



“Is Any Thing too Hard for the Lord?”

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 Friday and Saturday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions:

Part 1:

How do the ancient Near Eastern traditions regarding hospitality affect the story of Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah? Dr. Daniel Peterson explains how Abraham, Lot, and Sarah learn to trust the Lord and wrangle some of the more difficult passages regarding Sodom and Gomorrah.

Part 2:

Dr. Peterson continues to discuss Genesis 18-23 and the impossible choices Sarah, Hagar, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac make as they heed the Lord's commands, wrestle with identifiable human emotions, and reap considerable blessings.

Timecodes:

Part 1

- 00:00 Welcome to Part I
- 00:56 Introduction of Dr. Daniel C. Peterson
- 04:18 Faithful Scholarship and where testimony resides
- 06:56 Ancient Near Eastern tradition of hospitality and Lot and his daughters
- 12:08 Tradition of washing feet, anointing, dressing guest of a great house
- 15:03 Angels and the Lord arrive to visit Lot in Sodom and Abraham and Sarah are blessed with Isaac
- 24:44 Angels go to be witness to Sodom and Abraham bargains with the Lord to save the city
- 31:38 Men of Sodom contrast Abraham's hospitality (and even Lot)
- 33:15 Sodom's probable location and what is happening in the city
- 36:52 The angels decide to destroy Sodom and remove Lot and his family—they don't allow them to linger
- 40:52 Dr. Peterson shares a story of Bertrand Russell and Vladimir Lenin
- 42:07 Lot's wife looks back
- 51:21 End of Part I

Part 2:

- 00:00 Welcome to Part II
- 00:09 The terrible story of Lot and his daughters
- 02:00 Abraham tells Abimelech Sarah is his sister
- 04:16 Dr. Peterson shares personal story with Elder Gong
- 09:00 Dr. Peterson shares story serving as YSA bishop
- 12:23 Sarah is visited by an angel and she laughs
- 13:51 Ishmael and Hagar receive promises from God
- 18:32 Dr. Peterson shares story of teaching Palenstinian students at BYU
- 21:48 God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac and parallels of this story between the Savior
- 29:10 Realities of crucifixion

- 33:24 Dr. Peterson shares personal story of an Egyptian Muslim asking him why he chose to be a Christian
- 36:57 An angel stops Abraham from sacrificing Isaac and gives Abraham many blessings
- 39:09 Hugh B. Brown said that Abraham had to learn something about Abraham
- 39:53 Truman Madsen story about Heber J. Grant
- 42:12 Arabian story of a slave who is the beginning of his line
- 42:52 Dr. Peterson shares story of activating himself and also staying up late
- 44:33 The Law of Consecration is a check with an unlimited number of zeros
- 48:10 Sarah dies and Abraham buying the land is part of Israel's historic claim to the land
- 52:21 Story about Marion D. Hanks and future Stake President hiding from his call
- 55:23 Dr. Peterson shares his background to Church activity, a scholar and testimony of Jesus Christ
- 01:09:48 End of Part II

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Biographical Information:



Daniel C. Peterson (PhD, University of California at Los Angeles) is a professor emeritus of Islamic studies and Arabic at Brigham Young University, where he founded the University's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative. He has published and spoken extensively on both Islamic and Latter-day Saint subjects. Formerly chairman of the board of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) and an officer, editor, and author for its successor organization, the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, his professional work as an Arabist focuses on the Qur'an and on Islamic philosophical theology. He is the author, among other things, of a biography entitled *Muhammad: Prophet of God* (Eerdmans, 2007).

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Hank Smith:	00:01	Welcome to followHIM. A weekly podcast, dedicated to helping individuals and families with their <i>Come, Follow Me</i> study. I'm Hank Smith.
John Bytheway:	00:09	And I'm John Bytheway.
Hank Smith:	00:11	We love to learn.
John Bytheway:	00:11	We love to laugh.
Hank Smith:	00:13	We want to learn and laugh with you. As together...
John Bytheway:	00:16	We follow him.
Hank Smith:	00:20	Hello everyone, welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name is Hank Smith. I'm your host. I'm here with my salt of the earth co-host; John Bytheway. John, you are the salt of the earth. And the reason I bring that up is because I didn't want to say pillar of salt. I wanted to say salt...
John Bytheway:	00:39	Hold that thought, folks.
Hank Smith:	00:40	Yes. Hold on to that. Hold on to that thought. We're excited to be back and we're going to be in the Book of Genesis. And John, both you and I are a little starstruck today. Tell our listeners who's with us.
John Bytheway:	00:56	We are so happy today to have Dr. Daniel C. Peterson with us. I've listened to him, read his blogs and everything on Interpreter Foundation and everything. So we are so thrilled to have Dr. Daniel C. Peterson with us today. And let me give you our listeners some information. He's Emeritus Professor of Islamic studies and Arabic at Brigham Young University. And I think Hank I've told people, I think the Church's expert on Islam would be Dr. Peterson. I don't know who else that could possibly be.
Hank Smith:	01:26	A hundred percent.

