So when God, like in our Malachi, our tithing passage, says, "I'll open for you the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing." We take that as metaphorical. They took it a little more literally, that there's actually little windows out there. And in the flood story we usually think, "Oh it rained for forty days and forty nights." But what it actually says, you go to Genesis 7, you do get that coming from up there. But it also says that the foundations of the deep were broken up. So those bounds holding the water under the land are being ripped open. So you

got water coming up from below too. So you got water coming from down below. It's like holes in the snow globe getting punctured and this water is rushing in now. And that's where you get the flood coming from, is both from above but also from below.

- John Bytheway: 00:13:18 There's another spot. When Abinadi in Mosiah 13 is quoting the Ten Commandments to King Noah and the wicked priests, he says, "Don't make graven images or things which are in the heaven above, which are in the earth beneath or which are in the water under the earth." And so that sounds like their cosmology right there, the water's under, that's in Mosiah 13:12.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:13:46 They conceive of three realms. You've got that realm that's up above there. You've got the land where you are, and then the water underneath the land there. So those are the three layers they always talk about.
- Hank Smith: 00:13:55 I have a quote here from James Talmage from an address called "The Earth and Man," 1931, 90 years ago. James Talmage says, "Let us not try to wrest the scriptures in an attempt to explain away what we cannot explain. The opening chapters of Genesis and scriptures related there too... I would think he's talking maybe about Moses and Abraham, "Were never intended as a textbook of geology, archeology, earth science or man science. Holy scripture will endure while the conceptions of men change with new discoveries," which, Josh, you mentioned earlier, all the new discoveries. And then he said this, "We do not show reverence for the scriptures when we miss apply them through faulty interpretation." And I think, Josh, what you're giving us here is a skill that will help us avoid faulty interpretation. Any thoughts on that?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:14:50 Yeah. What you see happening a lot today is that people think we've got this big battle between say on the one hand, scientists and science, and being true and faithful to the word of God in Genesis. And people see these as pitted against each other. And so that comes up and debates about evolution or the age of the earth and things like that. And I think the fundamental problem with doing that is that Genesis isn't speaking the same language as what the scientists are. These aren't even in conversation. So to force them into a debate, it's just not going to work from the get-go.
- Hank Smith: 00:15:23 If you're talking to someone who believes they live in an inverted snow globe, again, not stupid. I know that sounds like I'm making fun, but I'm not. And then start talking to them

about evolution. Number one, you won't speak their language, and two, what are you talking about?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:15:37 Yeah. Another term which is quote. You see this repeated in more recent church publications too. So I got this one here. This is from the *New Era*, February 2016. And it says, "The details of what happened on this planet before Adam and Eve aren't a huge doctrinal concern of ours. The accounts of the creation in the scriptures are not meant to provide a literal scientific explanation of the specific processes, time periods, or events involved." So that's from just a few years ago.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:16:04 So it's the same sentiment, that you have to be careful not to use this to make scientific claims because that's not what it's trying to do. It really was getting into my Hebrew Bible training that gave me better tools to understand this, because even sometimes people who are trying to defend science don't really understand how scripture's working, and so they make some faulty assumptions there too. It takes a really good understanding of both.

Hank Smith: 00:16:25 So it's just not believers who do this, it's scientists too. And they say, "Look what the Bible says." They don't understand its cosmology either.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:16:34 Now, this brings up a problem though that I hope to address here, some people, and this can be Latter-day Saints, this has happened for the Christians, anybody who's religious reading this text. When you're told, and especially if you haven't heard this before and haven't really had time to process it, that scripture, sacred reveal of the scripture that we have in our canon, teaches something that sounds so wildly and accurate, as a flat earth surrounded by water and all this, that can be really challenging because people think, "Well, are the scriptures wrong then? And that can be a real trial. So I think this takes some stepping back to think about what God is trying to do with different scriptures and what He is not trying to do.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:17:19 There's a great passage in the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 1. I know we just left Doctrine and Covenants behind last year, but we're going to go back an entire year to Section 1 here. So look at Section 1, verse 24. Remember that this is the Preface to the Doctrine and Covenants. So the Lord's talking about the nature of this book. Verse 24, "Behold, I am God and have spoken it. These commandments are of me and were given unto my servants in their weakness after the manner of their language that they might come to understanding." And I think this is such a crucial concept. Like He's saying here that if the

language were different or the weaknesses were a little stronger, I might speak differently to these Saints, but I'm making sure that this is in a way that they can understand, adapted to their weakness because I want them to understand. That's the goal right there.

- Hank Smith: 00:18:10 I'm going to speak to them in their language. Could we change that word? I'm going to speak to them in their cosmology.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:18:17 Mm-hmm (affirmative). And so you think about, in Genesis 1, what is God trying to do? I think the assumption is often that He's trying to explain how the earth and the universe physically came into being. And I don't think that's actually what He's trying to do here. I think what He's trying to do is explain who He is, what His nature is, explain who people are, our relationship to each other, how do we relate to God and what's our purpose here on earth. Those are the doctrines that Genesis 1 is trying to teach and it succeeds beautifully. It does its job.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:18:54 And there's a lot of ways in which it corrects false ideas that were in the Israelites culture and it reveals beautiful things. So why is it using this, what we say is a wrong cosmology, to do that? Well, I've got a friend who's a Latter-day Saint historian, Ben Spackman. And he caught me onto this word that Christian theologians have been using, and it's called accommodation. And accommodation is a concept that says that when God speaks to us, he's got to dumb it down and speak from our framework so that we can understand. It's the same thing the Doctrine and Covenants is talking about. So we have this idea in our scriptures, we just don't often have a single word to use to describe it. So that's why I think accommodation is a useful term so we can wrap our minds around the vocabulary word.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:19:37 So you have other Christians talking about how accommodation is God, not just simplifying it down, but also adopting our fallen frameworks in some cases, in order to communicate things, because if he were to speak at the level He understands, it would just go over our heads.
- Hank Smith: 00:19:54 Josh, I do this as a parent all the time.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:19:57 And this is good pedagogy in the book of Mormon, remember Ammon going to King Lamoni. And Ammon just can't start teaching everything he knows about God, because he's got to start where Lamoni's at. He says, "Do you understand God?" Lamoni goes, "I don't know what you're talking about." Ammon is like, "Well, you believe in a Great Spirit, right?" Lamoni's like, "Yeah." And he's like, "Okay, well that's God."

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:20:18 Now, there's probably differences between the Lamoni concept of a Great Spirit and the Nephi concept of God. But it's close enough for right now he's like, "We're going to roll with that for now. We can flesh out the details later, but for now we're going to roll with this." And I imagine God's doing much the same thing in Genesis 1 with the cosmology. The Israelites have a cosmology already, this is how they see the world. And rather than fight that and confuse them by explaining black holes and nuclear fusion and solar systems and all these things, they have no concept about, He's like, "You know what? My real priority here is teaching you about your value and your worth and your purpose and our relationship. So I'm going to harness your cosmology and roll with that for the time being. It's wrong, but what the heck? I'm priorities here. I want to get at these doctrinal ideas."

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:21:01 And the cosmology works to explain that as is, and it's really not going to help them to try to get into the details of how the cosmology really works, because in the end, that's not going to help them as much as knowing about the nature of God.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:21:15 When people say, "Well, is Genesis wrong then?" I'm like, "Well you gotta stop and define what you mean by wrong. If you're talking about the scientific modern perspective of how the earth was made, then yeah, it's wrong. But if that's not what Genesis is even trying to do, it's unfair just to say it's wrong for what it was trying to do, its right."

John Bytheway: 00:21:33 Yeah. I was thinking about, I think Hugh Nibley calls them, "The Terrible Questions." And as you were describing that, Josh, I thought, "Yeah, God is trying to answer the questions of who is God, who are you? Why are we here?" It's not, how did I create everything? Who am I? Who are you? Why are we here? What are we supposed to do? And the text reaches those goals without refuting the Big Bang or endorsing the Big Bang or anything. That's not the purpose of the text and maybe we can get that later, but the truths about God and about who we are is more important to God right now in that text.

Hank Smith: 00:22:12 Yeah.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:22:14 Yeah. And here's another analogy, when I went to high school, I remember being in science class and learning about the nature of the atom. And we learned that there's a nucleus with the protons and neutrons, and then that the electrons orbit around the nucleus in the same way that planets orbit around the sun. So that was fine. And you can use that to do things like, "Okay, if you got an atom here and an atom here with these mini

electrons in their outer orbit, and then that means they'll stick together and form molecules. We did a lot with that. Then I got to BYU and took Chem 105, which was for me a really hard class. And I learned that that model, the atom, it's called the Bohr model is not only inaccurate, it's been inaccurate since the 1920s.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:22:57 And so I remember feeling so confused. Why did my high school science teacher teach me something that we've known was wrong since far before that teacher was born? And I asked this to the Teaching Assistant in class, and I'll never forget what she said. Two things are what she said. Number one, the Bohr model is a lot easier for high school students to understand than nuclear physics, which is, the modern conception is electrons are in these probability clouds, and they're somewhere in there, but you can't always tell. So a modern model looks like a balloon animal with these clouds sticking out everywhere. But she said, that's harder for high school students for one.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:23:30 But number two, maybe more importantly, that Bohr model is extremely useful for doing a lot of things. You can make a lot of predictions in chemistry and physics using that older model. Eventually it stops working when you get to more advanced stuff, that's why you have nuclear physics today, but it does quite a lot. You get quite a lot of traction out of it. So that's another reason why you just do that in high school, because it might be wrong ultimately, but it is very useful.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:23:59 So I think in a similar way, the Israelites' cosmology might have been wrong, but it was very useful. God with minimal messing with their paradigms here could teach them quite a bit using that. And sometimes that's just good pedagogy.

John Bytheway: 00:24:15 Well, this is great. In the *Come, Follow Me Manual*, it says, "One thing that creation story teaches us is that God can make something magnificent out of something unorganized. That's helpful to remember when life seems chaotic." And I think that's a big meaning we can draw without trying to get really specific about the science, but look what God can do with all of this.

John Bytheway: 00:24:42 We've got three different books here. Should we start in Genesis and start looking at some specifics?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:24:48 Let's do it.

Hank Smith: 00:24:50 Okay.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:24:50 So we'll take this from the top. Like I was saying earlier, some things in here we understand a little bit better because we can read about these texts from all the other cultures around Israel, and we can read about creation stories in Egypt, from Babylon, from the Canaanites. And so when you do that, you see some common themes develop that help us put Genesis in the context of their ancient understanding there.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:25:14 One thing for Israel and their neighbors is when they picture pre-Creation, what things were like before, they're not picturing nothingness in the sense of just empty space. There's always going to be stuff there, there's matter there, but it's unorganized. It's just chaotic, has no purpose, it's just crazy. And they visualize this as being, like we said, water, just primordial watery chaos.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:25:41 So the nothingness is made up of just chaos water, that's unstructured and unorganized. And that's what they're imagining.

Hank Smith: 00:25:47 The chaos water. Okay.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:25:49 Yep. And so when God or the gods, depending on your cultural story here, create, what they're doing is they've got to bring order to that chaos that's going on right there. And then a lot of these other cultures, that happens via a big cosmic battle that happens when you've got the creator God who's in battle with the forces of chaos, often represented by a giant dragon or sea monster, and you have this big dramatic battle. We would read these stories out loud at festivals and things, so it's supposed to be kind of exciting and entertaining too. But you'll have a big conflict. And you get this from Babylon and other places, and you're like, "Oh, I made your seats," being excited who's going to win, forces of chaos or the God who's trying to bring order and harmony to the universe. And when the god prevails in the battle, that's where creation can really happen, and we can start organizing things here and structuring things. So, Genesis-

Hank Smith: 00:26:38 And it's not just a story to them. Right, Josh? They're hearing their creation-

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:26:43 ... They're living this, they're recreating it as they tell these stories over and over. And what Genesis 1, what biblical scholars conclude is that it's in dialogue with these other stories. They're aware of these stories. Again, it's their pop

culture, they know about this stuff. And so Genesis 1 is in dialogue and responding to these other stories. And in some cases it pushes back against those stories and their assumptions in a way to what we'd call correcting false doctrine. To say, "Nope, that's not how it went. It's actually like this." And then like we said with the cosmology thing, there's other ways in which it just rolls with the assumptions. So again, God decided here, "What am I going to roll with for now? And what am I going to push back on?" So Genesis 1 is doing both in different ways.

- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:27:28 So let's look and see. Now, we'll start at verse 1 and just work through this here. So in the King James Version, we start off in verse 1." In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:27:41 Looking at this here, in Hebrew, it seems what's going on... I'm going to retranslate this a little bit here. The most common understanding today is that verses 1 and 2 are setting up a background scenario to get ready for where the actual main action starts in verse 3. So it's not like you have the creation of the heavens and earth in verse 1 and we're over and done with and then we move on, verses 1 and 2 were setting up the situation here.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:28:08 So modern translations might say something like this. "When in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth... " like it's still going. And verse 2 keeps that thought going. "And at that time... " again, before creation, "The earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." And then in verse 3 you get now your first moment of actual action. "And then God said, let there be light." So verses 1 and 2 were setting the stage right there. So a lot of modern translations will read like that.
- Hank Smith: 00:28:41 Yeah. So it's not, "God created the earth, and then the earth was without form." He's trying to just set up a story.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:28:48 Yes. We got this word created in verse 1, the Hebrew word there is *barah*, which even Latter-day Saints who don't know Hebrew might recognize because Joseph Smith brings it up in Nauvoo there. He talks about the word *barah*. And if you look in your footnote of your scriptures down there, it says, "Hebrew; shaped, fashioned, created, always divine activity." And that's a good description there. This word is used about 50 times in the Old Testament and it's always God doing it. So it's a divine thing

to do. And it means to shape or fashion, to organize, to separate, to designate, things like that.

- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:29:22 So Christians several centuries ago came up with this theological idea of creation *ex nihilo*, right out of nothing, which not only Joseph Smith pushed back on that for theological reasons. He said there's no such thing as immaterial matter. That God is organizing matter. That's right there. And that's the same worldview that the ancient Israelites have. That it's not that there was nothing there, but what God's role in creation was, was organizing this stuff. And that's what created is getting at here in the Hebrew.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:29:53 So then verse 2, "The earth is without form and void." In Hebrew that's a little rhyming phrase. Without form is *tohu* and void is *bohu*. So they rhyme. And the word and is *wa*, so altogether is, *tohu wa bohu*
- John Bytheway: 00:30:10 Josh, I'm so glad you're, you're talking about this because I think that whenever there's a translation, we miss things like that. Isn't that true? And that makes it so fun. I was talking with Hank about, sometimes the writers I think are not so much architects as they are artists or something in between. And that was artful to do though. Say the words again. That was cool.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:30:40 *Tohu wa bohu.*
- John Bytheway: 00:30:43 Yeah. And it reminds me of, I want to say Proverbs 31, which is an acrostic poem; who can find a virtuous woman, she's like this. But if you saw it in Hebrew, you would see it's going through the Hebrew alphabet in order. But you wouldn't see that in English.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:31:01 Yeah. These writers are poets. They love their language and they play with it all the time. And it's part of the message.
- John Bytheway: 00:31:06 I'm glad you point that out because there are things that are hidden in plain sight that we don't see because it was originally in a language where they use the language itself as art. Thank you for that. That's cool.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:31:19 And there's other ways in which they do this, like verse 1 has kind of a bookend to the end of this story, which is chapter 2:1, right there. "God created the heaven and the earth." Chapter 2:1, "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished." So you get these bookends going on right there.

Hank Smith: 00:31:34 Oh, okay.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:31:36 So there's all sorts of ways they tie this together. They're subtle but fun. So this form though, without form and void, that is a really important phrase right there, because it's setting up the twin problems that Genesis 1 is going to deal with here. So that phrase without form, the *tohu*, the meaning of that in Hebrew, it means wild desert-like or having no order to it. So it appears other times in the Bible describing just a desert waste kind of area. So it's just this place that's uncultivated, uncultured, uncivilized, just wild, that's what we're getting at, the environment.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:32:12 And the word void there, *bohu*, what that means is it's like waste or empty or unpopulated. So our twin problems here of this uncreated state is that the environment is wild and waste and that it's not populated. So those are our two things. And as we go through the days of creation, what we're going to do is create these environments that have an ordered structure and we're going to populate them. So it's going to deal with this.

Hank Smith: 00:32:36 I can't tell you how many times I've walked into my daughter's room and said, "Here is matter unorganized."

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:32:41 There you go.

Hank Smith: 00:32:42 This is without organization and or population, right?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:32:46 And then we get "Darkness was upon the face of the deep." So the deep here in Hebrew is *tohom*. And this is referring again to that primordial watery chaos stuff right there. Even in English, the deep, it's water. It's the ocean... deep.

John Bytheway: 00:32:59 Deep water. Yeah.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:33:01 And again, this is before creation has happened yet. We haven't said, "Let there be light," or any like that. This is what things are like before creation gets going, if you've got the darkness and the watery chaos stuff going on here.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:33:14 But then you get, "The Spirit of God moving upon the face of the water." So God's presence now is going to start doing its thing. The word spirit there can also mean breath or wind. So you just get the sense that He's just like sweeping over this watery chaos there and good stuff is about to happen, God's presence is here.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:33:34 So now we've got six days of creation, the seventh day is special. But the six days are very, very structured. And again, that's why it's problematic to use these to make scientific inferences about the physical development of the earth, because these are not *per se* physical literal description, they're literary, theological presentation, solving theological problems here, of the wildness and the unpopulatedness of everything.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:34:03 So you've got six days and they're divided into sets of two; Days 1, 2, 3, and Days 4, 5, 6. And the reason that's important is because in Days 1, 2, 3, we're dealing with the *tohu* problem where we're wild and waste. It's the creation of various realms, various environments. And then in Days 4, 5, 6, it's the creation of the populations that will inhabit those environments. And they're lined up so that Day 1 lines up with Day 4, Day 2 lines up with Day 5 and Day 3 lines up with Day 6. So it's a very structured, highly correlated sort of thing here. So we'll work you through how those all line up right here.

Hank Smith: 00:34:41 John, I'm trying to still get Josh to show me something I haven't seen before. My word! We're two verses in, I'm like, "I thought I'd read this? I'm pretty sure."

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:34:53 Yeah, this is great. So they line up with the form and void.

Hank Smith: 00:34:58 Problem one's going to be solved by Day 1, 2, 3. Problem two... What was problem one again? No, it was-

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:35:04 The wild and ways that the environments are not structured.

Hank Smith: 00:35:07 Okay. And that's going to be solved by Day 1, 2 and 3. And then the other problem was?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:35:12 Lack of inhabitants, unpopulated.

Hank Smith: 00:35:13 And that's going to be solved by Days 4, 5, and 6.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:35:17 Perfect. You got it.

Hank Smith: 00:35:17 Oh my word?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:35:19 And as everybody knows, these days of creation, the way they're so structured everybody recognizes that. Each day starts with, "And God said." And each day ends with counting off the days. "It was the First day. It was the Second Day." So they got this tight structure there.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:35:35 So diving into this, you got to talk about, in the Israelite point of view, how does God create? So we talked about it being organizing things, and that's really, again, what it's about. It's not taking something from nothingness to physical manifestation. In this ancient Israelite concept, creating means that you bring order to the chaos and you structure things and give them purpose and meaning. That's what's going on. So the way that God does that is He separates things out, divides them, He gives them a purpose or function and He names them. And all of those are three related things and they're all interconnected, and that's how you create. That's how you bring order to the chaos.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:36:16 So He separates them out, number one, two, gives them a function or purpose in an ordered system. And three, part of that, you give them a name. So you see all of those constantly throughout those days. For example, on the separating things out, look how much that language appears here in Genesis. So on Day 1, God divides the light from the darkness. Day 2, He divides the waters from the waters. And Day 3, He gathers the waters into one place so it's separate from land. Day 4, He divides the day from night. And day five, you have the animals reproducing after their kind, not like the other kinds, but like their own kind, so there's a division there. And it keeps going with that.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:37:03 So constantly dividing, separating. That's what He's doing. That's how things come to have a purpose and meaning, is they're separated out from other things. So the other thing you see in here is He's constantly naming things, calling things. Like in Day 1, He calls the light day, he calls the darkness night. In Day 2, He calls the firmament heaven. In Day 3, "He calls the dry land earth and then He calls the water sea". So as He creates these environments, He separates them out. They have a function to perform and He names them.

Hank Smith: 00:37:33 I'm writing this down.

John Bytheway: 00:37:34 Me too.

Hank Smith: 00:37:34 Separated out, given a purpose and name.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:37:40 Yep. And in their mind, that's how God creates, as we've got all this matter there but you got to it order. It's got to be a system where everything has a purpose, it has a function, there's a role to play. And that's what God's doing here.

John Bytheway: 00:37:54 Hey, can I throw something out that I heard once that I just thought was kind of fun, and that is on the third day, He says twice, "God saw that it was good," at the end of verse 10 and at the end of verse 12. And so the Third Day is called good twice. And I read in the Religion 211 manual that I think it was in there, that the Jews today like to have weddings on Tuesday because it is a twice blessed day. And I was excited to remember that my wife and I were married on a Tuesday, which is called good twice. Just thought I'd throw that in there.

Hank Smith: 00:38:33 Of course you were.

John Bytheway: 00:38:35 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 00:38:35 Romantic without even meaning to be romantic.

John Bytheway: 00:38:38 Without even knowing it.

Hank Smith: 00:38:40 Yeah.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:38:40 Yeah. You picked up on the fact that day three has a bonus creation. It has two things he does on one day. And that corresponds, because these days are parallel with day six, also has a bonus creation. And when we get there, we'll see why they each have bonus creation and how those are parallel to each other, but they do.

Hank Smith: 00:38:57 See, Day 6, that's Saturday. I was married on a Saturday.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:39:03 Also twice blessed.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:39:04 So Day 1, we've got, "Let there be light and there was light." He's dividing light from darkness right there. So here again, we're talking about realms and environments, but it's if everything was darkness before. Now, God's light is infused there. So what's being divided is basically the light and the dark here. And in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible, light is often used to represent the presence of God. So now we've got this environment where God is directly present. That's our first most basic form of division here, is the presence of God coming into this space here.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:39:40 Day 2 then we have, like we talked about earlier, separating water from water. So that's the division going on. We have these waters that are above and water's below. And that firmament, the solo dome is holding back everything so that now we live in the air bubble. So we've got the realm of the sky

above you now, we've got the seas, the water's below. So that's our environment at Day 2, is that sky above and the water below that we've separated out now so that they're not all crashed together.

- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:40:09 Day 3 there, we have the waters being gathered together and separated out from dry land. So Day 3 is versus 9-13. So we get the land, is our new environment in Day 3. But then there's a bonus active creation in Day 3 where we get the plants. That's our bonus. And even the plants are divided up and separated. So in verse 11, "Let the earth bring forth one grass," two, "The herb bearing seed," and three, "The fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind." So even plants are subdivided. It's all about separation and division, identifying purpose and function here.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:40:43 Okay. So that's our three days that have establishment of the environments. So we're solving our tohu problem, without form part, from verse 2.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:40:53 Now we've got our corresponding days. We're going to fill these with a population in each of these. So Day 4, starting in verse 14, going through verse 19, this is, God says, "Let there be light in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night. Let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and for years." And He talks about these two great lights, "The greater light to rule the day, the lesser light to rule the night," the sun and the moon. And then you've got the stars as well. So these are the population of this realm up above everything.
- Hank Smith: 00:41:31 The inside of our inverted snow globe is now populated.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:41:34 And in the Hebrew Bible, stars are often considered to be like hosts, they're described as a population. So calling them the inhabitants of the sky here is not crazy in here, their frame of reference here.
- John Bytheway: 00:41:46 Oh, that reminds me of Job, the morning star saying together? It was-
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:41:51 Yep. Good. The personification of the stars there. You're exactly right,
- Hank Smith: 00:41:55 Man. John, it's like you read scripture a lot.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:42:00 Okay. Then Day 5 is verse 20-23. And I remember back in Day 2, we got the sky and the sea, those environments there. So now we're going to populate the sky and the sea there. So we've got

in verse 20, the waters are bringing forth all the water creatures. And we've got the fowl that fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. So you see the mention there, of the waters below and the firmament again. And then we get all these different creatures created after their kinds, so they're further subdivided as well right there. So now we've got our population for that sky above you there and the water's beneath. And then verse 6, so Day 3 was the land, the dry land, now as we would expect, Day 6 has the land creatures.