John Bytheway: 01:26 He was born and raised in Southern California. He received a bachelors in Classical Greek and Philosophy from BYU. Studied for four and a half years in Jerusalem and Cairo. That's so cool. Earned a PhD in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures from UCLA. Has been a professor of Islamic studies in Arabic from 1985 until retirement in just last July of 2021. The founder, and until 2012, director of BYU's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative, which published dual language additions of classical Arabic works.

John Bytheway: 02:03 He served in the Switzerland Zurich Mission where they have the finest chocolate on earth. I'm just inserting that. For nearly 10 years, a member of the Gospel Doctrine writing committee of the Church served as a YSA Bishop for a ward adjacent to Utah Valley University. He's a former Chairman of the Board of FARMS, which you remember as the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies and the Author and Editor of numerous books and articles on Islamic and Latter-day Saint topics. And since 2012, the President of the Interpreter Foundation. I hope you will find that website. He and his wife are the Executive Producers of the foundation's *Witnesses* film project. Oh, I brought my DVD, because I went and saw the movie in the theater and bought the DVD. And this is part of our box of approved Sunday movies to watch.

Hank Smith: 02:53 I went to the Interpreter Foundation's website. Wow. I did not know how much there was. I mean, this is... It's interpreterfoundation.org. Do you want to tell us just a little bit about that before we...

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 03:06 Yeah the Interpreter Foundation was begun in 2012, August of 2012. And we have amazingly... We have published at least one article every week online and they're free. Every Friday, since August 2012. It's nearly 50 volumes of material and it's all available online for free and we've now done this movie and the docudrama that's about to come out. And there are things on all aspects of the scriptures and related topics. So we try to deal with issues that... Not always, we're not always trying to defend the church against criticisms. But when there are criticisms, we try to take them on straightforwardly. We're not afraid of any topic. And if there's a concern, then we'll try to address it. So it's been a lot of fun.

Hank Smith: 03:59 I've been looking just at the *Come, Follow Me* for this week. And there are dozens of articles that if... Isn't it amazing in our day and age, the availability of gospel resources is... I can't imagine telling Brigham Young or telling Wilford Woodruff about this.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 04:18 Yeah, no, there's so much in fact that I can't keep up with it. I mean, if I want to get ready for a *Come, Follow Me* lesson, I think, well, look at all the relevant LDS helps. I can't. I don't have time. There's no time in a week to do it.

Hank Smith: 04:30 Yeah.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 04:30 But which is a good problem to have as opposed to having nothing and being totally on your own when you're trying to deal in some cases with Isaiah or something like that.

John Bytheway: 04:41 That's why I think this is nice to be able to talk about this because a lot of Saints are eager to look for things. But they don't know where are these guys coming from? What's their angle? Can I trust this? And we can say Hank, yeah, you can trust the Interpreter. And you can trust that. This is great content. Faithful scholars. We just love Brother Peterson. How, like you just said, we're not afraid to take on a topic. And that straightforwardness is kind of characteristic I think of you and that site as well, which is awesome.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 05:14 Yeah. Well my confidence is, the Church is true. There's no criticism out there that is going to be lethal. Maybe somewhere we don't have a good answer yet. And maybe that'll come in a few years, I've seen that happen where I didn't have an answer for a while and then suddenly something comes along and I think my word, that's it. That settles that issue.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 05:34 I can remember once being hit by an issue, probably when I was a teenager. And I realized, I'll bet there's nobody around my neighborhood, not my bishop, nobody I know who knows anything about this. And you suddenly feel all alone. This is the first time. This is totally irrational, but this is the first time that this issue has ever come up and I don't know what to say. And then I began thinking about, it actually had to do with the Witnesses, now that I recall.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 05:59 And I began thinking about Richard Anderson's book on the Witnesses, which I had just read. And sure enough, there was a passage of about five pages that dealt with specifically that issue. It just, when I read the book, it hadn't meant anything to me and I kind of breezed through it. When I came back to it I thought he nailed it. There was no reason for being worried about that issue. He'd already dealt with it. But not everybody is aware of that book or the equivalent in any given issue. And so the goal is to try to help them. I don't want people to feel like they're out there twisting in the wind and that no one has an answer because somebody probably does.