- Hank Smith: 00:42:43 Day 6, right, Josh?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:42:45 Yeah. So starting in verse 24, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after his kind; cattle and creeping things and beast of the earth after his kind." So again, further subdivisions of those that are right there. And then just like Day 3 had its bonus, the plants, day six gets a bonus creation, which is humans. Verse 26, "Let us make man after our image." Then, why do we have the bonus creation of plants corresponding with the bonus creation of people? It explains that, just to jump ahead down in verse 29. God said, "Behold, I have given you the humans, every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth and every tree and bushes, the fruit of the tree yielding seed, and for you it shall be for meat," meaning food.
- Hank Smith: 00:43:30 Oh yeah. So that matches exactly with...
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:43:32 Yeah. The plants were there to be the food for the humans. Yep.
- Hank Smith: 00:43:37 So the bonus creations are parallel?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:43:40 They are. Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 00:43:41 Hey, could this be a good time to talk about men having dominion over animals and things like that? Could we maybe define what does it mean, verse 26, "To have dominion?" Is it like stewardship as well?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:43:56 Yeah, I think that's how we would see it is more of a stewardship. The word dominion sounds tyrannical, but I don't think that's the intention there. The idea, man is created in this image of God, they're reflecting him and they're supposed to be stewards over the earth just the way He has been.
- Hank Smith: 00:44:11 Okay. So take care of it.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:44:15 Exactly. I think you'd want to use this more in terms of protecting your environment rather than just wholesale taking advantage of it.

Hank Smith: 00:44:23 Yeah. Just use it all up, instead it's, "No, take care of it. Be careful with it. Man. Josh, this is amazing. Genesis 1 is entirely different in my eyes. Do we have anything more here that you want to show me? Let's say I'm finding a new room in my own house every verse here. I love this.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:44:44 Well, I guess we should point out, again, remember I said that there's ways in which Genesis is pushing back on the ancient or Eastern understandings of some things, correcting the false doctrine. So it's important to notice here in the other creation myths, a lot of them that we can find around the Israelites, humans don't come across looking all that great. Like in the Babylonian story, the humans are created as slaves to like a lower tier of deities and they're meant to just do the menial tasks. And then they get really annoying and the gods are frustrated that they created these guys, and so they want to send a flood to destroy them because they're so noisy and obnoxious-

Hank Smith: 00:45:20 Okay.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:45:21 ... and smelly. So humans often don't have a very good place in all this and these other stories. So Genesis is striking in how much people are the point. God creates all sorts of things and says it's good. But then with people, He steps back, "This is very good." People are the climax of the story, they're the point of creation, they're created in God's image. They're meant to have this dominion, stewardship over the rest of the earth. This is a huge elevated view of humanity compared to what the Israelites would've been used to from their culture. And I think that's really, really important.

Hank Smith: 00:45:57 That is crucial. That should be a major takeaway. Don't you think, Josh, of Chapter 1?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:46:02 You come away from this feeling really good about yourself. Other stories, human existence is described as a lot more pointless and bleak.

John Bytheway: 00:46:10 I'm so glad you brought this up. There are parts of this that are pushing back against other creation narratives out there. I've never considered that before. And this one elevates man a little bit more than some of the others.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:46:25 Yeah. Another example of how it's pushing back is, remember I was talking about that and a lot of these other creation stories. Creation has to fall a big climatic battle where the gods have to fight these forces of chaos. You notice there's no battle here. It's very orderly. God's in complete control. He just says, "Let there be," and the universe just responds without pushback. And that's a different perspective too.

Hank Smith: 00:46:51 They would've heard of God's fighting each other in order to create. And here's God, he's just the breath of God.

John Bytheway: 00:46:59 I was thinking that in our theology, there was war in heaven, but that's not the same thing about a war as a part of the creation story.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:47:10 Well, I think you could find some connections to that. And I should make a caveat, that just because there's no cosmic battle here in Genesis 1 that the author of this text is trying to say God's in complete control, the Israelites did have a tradition of God fighting these forces of chaos at the beginning. So you do find that motif elsewhere in the Old Testament, just not here. I'll show you one quick example. So Isaiah 27:1. Do you want to read that, Hank?

Hank Smith: 00:47:38 Man, if I can pronounce these words. "In that day, the Lord with his sword and great and strong sword shall punish Leviathan, the piercing serpent, even Leviathan, that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea."

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:47:55 Yeah. So if you're used to these stories from the other cultures about God fighting a giant serpent from those chaos waters, this sounds really familiar. And Hank, can you read the footnote down there, footnote c, in the LDS scriptures.

Hank Smith: 00:48:09 Sure. "I.e A legendary sea monster representing the forces of chaos that oppose the Creator."

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:48:18 Yeah. So it's in there again, I'm not making this up. And there are places in the Psalms, in Job, other places in the prophets where that motif does come in, Rahab, all those things. They have a concept of this and it pops up elsewhere, but it seems that the author of Genesis here is trying to not go that route. They're trying to make a different point. So instead they're suggesting that this was completely orderly and that God's in complete control, that's what they want to emphasize here.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:48:44 But elsewhere, it is meaningful to them that God can conquer those forces of chaos. That's another way to talk about how powerful He is. And I think John's right in that we definitely could link this into our motif of that conflict that happened in the Premortal council there and how God wins.

Hank Smith: 00:49:02 Yeah.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:49:03 That's a takeaway from this.

Hank Smith: 00:49:05 This is awesome.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:49:07 This is a brand new book that just came out from the Religious Study Center at BYU. It's called *From Creation to Sinai: The Old Testament Through the Lens of the Restoration*. Edited by Dan Belnap and Aaron Schade. This just came out. And this is in a lot of ways a landmark book. It's really, really thick and big. It's got, I think, 17 chapters written by some of our best Old Testament scholars that we have. And it covers all sorts, in an academic but restoration lens. It covers all sorts of stuff. And Chapter 1 is by Dan Belnap and it is all about the opening chapters of Genesis. It's titled in the beginning, Genesis 1-3 and its significance to the Latter-day Saints. And it goes over all this stuff there too, in a really rich way.

Hank Smith: 00:49:50 Awesome.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:49:51 So if people are looking to dive deep into this background stuff. This is not a good book if you're trying to give quick and dirty tips with your kids for Family Home Evening. But if you want to dive deep into some of this stuff, this book that just came out is fantastic and it has this.

Hank Smith: 00:50:04 Okay. Before we move on, I want to ask you about what you said earlier with in the Babylonian cosmology, humans are just pitiful slaves. In Egyptian cosmology, they're accidents, they're just there as spectators. And here in this cosmology, humans are the purpose. To me that could speak to all days as well.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:50:32 Yeah, exactly. In 26, God said, "Let us make man in our image after our likeness." And that's a big deal here. The word image here it's seldom, and it does mean a physical representation. This isn't like, "Oh, you're ethical like God," or things like that. It's a very physical representation used here that, you're created in his image, which corresponds with how Latter-day Saints see this too. We're created physically and literally in the image of God.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:51:03 And God in verse 28, blesses them to be fruitful and multiply, and all these things. And gives them stewardship over the earth. So this is a very elevated view, I think. It hits what our Restoration scripture teaches that God prepared the earth for us. We're not an afterthought, we're not just one of many creations, we are his children and we are special in his sight. We are fundamentally different from his other creations, as wonderful as they are.

Hank Smith: 00:51:32 If I'm with my teenagers teaching Genesis 1, that might be my core lesson, is, "You matter. You matter in this creation, this plan."

John Bytheway: 00:51:44 And it reminds me of Lehi talking to Jacob 2 Nephi 2, and making this incredible dichotomy of all of God's creations, things that act and things that are acted upon. And we are the things that are supposed to be the ones that act. And just about everything else is acted upon, right? And Elder Bednar gave a whole talk about that at once too. Does that ring a bell? And that we don't say He makes me this, or she... " No, we're created to act and to choose God not to just be acted upon.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:52:21 Well, another way to make this personal too. So we just went over how creation looks from an ancient Israelite perspective about the separating, the identifying purpose and the naming and all that. In addition to just being like, "Okay, well let me think like an ancient Israelite and make sense of why the text is structured this way." If you want to make this personal, an individual now and step away from ancient history, I think this has a lot to teach us. I know a lot of times when we pray, we want God to give us a blessing out of somewhere and just drop it on our lap or make our problems disappear, just go away, become nothing.

Hank Smith: 00:52:59 You must have heard me pray last night because that...

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:53:04 And if Genesis is suggesting that His creative activity isn't poofing things out of non-existence into physical reality and vice versa, but His creative act is to organize and give purpose and meaning to, and name and things. I think that might have some interesting things to teach us. There's people going through a lot of really hard stuff. You think of people that are experiencing mental illness, people that are experiencing loss, people that are going through just these really excruciating trials. One of the things that can make those worse than anything is not being able to have any sense that there's any purpose to any of this. That it's meaningless suffering, there's no value or purpose behind it for people even who struggle with faith, wondering if

God is even there listening to them, the idea that existence is pointless is terrifying.

- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:53:59 And when we're going through these hard things, I think it's so important that we turn to God, because what we see here is a God who is able to organize things into significant ways out of what looks like chaos and nonsense at the beginning. He can take our stories, our narratives that we tell about ourselves in our lives and out of what seems to be random events or pointlessness, He can grant us meaning and purpose and direction, and suddenly things make sense. Or maybe there are blessings that have been there all along, but you get that insight, all of a sudden that flash of inspiration where you recognize the blessing, because now he's separated out from all the noise in your life and named it as a blessing for you and you make you connect those dots, and then that just comes to your mind.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:54:50 I think his ability to sift in our lives what's significant from what's not and things that are blessings from all the noises, that's a really significant aspect of his creative activity, which continues with us today. John mentioned this, but in the *Come, Follow Me*, that's the opening paragraph for this week's lesson. That one thing the creation story teaches us is that God can make something magnificent out of something unorganized. That's helpful to remember when life seems chaotic. Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Creators and their creative work with us is not finished. And I think that's so important to remember. If we feel like we're adrift, like we have no purpose, like things are nuts, He can give shape and order and meaning to our lives in a way that's just going to be beautiful.
- Hank Smith: 00:55:36 Josh, tell me again. *Tohu*, I'm going to write it down.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:55:38 The *wa* is and. So the full phrase is *tohu wa bohu*.
- Hank Smith: 00:55:43 That's going to be, Josh, I think my phrase for my problems is going to be *tohu wa bohu*. When I hit a problem that I don't understand, I'm going to be like, "Yes, this is *tohu wa bohu*." And now, what do I need to do? I need to go to God, let him teach me how to separate it, give purpose to it, name it that this is an important part of my life." I'm going to use it. John, whenever I run into a problem, I'm going to text you, "*Tohu wa bohu*."
- John Bytheway: 00:56:15 *Tohu wa bohu*.

Hank Smith: 00:56:19 I have got a problem. And that means I'm going back to God to give me purpose behind this.

Hank Smith: 00:56:24 Josh, I think you're so right. Someone who is struggling with mental illness needs to know that there is a purpose behind this, that this is doing something.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:56:35 And often that means him not changing our circumstances. It's not the snapping things in and out of existence, but it is defining, and giving order to, and structure and meaning to these things. And that sometimes makes just all the difference.

John Bytheway: 00:56:47 I think one of the things the gospel does is, even when we don't know what it is, when we can say to ourselves, "There must be a reason. There's a loving God. He loves me. It's kind of 1 Nephi 11:17, "I know He loves His children. Nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things". And 2 Nephi 9, "He doeth not anything, save it be for the benefit of the world." And so we can go, "I don't get it. I don't get why right now. I don't get why this, but I'm going to press forward because there must be a bigger purpose that I see."

John Bytheway: 00:57:28 And Josh, you got to help me with this because I can't remember who it was, but somebody proposed the idea of God creating the world like a clock and then backing up and just disinterested, "Gee, I wonder what's going to happen." Have you heard that idea before?

Hank Smith: 00:57:42 I think it's Deists.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:57:43 Yeah. That the whole universe is a big machine.

John Bytheway: 00:57:47 Yeah. And he's just interested. "Wow, wonder what's going to happen," and backs off, instead of wanting to bless us, wanting to help us and having our ultimate good in mind, which is a whole different mindset.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:57:59 Yeah. That's a great conception of the universe where you get that. In the Hebrew term of the universe, it's not like that because the way it describes the relationship between the Creator and his creations, is its very much a relationship and it's framed in covenantal terms. He's invested in this, he's an active dynamic part of this and it's not like he creates and takes off.

Hank Smith: 00:58:19 So Josh, would it be fair to say that ancient Israelite hears what we call Genesis 1 and then walks away thinking, "Hey, I matter, I'm important."

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:58:28 Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think that's exactly what they're supposed to hear. They're supposed to take away this elevated view of humanity, this elevated view of God that He's better than the gods of Egypt or Babylon or Canaan or wherever. This is a big picture that this God is all powerful.

Hank Smith: 00:58:43 Wow. You just stepped us into the world of Genesis and I'm very grateful really. What do we do next, Josh?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:58:53 Well, I just want to note that this account of the Creation, the division between Chapter 1 and 2, like you might know the chapter breaks were added centuries and centuries later and they're often not in good spots.

Hank Smith: 00:59:05 Josh, you're right. When we hit a chapter break, we almost do a memory wipe. We don't even remember the previous chapter. We just say, "Hey, brand new-

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:59:15 Or you sto, go to bed that night and pick it up five days later.

Hank Smith: 00:59:17 ... Right. And we don't remember anything from the last chapter when they should be connected in many places.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:59:23 So the chapter breaks in the wrong spot. If you're going to have a chapter break here, you want to put it down, like in verse four, that's where the division would be, at the beginning of verse four or halfway down verse four, somewhere there. Because Chapter 2:1, 2, 3 are continuing the same structure and story that we've had going the whole time, including the seventh day, right? You don't want to forget about that.

Hank Smith: 00:59:46 They just were like, "Ah, no. Another chapter for that one."

Dr. Joshua Sears: 00:59:49 Yeah. There's literary bookends that link the beginning of Chapter 1 with what you got at the opening of Chapter 2 here. So notice Chapter 1:1, "In the beginning, God created heaven and the earth." Chapter 2:1 "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the hosts of them." And notice again that even there it's getting out those two problems we talked about, the *tohu wa bohu*. The heavens and the earth were finished, that's the environments, and all the hosts of them, the populations again. So we're solving those twin problems of the uncreated states.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:00:19 And then versus 2 and 3 are about that seventh day, and they link back to verse one, two. And this is getting really nerdy down in the details now. But like chapter 1:1 in Hebrew has

seven Hebrew words, and then the second verse has 14 Hebrew words, so seven times two. And then if you look at Chapter 2:2 and the first half of verse 3, it's also got a set of seven words, seven words, seven words, right there. So just even the number of words, people have seen a bookend to show the beginning and the end of this structure there.

- Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:00:58 So that's fun stuff.
- John Bytheway: 01:01:00 Yeah. And seven is wholeness and completeness, right?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:01:05 Right. Yeah. Seven in their culture has this sense of wholeness completeness. And so they're, by framing everything around that, you got seven days, you've got these sets of verses where it's in seven words, you've got seven announcements that creation was good, there's just seven all over the place in here.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:01:22 The details in here, you can tell someone really was carefully crafting this. You might even say they're inspired, right?
- Hank Smith: 01:01:29 Yeah. You might even say.
- Hank Smith: 01:01:32 What happens at verse 4? Is it a brand new story?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:01:37 So what you see is that starting in verse 4 and going on, it's basically a different account of creation. It doesn't just keep going. It takes it from the top and starts all over again. And it talks about things in a different order. It talks about things in a different way. It uses different vocabulary terms. So people have spent a lot of time trying to ask why that is. Why is Chapter 1 and basically Chapter 2 so different?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:02:05 Biblical scholars often have the theory that these were written by two different people, and that later an inspired editor here came together and stitched these two accounts together side by side so you could learn from both of them.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:02:17 There's other ways to explain it too. So for example, some Latter-day Saints have looked at a passage in the Book of Moses where God explains he created everything spiritually before they were physically created on the earth. So they propose that maybe Genesis 1 is more of a spiritual creation, and Chapter 2 is more that physical creation. There's other explanations too, but whatever way you want to go with those explanations for why the differences are there, it is worth noting that clearly there are differences in how Chapters 1 and 2 are telling the story of this.

John Bytheway: 01:02:47 I think maybe the footnote committee subscribed to that, you see the summary at the beginning. The prior spirit creation is explained.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:02:59 Yeah. That spiritual versus physical, I think when Bruce McConkie, that's what he went with. And so when he writes the chapter hitting there, that's how he's dealing with that.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:03:09 Some of the differences that people see are, for example, in chapter 1, it talks about God creating. And the Hebrew term there is *Elohim*. And in Chapter 2, it talks about the Lord creating and with the small capitals, in the Hebrew there is Jehovah.

Hank Smith: 01:03:27 Like Chapter 2:4, "In the day that the Lord God made the heavens and the earth..." So you're saying in Hebrew that's a different God than in the beginning God created the heaven of the earth from chapter one?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:03:40 Well, or at least it's a different term that they're using.

Hank Smith: 01:03:44 Okay.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:03:45 We should stop and explain this maybe because this'll be handy for people for the rest of the Old Testament about what it means with those capitals.

Hank Smith: 01:03:51 Please do.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:03:52 In Hebrew, the name that the Israelites had for the God of Israel, the God that they're sacrificing to, that they're worshiping, that's talking to Moses and Isaiah, in Hebrew they say his name *Yahweh*. And that's the name that we have in English as Jehovah. It's just our Anglicized pronunciation of that. The history is complicated, but we don't need to get into that.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:04:13 So basically *Yahweh* and *Jehovah*, it's just the original pronunciation versus the modern English pronunciation. And you see that name *Yahweh* pops up a lot in terms you are familiar with because when they pair the name with other words, they often shorten it to an abbreviated form *Ya*. So for example, you guys have heard the phrase *Hallelujah*, right? *Hallelu* means, "All of you praise," like in command form there. And, who are you praising? *Ya*, short for *Yahweh*. Or for example, *Isaiah* or *Elijah*, their names have that *ya* in there. So you see that shortened form pop up a lot in different names and expressions right there.

Hank Smith: 01:04:55 So I'm watching for the small caps.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:04:58 Well, what happens is Jews after the Old Testament, before you get to the New Testament, they develop a tradition that the name is too sacred to say out loud. So they start, when they're reading their scriptures and they come to the name, they'll say the phrase, the Lord in Hebrew, *Adonai*, instead. On the page in front of them, the words will say, "Yahweh spoke to Moses," but then out loud they'll say, "The Lord spoke to Moses," in order to avoid saying the name. So then when the King James Bible translators were making this English translation, they decided to keep up that Jewish tradition. So when that name, Yahweh appears, they'll use the title the Lord as a euphemism, but they put the small capitals in there as a wink and a nod to let you know, "Hey, I might have a secret."

Hank Smith: 01:05:46 It says Yahweh here.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:05:47 Yeah, it's a name here, not the title, the Lord. And so the small caps are tipping you off to that. When it really does say the Lord, because that's also a term, it'll just be in regular lowercase letters. It's just plain and simple, nothing fancy there. But those small capital letters are your little tip from the translators to let you know what's really going on. So you can see the Lord in the capitals and think to yourself, "Oh, that's the name Jehovah."

Hank Smith: 01:06:11 Okay.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:06:11 That's what you want to be thinking in your—

Hank Smith: 01:06:12 Is it always paired with Lord God? Or is it sometimes not always?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:06:16 ... It is here in Genesis 2, but other places it's just the Lord all by itself. Jehovah.

John Bytheway: 01:06:20 And that's only in your King James Version, right? I don't know if the others—

Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:06:26 Different languages and translations do it differently. For example, the Church has its own translations in Spanish and Portuguese that they came out with in 2009 and 2015. So these are relatively recent. The Spanish translation ditches that Jewish tradition, it says *Jeova*, *Jehovah*, all over the place, left and right. Whereas the Portuguese one takes a different track and it says *Elsinor* in the small capitals the whole way through, so it's more like the English there. And you read different translations

and different languages and cultures, just have their own kind of preferences they developed with this. So it just depends on what tradition you're following there.

- Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:07:03 I taught at the MTC and I taught Spanish. And I remember these missionaries who'd get their Spanish Bible and they'd flip it open and they see *Jeova, Jeova* all over the place, because that name appears over 6,000 times in the Old Testament. It's on almost every page I think. So they see all over and they are just dumb struck at first because for them, Jehovah's a relatively rare word. They don't use it a lot. So when they see that it's all over the Old Testament, they go, "What in the world is going on?" It takes them back at first, and then that teaches them that the name has been there all along, it's just hiding behind that euphemistic title in English.
- John Bytheway: 01:07:38 Well, that's good to know. Hank, when we have students who have served in a Spanish-speaking mission, we can point that out in their scriptures. And Josh, I seem to remember in your bio you've done some work with the publication of the scriptures.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:07:55 Yeah. I published an article on the Church's Spanish Bible translation. I kind of analyzed it, and did that.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:08:02 And they bring up another, just point here that's handy for people. In the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, of course who is Jehovah?
- John Bytheway: 01:08:10 Jesus.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:08:11 It's Jesus Christ. "The Living Christ" document says that clearly that, He is the Jehovah of the Old Testament, the premortal Jesus Christ. So when you're equipped with the knowledge to know that small capitals, the Lord there, means Jehovah, means Jesus Christ, that opens up a whole new world for you to see Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. You have to connect those dots and do that pairing. But once you do, it's amazing. Because we often have lessons or say, "Oh, you want to grow closer to Jesus in the Old Testament this year? Well, watch for the types and shadows, watch for the symbolism, watch for the messianic prophecies, they'll pop up every so often."
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 01:08:51 And I'm thinking you don't even have to do all that hard work. That's good stuff too but in your mind you see the Lord and you're thinking Jesus Christ right there, you don't have to go looking for all the hidden symbolism everywhere. He's

everywhere. He's on Sinai talking to Moses giving the Ten Commandments, he's leading them out of Egypt. Jesus is talking to Abraham and Isaiah and Jeremiah. He's the one that they're discussing in the Psalms. He's everywhere, directly on the surface, not hiding. And that's just an exciting thing as a Latter-day Saint, to be able to put that all together and see Him there and watch how He acts in His role as the premortal God of Israel.

Hank Smith:

01:09:32

Please join us for Part II of this podcast.



John Bytheway:	00:03	Welcome to Part II of this week's podcast.
Dr. Joshua Sears:	00:07	So we just talked about what that phrase the Lord and the capitals means the name of the God of Israel, Jehovah. I want to go back and clarify too, when I said that in Chapter 1 that term God comes from Hebrew <i>Elohim</i> . I want to make sure we understand what that means, what doesn't mean as well. So the way we use the term <i>Elohim</i> as Latter-day Saints is different from how the Hebrew uses the term <i>Elohim</i> in the Old Testament. Here's the basics of the story. So as Latter-day Saints, when we use <i>Elohim</i> , we're using it as a personal name for God the Father.
Hank Smith:	00:39	John, right?
Dr. Joshua Sears:	00:40	Yeah. So we will say, oh, Jesus' premortal name was Jehovah and that the Father's name is Elohim. And you'll hear in temple dedications like, oh, Elohim, things like that, addressing God the Father. That's fine but that's a usage that we have somewhat by tradition and by deliberate decision, but it doesn't reflect biblical usage. In Hebrew, <i>Elohim</i> is the word for God or Gods. So it's not a name, that's just what it means, God or Gods. The reason I'm saying God or gods is because there is a singular version of the word <i>El</i> that means God and there's the plural form <i>Elohim</i> , and it can mean either Gods in the plural or a God in this singular, it has both usages right there.
Hank Smith:	01:25	And that's going to come up for the Book of Abraham, right?
Dr. Joshua Sears:	01:28	Yeah. Well, Joseph Smith is going to get thinking on that, and that's going to be one thing he's going to use to get this idea of there were multiple divine beings involved in the creation, for sure. But it can just mean Gods generically in the plural. Like in the Ten Commandments when it says, "Thou shall have no other gods before me." It says, "Don't have any other <i>Elohim</i> before me." That's the term it uses, just the plural there. And by

the way, since Hebrew is cognate with Arabic, you might also recognize it cognate with the word for God that they have, which is Allah. It's from the same route, it's the same *El*, Allah, it's all the same thing meaning God. So in the Old Testament, *Elohim* is not a name, it simply means God or God's right there.

So what happened is in early Church History, Joseph Smith used *Elohim* and *Jehovah* really interchangeably all the time. He wasn't making the hard and fast distinction between God the Father and God the Son. And it what isn't clear until 1916, when the First Presidency released this doctrinal statement on the Father and the Son, that they said, "Hey, to avoid confusion and to keep our terms straight and make sure we all know what we're talking about, we are going to refer to the Father as *Elohim* and the Son as *Jehovah* right here." So that's something that we decided and we have a convention. And I'm not complaining about that, conventions are fine, but we just want to be careful when we're looking at the Old Testament that we don't read that back into there and assume that our Latter-day Saint terminology is always going to match on to what they meant by it.

- Hank Smith: 02:57 1916, John, do you remember? Do you remember the announcement?
- John Bytheway: 03:03 Well, I was only 25-years-old back then.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 03:08 On the Religious Study Center website, there is an article going over all that Latter-day Saint history, it's called, "The Usage of the Title *Elohim*." It's by Paul Hoskisson and Ryan Davis. So you can just search for *Elohim* at rsc.byu.edu and it'll give you all the rundown and all this.
- Hank Smith: 03:24 I have to claim my claim to fame, Paul Hoskisson's my cousin. So that's cool..
- John Bytheway: 03:27 Is he really? I had him for Old Testament in my college days.
- Hank Smith: 03:32 My mother is Cynthia Hoskisson.
- John Bytheway: 03:36 I didn't know that. I love that guy. It's fun to tell our brothers and sisters that you probably know more Hebrew than you think you do. And when you see I'm, that's plural, so yeah, *Elohim* is plural. But what's lights and perfections? *Urim* and *thummim*, there's that *im* again that makes it plural.
- Hank Smith: 04:02 I'm going to put that on my resume, I speak a little Hebrew.

- Dr. Joshua Sears: 04:05 The *im* phrase is related to the name Jehovah. That Jehovah Yahweh name, it seems to be somehow related to the verb to be. So when he says I am that I am, it's a wordplay off of that name right there.
- John Bytheway: 04:18 One of my favorite examples to point out is in the call of Isaiah and Isaiah 6 or 2 Nephi 16. And to notice in Isaiah 6 how I think it says seraphims and it put an s--seraphims, which is like saying geeses. But in the Book of Mormon, it gets it right, it's seraphim. But seraphims or maybe it says... Yeah, I got to go back. But it's interesting to say, oh, it's already plural if it hasn't im at the end.
- Hank Smith: 04:47 Yep, interesting.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 04:49 Well, we were talking about how the Chapter 2 creation narrative has some differences with Chapter 1. So we talked about the differences in the term it uses for God, the Elohim versus Jehovah. Some other thing that I think is fun is in chapter 1, God creates by simply speaking, "let there be" and so forth and things just react. Chapter 2, I think is fun because in Chapter 2, when God is working, he gets his hands dirty, he rolls up his sleeves, he does this.
- So here's some of the verbs it uses in Chapter 2, it says the Lord God formed, breathed, planted, made, took, formed, brought, caused, took closed up, made, brought, he's very physically involved in this. It's fun to see him doing these things. He's down with the mud that's there forming people and it's a fun description I think. We've got that going on. And, of course, the Adam and Eve story is more fully developed in this one. In Chapter 1, it just says he made male and female all together, summative right there. Whereas here, we get the more detailed story.
- Hank Smith: 05:56 And I noticed Josh, it's definitely out of order. We start with heaven and earth and then plants and man.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 06:05 It doesn't seem to be assuming that we've read Chapter 1 necessarily. And this doesn't mean that these can't bounce off each other in a really rich way. Again, even if you go with the theory that these were written by different people, you may or not, but at least, even if you did, at some point an editor thought that these should be put side-by-side to be read together.
- Hank Smith: 06:23 And they're not meant to contradict each other, they're meant to complement each other.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 06:27 Exactly. The only reason you would have put them together, assuming they had been separate, was to compliment each other in a really huge way. So whichever way you want to go on who wrote this, it's very clear that these go together beautifully and that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. So in this version, so in verse 4, some people think that the first half of verse four would go with what came before, it's summarizing the first account. These are the generations of heaven and the earth when they recreated. And that the second account starts more properly in the second half of verse 4.

So in other words, "In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens..." And it's once again doing that thing, where it's setting up the background before you get to the action. "In the day that the Lord God made the earth in the heavens and every plant of the field before it was in the earth and every earth the field before it grew." And give all that background. But in verse 6 then you get the action. There rose up this mist or this stream, this flow and watered the whole face of the ground.

Hank Smith: 07:28 So that's the same idea, is there's water underneath us.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 07:31 There's water underneath there, yeah. Here we're starting with this desert waste setting, but this water is flowing up from beneath and it's a controlled amount of water here. So this is nice life giving water. When it's controlled and channeled properly, water's great, it's just they're afraid of when there's too much.

Hank Smith: 07:47 So there's *tohu* but no *bohu*.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 07:51 So we get the watering of the ground there in verse 7, "The Lord, God formed man of the dust of the ground." So the sense of dust in English sounds like it's dry stuff, but from the proceeding, in Hebrew dust doesn't have to mean that. It seems that we're imagining mud here from this water that's seeping up, it's covering the ground here, and you got this mud, this clay from which he is creating this guy. "And he breathes into his nostrils the breath of life. And he became a living soul." So you got this divine power flowing into this, a combination of his divine breath with this physical matter that you got there. Chapter 1 was more like a big overview shot, Chapter 2 is now getting down in the trees on the ground in its worldview.

John Bytheway: 08:29 Reminds me of is it Job again, "Dust thou art, unto dust shall thou return?"

Dr. Joshua Sears: 08:34 Yep, this motif of humans comes out of the earth. In fact, it's even a pun in Hebrew. So Adam's name in Hebrew is *Adama* and it means human. And there's a wordplay here with the ground, which is *Adamah*. So it sounds like the same thing. This even with the pun between his name and the word there is significant, it's making that link. Then in verse 8, "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden and there he put the man whom he had formed." And here you get this sense, it's like gradations of holiness as you get closer to the temple, it's more and more holy. You've got all the land and then the most sacred part of that is this place called Eden and then the most sacred part of Eden is this garden that's somewhere in there. So we're moving into this spot here.

Hank Smith: 09:18 So it does sound like the ancient tabernacle, what we'll study later, this idea for moving out of the courtyard, holy place, Holy of Holies.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 09:26 And we haven't mentioned this yet, but both Chapters 1 and Chapter 2 are saturated with temple vocabulary and imagery and everything. So Creation is really depicted as God making this giant universe temple, of which the temple in Jerusalem is going to be a microcosm of Creation right there. And you get Eden imagery in the temple there, with the cherubim and everything. So there's definitely going to be links all over the place with temple imagery to this stuff.

Hank Smith: 09:51 So it's the garden in Eden not necessarily the Garden of Eden.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 09:56 Yeah. It seems that the garden is a smaller part of Eden, at least the way the grammar looks. And then we've got to verse 9, the trees set up there. Versus 10 through 14 are interesting because it's like a long parentheses. Grammatically, it sets it up like that, that it's a little bit of an aside. You get away from the guy and his story and we'll get back to that in verse 15. But you got this long side with this theological geography going on here about this river comes out of Eden to water the garden and then it splits into four different rivers. And the name that you've got, it even names them all. You've got this river the Pishon and then there's river called Gihon, another one Hiddekel and the Euphrates. So people are often wondering, why are we talking about rivers? What's going on?

Hank Smith: 10:47 And why are they named?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 10:49 The interesting thing is two of these rivers correspond to rivers that we know about, or at least we have rivers with the same name. You've got the Euphrates and the Hiddekel up there

talking about the Tigris. The Tigris and the Euphrates are these two main rivers that go through Mesopotamia. We have no other way to correlate the Pishon and the Gihon, except the Gihon is also the name of the water source in Jerusalem later.

Hank Smith: 10:49

The spring.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 11:12

The same name.

John Bytheway: 11:13

But this brings up a question about, well, I thought the Garden of Eden was in Jackson County, Missouri.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 11:21

So Joseph Smith teaches that and I'm not going to contradict Joseph Smith. Although I don't know if the ancient Israelite writers if that's what they're thinking. They seem to always relate this story to events in the ancient Near East, what they're familiar with. Joseph can be totally right, but in their view, I think they're connecting these to places they're familiar with. Because look at this, so the Pishon, this river, it encompasses the whole land of Havilah, and it talks about the gold there and stuff. Havilah is on the way between Israel and Egypt. So they pass there on your way down to Egypt. Then you got the Gihon, it says that goes down to Ethiopia, that's Kush, South of Egypt. And then, of course, the Tigris and Euphrates you know about from Mesopotamia. So they seem to be linking these to their known world, which is Israel. And then you got Egypt and Mesopotamia on either side of that right there.

So why are we spending all this time talking about this? And there's different ideas people have. I think it's interesting that these rivers are flowing out of Eden and going to these places bringing that life and blessedness from Eden out into the world. And maybe it's not a coincidence that these are all places where the Israelites are going to end up enslaved, in captivity, Egypt and Babylon are right there. This is one of many links in these creation stories to the story of the House of Israel later.

Hank Smith: 12:38

These four rivers are going out from Eden to the world.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 12:42

At this point, these rivers are carrying this life giving water force out into the world. But isn't that exactly what Israel itself is supposed to be doing later? "Through thee and in my seed shall all the families and nations of the earth be blessed." Israel's supposed to go out later and bless these nations. And they go to Egypt and they go to Mesopotamia and they have these experiences there. So maybe that's got something to do with

the significance of this. There's other explanations too, of course, like anything in these chapters, but...

Hank Smith: 13:09 Water for them is life-giving, is that what you said? The river is life.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 13:15 We talked before about water being chaos and stuff. But when it is controlled, when it has a purpose and a function and God has now ordained it for a purpose yeah, in small quantities, now it's a life-giving metaphor. And this possible link to the story of Israel is an important point to mention here just in passing while we're at it. It's interesting to note that the creation stories here, whether you're talking about the Chapter 1 version or the Chapter 2-3 version, they're not mentioned directly a lot throughout the rest of the Old Testament. You don't find discussions of Adam and Eve or the creation as described in Chapter 1. It's just not discussed very much in the Old Testament. You do get it in the New Testament, in the Book of Mormon for sure, but not the rest there.

For the authors of Genesis, these stories are really written as a prologue to the main story. The one they're really interested in, which is the story of Israel. That's where they're excited to get to. That's why there are so many chapters on Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca and Jacob and Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah. That's the real story, is Israel. So all this stuff here for all the attention and the interest that we in the modern world have with these early chapters, they're not spending a lot of time here nor do they go back and talk about it a lot. Because a lot of this, for them in terms of the overall structure of Genesis, really is a prologue to the story of Israel, which is what gets them really excited.

Hank Smith: 14:34 Wow.

John Bytheway: 14:35 Very interesting.

Hank Smith: 14:37 That's awesome. They're setting us up to learn about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 14:42 A lot of the stuff here is preparing the way.

John Bytheway: 14:44 This is how we got here, but here's the real story.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 14:48 Israel's job is to renovate the world, to save it, to save us from the violence and the wickedness that's all there. And that's an important story, that's how God saves humanity, is through the

house of Israel. So all this is setting up the environment where we're going to get that story. So at this point, the rest of chapter two is basically the setup for Chapter 3, with Adam and Eve getting ready for the tree, the different tree that are there and everything. And that's next week's lesson. So maybe we can pause on Genesis there. And this might be a good point to jump to the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham and the Pearl of Great Price and see how that builds on this foundation of Genesis.

- Hank Smith: 15:25 And Josh, could you give us... There's no fear in repetition here. We had Kerry last week tell us a little of the history of Moses and Abraham. But if you want to give us a review, that would not be a bad thing. Where did these books come from and how did they get at the end of my triple combination?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 15:47 So let's take a look at the Book of Moses first. And just by way of review here then, what is the Book of Moses? Where does this come from here? The Book of Moses is basically the excerpt from the first six chapters of Joseph Smith's new translation of the Bible, the JST. So most of the JST didn't end up canonized, we have a lot of it in our footnotes. But for various historical reasons, these opening six chapters, since they were so awesome, basically is how this happened, they end up in the Pearl of Great Price. So we have this JST chunk right here that we got.
- Hank Smith: 16:20 This was the project he started right after the organization of the Church, right?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 16:24 Yeah, June 1830s is when he dives into that, it's very early and a significant part of his ministry. And so since we've been talking about Genesis 1 and 2, we want to note that... So Moses 1 has no parallel in Genesis, it's our great story of Moses talking with God and then confronting Satan and all that. So that's the prologue. And then starting in Chapter 2 of Moses, is where you get the direct parallel to Genesis 1. And then Moses 3 would be the direct parallel to Genesis 2.
- Now, it's worth maybe talking about what's the relationship between these texts. They read differently but they're also much the same. So what's the relationship? Why are they different? How are they different? When Joseph Smith was working on his new translation of the Bible, basically what he did, he didn't have an ancient document in front of him like he did with the gold plates of the Book of Mormon. Instead he has Oliver Cowdery buy a new copy of a King James Version of the Bible in English. He sits down with it, he reads it, and he just lets

that revelation start flowing and he's pondering it in his mind. And he will just start talking and making changes. He's got a scribe there, it's usually Sidney Rigdon, and he writes down the stuff.

Recent scholarship on the Joseph Smith Translation has been stressing that the Joseph Smith Translation represents different things in different places. In some places, it's like that pure revelation with a capital R, when Joseph gets a whole chapter or two that's not in the Bible at all. He's just got these words coming to him, it's revelation, it's just new stuff and the scribes are writing it down. So that's a big R capital R revelation right there. So some parts of the JST are like that. Then other parts of the Joseph Smith Translation look like they're more like a process of Joseph wrestling with the English text, applying his logic and his reasoning and his deep thinking to it. You can see him wrestling with the text and playing with the words and trying to render it more clearly, adding his own insights to it. So it's not necessarily like every single word of every single change is all dictated from heaven. Sometimes it's doing one thing, sometimes it's doing a different thing.

The reason that the book of Moses is special is because it's often this big capital R right, you get lots of new information here in Moses. We actually have some places where Joseph translated the same chapter twice because he forgot that he already did it. And what you see there is he'll sometimes make... The thrust of the differences there is that he'll often make the same basic kinds of changes, but he'll use different words to do it. So it's not like every word is precisely exactly revealed from God. And it has to only be this way. He's trying to teach and he's trying to put ideas out there but it's not always word for word, some of it is up to him, how to do that.

Hank Smith: 19:14 And I think we need to have this, we need to have some flexibility with him because that's how it works with all of us. Receiving revelation, sometimes you feel like you're getting just pure inspiration, other times you're, "I'm I figuring this out? Is the Lord helping me." I just feel like that's very, I don't know, that's natural to my experience. I don't know about you guys, but to me.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 19:35 And our classic major scholar on the Joseph Smith Translation was Robert J. Matthews, who has now passed away. One thing that he was really great at articulating was that the Joseph Smith Translation, again, it's doing different things in different places. So in some places, he talked about restoring text that was once in the Bible but was lost, bringing that back. In other

places, it might be that what we have in the Bible really is the original version, but Joseph is revealing additional details that were never written down, but that he's adding them now so we can get some added cool bonus insight on stuff that happened back then. In other cases, he's adding Latter-day commentary and in other places he's simply modernizing the English, making it easier to read, stuff like that. So different things in different places.

So when we're comparing Genesis 1 and 2 with Moses 2 and 3, I don't know that the best way to read it is to understand that Moses 2 and 3 is the original version and that Genesis 1 and 2 is a degraded version that got all messed up. Now, there are Latter-day Saints scholars who see it that way, and I'm totally fine with that position. I'm just outlining options here. But I don't think it's required that we see the changes in Moses 2-3 to have been original and that Genesis 1 and 2 is then the messed up version. It's also possible that Genesis 1 and 2 is pretty much the way that it came from the original ancient authors and that Moses 2 and 3, what Joseph is doing is giving a Latter-day expansion, commentary, adding cool new insights and everything. So I just want to point out that there's two options there and we don't need to assume one or the other dogmatically, I'm open to both.

- Hank Smith: 21:15 I like that, Josh. Thank you.
- John Bytheway: 21:17 Good to know. I really appreciate that too, that description of the JST, I think it's very helpful. In fact, sometimes I wish we called it the Joseph Smith Clarification or the Joseph Smith Illumination or something because it's not translated the way we normally think of it.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 21:35 And I love the JST. That's what got me into scripture study in the first place. Was just got really interested in the JST somehow. So I love going through this stuff.
- Hank Smith: 21:46 So Josh, should I read them side by side? Should I get my Genesis open or should I just jump into Moses 2 and just see what's here on its own?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 21:55 Given that Joseph is doing different things in different places and that not all of the changes represent a restoration of pristine original text, my recommendation, when you study the Joseph Smith Translation, is to always study it side by side with the King James Version. That's the base text that Joseph is starting with. He's looking at a King James Bible and he's responding to the King James Bible. So when you look at the JST

on the side, often the only way to get in Joseph's head and see why he made a change is to compare it with the King James Version and ask yourself, what did Joseph notice here? Was there something that sounded off to him? Was there something that didn't make sense? Was there a problem to be solved or figured out here? And it's often with the comparison that you appreciate the significance of the change he made. If you just read the JST all by itself without the comparison, you're often going to miss getting into his head a little bit and figuring out the significance of the change in wording.

- Hank Smith: 22:50 So I've got my scriptures on my phone, I've got my paper scriptures, so I can look at them side by side here.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 22:55 So rather than go through it verse by verse because we already did that in Genesis, it might be worth our time just to summarize what are the awesome things that Joseph Smith's expanded translation here, what does it add? What does it clarify? What does it contribute to you? And you guys know this just as well as I do. So let's all jump in here, just have fun pointing stuff out.
- Hank Smith: 23:16 Show us, Josh. I'm ready.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 23:18 Well, I'll just pick us up. I think one of the great contributions of the Book of Moses is how much it makes us understand how involved Jesus Christ was in Creation. In a way, that's more clear than Genesis because you don't have to do the Yahweh or Jehovah or this and that stuff there. The Book of Moses says, like Chapter 1, verse 33, to go back a little bit, "And worlds without number have I created; and I also created them, for my own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten." It's much more clear in the Moses version here than Genesis, that this is a Christ-centered text and that Jesus was the creator acting under the direction of his Father. And that this is part of his divine role as Jehovah, was to be involved in creation. So I think that's a wonderful contribution here to help us appreciate the savior in an additional role.
- Hank Smith: 24:07 And Josh, you talked about how Genesis 1 is elevating humankind. Look at the verse... Then you add that verse 39 of chapter 1, "This is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." Once again, elevate the role of men and women.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 24:24 Well, one of the big changes that Moses does is it frames the story from Genesis differently. Genesis is told from the perspective of a third person narrator describing God created

this, God did this. Whereas, Moses 1 sets up this stage where God is going to tell Moses about how he created the earth. And then in Moses 2-3 he says, and I, God did this and I, God did this. So it's a very different framing for the story where God himself is telling the story, which is really cool.

- Hank Smith: 24:55 That is really cool.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 24:56 And again, that doesn't necessarily mean that originally, thousands of years ago it read, and I God and that some mischievous scribe through and changed it all to third person God, it doesn't necessarily mean that. But Joseph is definitely in the version he's receiving by revelation here, it's reframing it in a powerful way that really makes it more personal right there.
- Hank Smith: 25:17 So we don't have to see the Genesis version as a bad version and this is a good, we could say this is an addition, Genesis is inspired, Moses is inspired, it's more.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 25:27 They're all in our canon—scripture. So I think there certainly can be places where Genesis did get messed up somehow and Moses is restoring the original version, I'm totally fine with that. But we don't have to see every single change that way.
- Hank Smith: 25:40 Do you teach your students anything about the significance of the first person idea, that God is getting up close and personal maybe here?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 25:48 That's Chapter 1, verse 40, "And now, Moses, my son, I will speak unto thee concerning this earth upon which thou standest; and thou shalt write the things which I shall speak." So it is framing this with the prologue that you don't get in Genesis, as this is the story told by God to Moses. Here's another way that Moses 2 adds to the Genesis experience. So in verse 26 and 27, this is the classic, "Let us create man in our image," back from Genesis 1. So it's famously a thing in Genesis 1:26 that God speaks in the plural here, "Let us create man in our image." Bible scholars looking at that will probably correctly see this as an illusion to the Israelite idea that there's a Divine Council, where God is ruling with other divine beings and angels and things there. That he often speaks with them as he makes his plans.
- But I love the even more specific clarification you get here in the Book of Moses, where verse 26, "And I, God said unto my Only Begotten," So the Father is speaking to the Son, "which was with me from the beginning: let us make man in our image."

And that reframes it so you specifically see God the Father and Jesus Christ working as a creative team here. And I think that's just beautiful. Modern scholars will call this the Divine Council or the Divine Assembly. And you see this again, this is an idea that's in other cultures around Israel. They'll have this idea that there's a council of deities that are ruling and deciding things together. And Israelites have the same thing, they imagine that you got God, but he's not all lonely and lonesome up there in heaven, that he has other divine beings that he communes with and works with. So you see this in different prophetic places, prophets talk about this. The famous scripture we have Amos 3:7, "The Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret to his servants the prophets."

That word secret there, so it means this council, God is going to reveal these council decisions and plans to the prophets. And in fact, you get a lot of places in the Old Testament where you see that of all these divine beings that are on the council deciding things, you get a moral representative, and that's the prophet. The prophet is the human seat on the council who gets to represent the human point of view on there. So for example, later in the book of Amos 7, Israel is wicked and they're discussing, well, we ought to destroy them because they're wicked. And they propose sending down this fire to destroy them. Amos speaks up and he is like, "I object. Please no, don't do that. How shall Israel stand? He is so small." And they go, "Okay." And they scrap that idea. And then they propose sending locusts I think is next. He again objects and then they move on to another plan. So you sometimes see prophets, they're not just passive listeners, they get to speak up and have a role in responding to things here. There's deliberation going on, and it's very interesting.

Hank Smith: 28:40

That's Jacob 5, "Let's just tear down the vineyard." And the servant says, "Oh, let's spare them a little longer."

Dr. Joshua Sears: 28:45

No, no, no, let's wait. Exactly. And there's this great point where Jeremiah accuses the false prophet saying that they're not on the Divine Council, so they're not really speaking for the Lord. And it's funny because the subtext is like, "I go to the Divine Council meetings, I don't see you there." So he figures. So there's several places where you see God discussing with angels or with others. He'll say things like, "Shall I talk to Abraham about what I'm going to do." And it sounds like a rhetorical question, but he is talking to people and they have these discussions about what they're going to do on earth or who shall we send to do with this mission. Like with Isaiah 6, "Whom shall go before us and whom shall we send?" And Isaiah

volunteers because he's on the council now. "Here am I, send me, I'll go and do the job." So this motif appears a lot of times.

- Hank Smith: 29:31 I have another question for you. It sounds to me and Kerry talked about this last week and I'm sure some of our listeners are going to think, "This sounds a lot like God the Father speaking." Because he's talking to his Only Begotten, "I said to my Only Begotten." But yet what would you tell your students, that this is still Jehovah speaking to Moses?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 29:52 There's different ways to look at that. I think one thing with Joseph Smith and the way he's getting the revelation, Joseph Smith lives at an era now where we're really distinct between the father and the Son. So that language is much more prominent that's going to be in the Old Testament. The Old Testament does not make a big deal about God the Father verses God the Son. That's just not a concept that a lot of the Israelites seem to have had. They worshiped Jehovah and that's their main deal. They have an idea often that there are other deities, and that even Jehovah can have a father. But they're not really making a deal about that. Whereas here that's theologically more significant to us now post New Testament. You can also bring in ideas of divine investiture of authority, that Jehovah can often speak as if he is the Father. He has the authority to do that, he's an authorized representative of the Father.
- Hank Smith: 30:38 I think Kerry talked about that last week. Didn't he, John?
- John Bytheway: 30:41 Yeah. And I think it's a really good point because we want it to be so clear cut. But even in the Doctrine and Covenants in the dedicatory prayer, in one place they say Jehovah addressing Jehovah and another place it is Elohim they say or is it Holy Father?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 31:03 He didn't use the word Elohim, he uses Father. And this is because this is pre-1916. Joseph Smith used those titles that he knew from the Bible interchangeably. So you have to figure out from context who he's talking about. The confusion that that can potentially create is why the First Presidency eventually decided let's just keep our terminology consistent.
- John Bytheway: 31:22 So in 1916, was it Joseph F. Smith doctrinal disposition on the... What was that document called?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 31:31 It's called "The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition" or something. It was reprinted and signed in 2002. So it is on the Church website, you can find that.

Hank Smith: 31:39 And we can put a link to it in our show notes on our website.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 31:43 Sure, yeah. So the book of Abraham, of course, now this is all coming from that Egyptian papyri that Joseph Smith got access to. So a lot of the stuff in Abraham is new stuff that's not found in Genesis. But then you get chunks of it that do parallel Genesis. And Abraham 4-5 are now based again off Genesis 1-2, but told in a different way. And this version is different from Genesis and it's different from Moses.

John Bytheway: 32:13 So I can anticipate our listeners, why do we want or need or what do I do with three different creation stories? How might we answer that?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 32:25 I think what we don't want to do is assume that there's one original text, and these all have to match it or they're not inspired. I don't think that's really what's going on here. I think it's totally fine to have parallel versions of the same story where the prophet working with God gives different emphasis, teaches different things, uses a text to teach different points and you have different versions. Just like the joy of having Matthew, Mark, and Luke and John rather than just one story of Jesus. They're different, they stress different details, they emphasize different things. Occasionally they may contradict a little bit. But the fact that we got four stories of the life of Jesus is a blessing not a problem. Ultimately it's good we have this.

And Latter-day Saints, we have Genesis 1-2, Moses 2-3, Abraham 4-5, and the version of this that's presented in the temple endowment, which is different in some ways from all of these again. So Joseph is giving lots of versions of this. And I think we're meant to learn different things from all of them without having to rack our brains and think it's a big problem that, oh, this doesn't match this or the days of creation are different order here than they are here. If we're trying to teach different things in different places, then those problems go away.

John Bytheway: 33:37 That's a great answer. Perfect.

Hank Smith: 33:40 That right there, Josh, is going to be that right there. That is, how do I say that? That right there, that is just that right there. John, it reminds me of that verse that we get so many different

ways, he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers. And then a different prophet says it differently and then Jesus says it differently and then ... says it differently.

- John Bytheway: 34:00 –says made to the fathers.
- Hank Smith: 34:03 Every time it's different, but every time it's inspired.
- John Bytheway: 34:07 That's again that idea, is scripture static or is it dynamic? Another prophet could come along and say, "Hey, let me give you some more insight on that." Or teach something different as Josh just said, I like that. Learn something different from these different accounts.
- Hank Smith: 34:07 Let me emphasize something different.
- John Bytheway: 34:20 And let me add, you brought up Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. One of my favorite JST changes, it's not the gospel according to Matthew, the gospel according to Mark because you'd think the gospel would be the same, it's the testimony of Matthew and the testimony of Mark and the testimony of Luke. And that, oh, okay, well, no two testimonies sound exactly the same and that's beautiful, that's what we want.
- Hank Smith: 34:43 That would be funny. In testimony meetings, someone bears your testimony. Someone else comes up and we're like, "We already heard that, we already-"
- John Bytheway: 34:48 That's true. We don't want that.
- Hank Smith: 34:50 We don't need more testimony, we already got one. So Josh is saying, maybe we should see this as a testimony meeting of Moses, Joseph Smith, Abraham, the temple, same testimony just different verbiage.
- John Bytheway: 35:07 What can you learn from this one? What can you learn from this one? What is being taught? What's being... Yeah, love it.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 35:10 And it's not just one prophet giving a different take on it from an earlier prophet, the same prophet can give different meanings. So to compare to... So Joseph Smith is doing that here in one lifetime. But another example might be Jesus in 3 Nephi. You'll see him quote Isaiah and then he'll quote the same Isaiah passage a chapter or two later and he'll change the words and use the same passage to make a different point. And he's not afraid to do that. He's willing to change the words in order

to change the message and he interprets it differently. The fact that he is willing to do that within a couple of chapters of each other, I think really he's saying scripture's flexible, you're not just trying to bind it to one single meaning, it's meant to teach different things. So just being open to the same phrase being used in different ways in different places, I think he's modeling that really well there.

- John Bytheway: 36:01 Great thing to draw from that, that's great.
- Hank Smith: 36:04 Josh, you reminded me of my friend, Anthony Sweat, who wrote a book, *Seekers Wanted*. Page 70, he says, "Written revelations, scriptures, are not the revelations themselves but rather records captured in limiting human language." He says, "The purpose of scripture is not to be a perfect record of God's dialect or diction, but to act as a personal Urim and Thummim, a launchpad for revelation to connect us to the same divine source that revealed the truths in the first place." He said earlier, just a couple of pages before that, let me find it, he says, "We see the task of scripture study in fresh light. Our job is to get in tune with the same spirit that revealed the concept." So I like what you're saying here, it's not the idea that we want to get the correct creation story, but we have four different creation stories to get us in tune with the creator.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 37:04 That's great.
- Hank Smith: 37:06 All right. What do you want to do with Abraham then?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 37:09 Well, we don't have time to go in detail over every little thing, so just some overview notes here. So we noted that in Genesis 1, it talks in the third person about God creating, "And God said, let there be light." In the book of Moses, the framing is different, word's, "And I God said let there be light." Abraham has a third framing, a third way to tell the story here, where it is they, "The Gods said, let there be light." So now you've got a group of them doing it together. God acting with these other divine beings that are helping with this here. So again, I don't think you have to say that one's right and the others are wrong, I think these are all ways of looking at it that are each bringing different aspects of this to the forefront. Which is really helpful.
- Hank Smith: 37:52 The Gods, what do you think Joseph Smith had in mind there?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 37:56 Well, one thing that might explain some of the differences between Moses and Abraham, in addition to inspiration, I'll just make sure I say that too, Joseph Smith is totally in tune with the

Spirit here. But one thing that also might be driving some of his thinking is that he has studied Hebrew in between Moses and Abraham, the Books of Moses and the Book of Abraham. He has studied Hebrew so now he's aware, for example, that the term Elohim is plural, and that gets his gears thinking and opens up whole new questions to ask and insights to get. So that might be one thing driving the fact that he's so willing to go this route here.

And there's other places where some of his expressions that he uses, like look at Abraham 4:2, "And the earth after it was formed was empty and desolate." And that's a really great description of *tohu wa bohu* there. And he knows what that means now from his study of Hebrew. We know he studied Genesis 1 with his Hebrew teacher. So there's places like that now where he's utilizing that and harnessing that here.

And there's some places where a change was made in Moses, so he changed the King James Version to something. But he changed it away from the meaning of what the Hebrew means. And maybe now that he's figured out, "Oh, I didn't... In the King James Version that looked like a problem, but now I get what it's doing in Hebrew." He actually reverts back to the original King James reading here in the Book of Abraham. So he's going all sorts of directions with this. And you can see it as a later stage in his understanding of doctrinal ideas and his mastery of the original languages and how he's trying to put it all together, and it's really great.

- Hank Smith: 39:30 Josh, I like what you're doing here. I often tell my students when we're reading the Book of Mormon, "Try to get Mormon's head as the author. Well, you're doing this with these Joseph Smith writings. Let's try to get into his head here and see what he's experiencing.
- John Bytheway: 39:44 Oh, just noticing a different word choice in Abraham 4:2, instead of God moving above the waters what does it say in Genesis, "He was brooding upon the face of the waters," that's a... Brooding, what is that, is a thinking, pondering.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 40:02 Oh no, this is him hovering. Which is a good sense of the Hebrew there too. The Spirit is just flying there over the waters entering this chaos and darkness there, getting ready to do its thing. Then you notice Joseph Smith is big here, he really taps into this idea of organizing and structuring that you get there in that Hebrew sense there. So like in verse 7, "The Gods ordered the expanse," there in verse 15, "He organized them." So the organizational thing that we talked a lot about back in Genesis

1-2. Joseph's really bringing that to the forefront here right there. You see the Gods counseling together, they're planning things, they prepare things before they actually do it. So it just adds all this nuance and richness here with this idea that there was a council working in harmony and deciding things. And it highlights that in ways you don't get in the other versions.

- Hank Smith: 40:58 You've got the Gods organized in verse 14. These were words you were using in Genesis, you were saying that the Hebrew was highlighting this idea. Josh, when you were in your Hebrew studies, did you want to raise your hand in class and say, "Hey, I've got an interesting version of Genesis from Joseph Smith?"
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 41:18 I would from time to time share stuff. We'd be talking about the temple and Jerusalem and I'd be like... They'd always talk about it as a past tense thing because most of my colleagues and fellow students were Jews or Christians. And for them, the temple is a past thing. And I would bring up that we still have temples today that we see a connection with. It was always a very open, welcoming, kind environment. People were really interested in things like that. Grad school Biblical Studies, sometimes there's this idea out there that it's these atheists trying to knock your faith out constantly. For me, it was always a very ecumenical environment. Everyone was really fascinated by what I had shared about my own faith tradition and I loved learning from theirs. So yeah, we actually felt pretty free to share this stuff. And people always thought it was really interesting.
- John Bytheway: 42:00 This was University of Texas at Austin when the...
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 42:03 Yeah. And the Ohio State University.
- John Bytheway: 42:05 And the Ohio State.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 42:06 Just great people.
- Hank Smith: 42:08 Josh, where did you highlight that they're doing things before?
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 42:12 So for example look at Abraham 4:18. "And the God's watched these things which they had ordered until they obeyed." So there's the sense that time is going on and this takes a while, not just instantaneous like you might assume from Genesis, right?

Hank Smith: 42:26 Right. That made me laugh, by the way. I'm going to share that with my wife. "And the parents watched the children which they had ordered until they obeyed."

Dr. Joshua Sears: 42:35 I can relate to that.

John Bytheway: 42:37 We're going to be watching for a long time.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 42:40 Verse 31, "The Gods said: We will do everything we have said, and organize them; and behold, they shall be very obedient." That's also what parents want to see happen.

Hank Smith: 42:49 Yeah, "They will be very obedient." Josh, I wanted to mention something just because you said that. I think it was Elder Bednar, you guys can both probably remember, who said, "When the Lord says we're going to create something spiritually before we create it physically." He said, "that's what we should do as well with our mourning prayer and our evening prayer. The morning prayer, we spiritually create our day and our evening prayer is to return and report. So we're praying always in that way because we have that spiritual creation of our day in our minds. To me, that impacted my life. My morning prayers became a spiritual creation of my day and my evening prayers became a return and report on the creation. The bad part is, whenever they return and report in the scriptures or the temple, we did everything exactly as we said. And my return and report doesn't sound like that. I said, "Well, I got maybe 1% or 2% of it."

Dr. Joshua Sears: 43:54 I remember changing my morning prayers too because otherwise you're thinking, "Why am I praying here in the morning like the last thing I remember? It seems like five minutes ago I said my night prayer." But when you see it as looking forward to the day and spiritually creating before it happens, that's a powerful insight.

John Bytheway: 44:11 It's almost like to me, a patriarchal blessing can be like, "Here's your capacities, your talents, your gifts, here's a blueprint. Now, go strive to make it happen with the Lord's help."

Hank Smith: 44:24 John, I like that a lot. There was a time in the temple where I thought, of all the scripture stories, this one is the one we're going to review over and over and over. And for a while I thought, "Why?" And I think part of that has to be what we're talking about, where the Lord says, "Look, you're the child of a creator, I want you to create. You're going to create a happy marriage, you're going to create a happy family, you're going to

create a career, you're going to create whatever. Create the way I create, deliberate, planned, careful, ordered. Keep your eye on the goal, don't rush Day 7. All of a sudden don't rush to the end, don't try to get it all at once. Do it, be aware that in any goal, any creation there's a Day 1 and there's a Day 2 and there's a Day 3. And don't worry."

That helps me go, "Well, John is on Day 6, spiritually, I'm still back on Day 2. But I'm creating. One day I'll get there." So it helps me not compare. I don't know, Is there anything else that you guys have felt or seen from just this story of the Creation in any of the accounts we have, Genesis Moses, Abraham, the temple that has helped you live?

John Bytheway: 45:38 Well, just what you said, Hank, the temple, Section 88, "Prepare a house of order, a house of faith, a house of prayer." And he's telling him, "Start your plan, start your spiritual creation of this."

Hank Smith: 45:50 Josh, what do you get out of the Creation stories?

Dr. Joshua Sears: 45:53 Well, I love how in Moses and Abraham, it has a setup before the creation story that impacts how you read it. So we talked about in Moses 1, God's talking to Moses and that's the setup he says, "This is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." That makes you read creation with a very different framework. And same thing here in Abraham. So Chapter 4 is our parallel account to Genesis 1. But right before that starts at the end of Chapter 3, you get this description of those spirits that Abraham sees, the noble and great ones that are in the presence of God, "These, I will make my rulers. You were chosen before are born."

And it talks about verse 24, "There stood one among them that was like unto God," I'm assuming this is Jesus Christ, "and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth wear on these, all the spirits may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; And those who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who shall keep their first estate; and those who shall keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads forever and ever."

And it's just this amazing expansive view of this is why we're here. And it's not meaningless, it's not random, we're here for a reason, we have a creator. And even if these accounts aren't

giving us the physical scientific structure of how the earth was created, like big deal, I'd much rather know this stuff. I want to know who my creator is, why I'm here. So that even if I don't know the details of how creation happened, I know who my creator is and I know how I can get back to him. And I think that's really empowering.

John Bytheway: 47:42

It's a purposeful creation not, I think Elder Maxwell said once, "Not an accidental arrangement of atoms." So it's not exactly how I did it, but here's why I did it.

Dr. Joshua Sears: 47:54

So one thing we can take away from the story of Adam and Eve—Genesis, that the story seems designed to do, is to really, for readers to see their story as in a lot of ways our story. That their story is an archetype for the story that we go through. So for example, one way that the story does this is by the names it gives these characters. So Adam, his name Adam in Hebrew means human being. That's about as generic as you can get when you want to name a human being. Eve's name means living or a live, life, something like that, living one. So it's also a generic thing. And by having names that are these big categories, it invites us to put ourselves into that category with them.

And even in the endowment, in the temple, it'll invite us. That's the reason that it reviews their story so that we can see ourselves as part of the same story, and put ourselves in their place. Where Adam and Eve start off in the presence of God and they have to leave his presence and then they're trying to figure out, how do we get back to his presence? And that's through the temple, that's through covenants, that's through the Atonement. And our story is basically the same. We start off in God's presence, we come here to this earth, and we're trying to all figure out how we can get back there and reclaim that paradise and the presence of God there. And it's the same journey that they took through temples, through covenants, through the atonement, and I think that's a great contribution. So in addition to whatever the story is trying to say about the historical figures of Adam and Eve, it is at least trying to do this as set up this archetypal story that's all of our story.

Hank Smith: 49:23

Josh, we've had a fantastic day with you today, walking through these creation accounts. Honestly, this has changed a lot for me. I'm just so, so grateful. I think our listeners would be interested in your... You become a biblical scholar yet here you are, a believing faithful Latter-day Saint. I think they'd be interested in that journey.

Dr. Joshua Sears:

49:43

I guess I would say first off that the foundation for my testimony is the witness of the Holy Ghost. I've been experiencing that long before I went to college. Spent 13 years in college, it was a long time. And that comes from the Book of Mormon honestly. I think the Old Testament has enriched my testimony but the Book of Mormon is the foundation of it. And it's actually my favorite book. If I could have done 13 years of college on the Book of Mormon, I would have done that. There's just no programs for it. But the Book of Mormon and the spiritual experiences I've had feeling God's love and understanding his plan for me while reading the Book of Mormon has really been foundational to my entire life. And honestly, one of the reasons I got into the Old Testament was to understand the Book of Mormon better because the Book of Mormon is so full of Old Testament things. So I just love the Book of Mormon. And I know from the Holy Ghost that it is true.

Also I would say I had a lot of experiences in my life with God's miracles. I used to just assume that everybody has these. I've talked to a lot of people, apparently that's not everybody's experience. But I've just had a lot of experiences with immediate miraculous answers to prayer, wonderful direction from my heavenly father, people who are healed in miraculous instant ways. So that's not everybody's experience and it doesn't have to be, but I have had those. So when I read the scriptures about revelation and about miracles and about healing and these things, it does not sound like a foreign old timey concept to me, it's something I've experienced and that I've seen God's hand in my life and those that I've served with and people that I love.

As far as the academic study goes, this has only strengthened my belief in the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I think the Old Testament is a great way to wrestle with some of the deep, hard issues that we have with faith and testimony. Again, the Old Testament's not the foundation of my testimony, but it sure has helped me wrestle with things. I'll just give some examples here. I've met with people who really struggle when they find examples of modern prophets who either didn't know something or got something wrong or made a mistake. They have this idea that prophets are perfect and that they know everything and they would never mess up. And when they see Joseph Smith or Brigham Young or somebody doing that, it can be totally damaging. Well, they can't be a prophet.

While I'm spending all my time going through the Old Testament, and it's just full of stories of these imperfect prophets. So some examples, I think of Joseph in Egypt, amazing

revelations. He can interpret the dreams of the butler and the baker, he knows what's going to happen with Egypt for all these years. But then when his brothers come and he reveals himself to them, what's the first thing he asks them? "Is my father alive?" He so desperately wants to know if his dad's alive. Apparently I imagine he must have asked that in prayer many times and that he never got that answer. So he just desperately wants to know that. So knowing all the amazing things he had revealed it didn't mean he'd know everything, even something he wanted to know so much. So God reveals things to prophets, that's the miracle, but it doesn't mean they know everything. So when I see prophets today or other places that have some blind spots or things they don't know, that doesn't surprise me because the Old Testament's primed me for that.

Another thing that I love about the Old Testament is, I'll put it this way, the Book of Mormon has fantastic characters, but Nephi, Mormon tend to paint them as black or white, they're all good or all bad. You don't find a lot of morally gray in the Book of Mormon. You have good people, bad people, it's really easy to separate them into the heroes and villains. And you have some people that are really bad and then they become really good. But there's not a lot of people who are in that gray zone where most of the rest of us feel like we live, where sometimes we're the villain., sometimes we're the hero. But the Old Testament is just full of gray characters and moral ambiguity and choices where there's not one right or wrong way to do this and things are hard and complex.

The reason I think that's so nice, I'm not trying to put down the Book of Mormon there, it's great for what it does in giving us those models and the ideal to follow. But the Old Testament shows people who sometimes feel a lot more like me in the world that I live in, where things are complicated, there's trauma people go through, you have just these really gut-wrenching choices and priorities you have to make. And the Old Testament is just full of people like that. You ask yourself, is David a hero or a villain? You can't really do that, it's hard. And there's people like that all over the place. So I think it's really good for just wrestling in that ambiguous area where you're trying to do your best, and it sometimes doesn't work out very well. People who are doing that, and it's just story after story of just wrestling with that ambiguity right there.

So I think it's really good for just learning from these people, what did they do? How did that turn out for them? The Old Testament forces us to ask all sorts of hard questions. It brings up genocide, it brings up sexual assault, it brings up poverty,

and issues of class and ethnocentrism. The Old Testament brings up family structures and family conflict and what happens when the family... It's just full of all this stuff. So as we wrestle with all these problems in the modern world, I think this is just such a fantastic resource. And it's, I think for me, trained me to really embrace that wrestle. And that's only strengthened my faith to recognize there's not always an easy, clear cut answer to everything and that's okay, that's the way God works with us. And the Old Testament is great for just practicing that exploration and the wrestle.

- John Bytheway: 55:07 Great.
- Hank Smith: 55:10 I'm putting up where's my number 10.
- John Bytheway: 55:14 I need an emoji right now. No, it's really great because I think you're right. And I think the Old Testament will bless a lot of people because of that. I think we talked about this a little bit, and I can't remember who it was, Hank. That was like, I identify more with Martin Harris because I did some good things, I made some mistakes too. And I feel like that's more me than always doing every... And the Book of Mormon does, it's a very this or that type of a book, and I'm glad you brought it up. I was thinking of Sampson, even Moses.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 55:45 Moses kills a guy and then he is not allowed to go to the promised land.
- John Bytheway: 55:47 He's not even allowed to go in. Oh my goodness. So beautifully said. Thank you so much.
- Dr. Joshua Sears: 55:54 I've had people tell me, "I love the Book of Mormon, but why would I want to go through the extra effort to go to the Old Testament?" But I do think, not that it's better or anything, but that there are some unique things it does and that it's really good at doing that are worthwhile. If you embrace the weirdness, embrace the complexity, roll with it, don't expect everything to line up and be great, it's a foreign world to jump into. But my experience is that if you're willing to pay that price of studying a little and wrestling with the text, it's fascinating and just ultimately enriching. Even the parts that are hard and gut wrenching and all that. It just helps you wrestle with the messy reality of life.
- John Bytheway: 56:34 Beautifully said.

Hank Smith:

56:35

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