- Hank Smith: 06:40 Dan, we want to turn this over to you. Genesis 18. Where do you want to jump in? How do you want our listeners to... What might be some skills they need to approach this text? Anything like that before? Any prelude before we read? Yeah, 18 through 23.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 06:56 Well, I think one of the things that people need to appreciate about these chapters is one of their themes is hospitality. And let me give you a little background to that from a Middle Eastern perspective. Hospitality is really important in traditional Middle Eastern cultures. And by traditional I mean here, not the Babylonians, but the Bedouins, I mean the really oldest, in some ways the oldest form of Middle Eastern culture. Even today one of the greetings that you have in Arabic when people come, and I don't even know that the Arabs think of this, they'll say to you *ahlan wa sahan* welcome. Well, *ahlan wa sahan* comes from two words, *ahlan* means kinfolk and *sahan* means a flat place like a good campground. So what you're saying to people. When you say *ahlan wa sahan* like welcome to my house, you've come to family and this is a good place to camp. You should spend the night here.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 07:49 And that's what you see when the Lord and his two accompanying angels come to Abraham. He's out there in the plains of Mamre or some translations say by the oaks of Mamre or the terebinths of Mamre, he is eager to have them come in. And he wants them to stay with him. And this is classic Bedouin hospitality. And it's a really important thing.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 08:12 There's a poem from pre-Islamic Arabia, which says, I'm not servile in any other way. But when a guest shows up, I'm his slave. Anything for the guest. And they really believed that. And he would sacrifice almost anything rather than allow harm to happen to your guest. There's this really terrible story that comes up later in this section of Lot offering his daughters to protect the visitors.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 08:39 We're aghast at that and it probably says something about sexism in the ancient Middle East. But it also, and I think they would've meant it to be read as, he is so desperate to protect his guests. He is honor bound. It will be a disgrace to his family forever if he allows harm to happen to his guests while they're with him. He will give up anything, including his children. There's again a Middle Eastern poet, Imru' al-Qais from the pre-Islamic period who leaves his weapons with someone while he goes off to do something. And the enemies of that man come and besiege the castle in which Imru Al-Qais' weapons have been stored. And the master of the castle says "He's not here."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 09:22 "Where is he?"

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 09:23 "I won't tell you."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 09:25 "Well, let us in."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 09:27 "No."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 09:28 "Give us his weapons so that he can't have them back."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 09:30 "No."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 09:31 "Well, we've captured your son who was out here hunting. We've captured him. We'll kill him if you don't let us in."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 09:36 And he says, "Well, I don't want you to kill my son, but you do what you have to do. I cannot allow you to violate the relationship between the host and the guest." I mean, it's that important to them. So I think you're seeing that here with Abraham. He's dwelling in a tent. He's in that way, a classic Bedouin. And you notice he comes out, he bows, he touches his forehead to the ground, please stay with me and it's this strong sense of honoring the guest. Especially, I think it grows out of the fact that you're out in the desert and this really inhospitable area and when a guest comes straggling along, he may need to help. And this is mutual protection. You hope for it too, if you're in trouble. And there's a person out there, and even if he's your enemy, if you come in under his roof, he will not harm you while you're his guest. He's honor bound and it would be disgrace forever if he did anything to you.

John Bytheway: 10:34 I'm putting that against Ben Franklin's fish and guests stink after three days, right? . Totally different culture...

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 10:42 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 10:43 ... Than what we're used to.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 10:44 There's a wonderful section about this in a film that was done years and years ago. And I should have looked it up. I don't remember where it is. It's been posted again in a cleaned up form. It's called the *Faith of an Observer* about Hugh Nibley. And there's a really moving scene toward the end of the film where he retells the story of Abraham in the desert from a Jewish apocryphal source. And Hugh gets emotional. He tears up telling the story about how Abraham is not only welcoming

to the guest, he's out there, it's a terrible burning hot day, dusty, the wind blowing horrible.

- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 11:21 And he is looking for stragglers in the desert. He says, I will not eat until I've helped some poor soul out here in the desert. And that's when, according to that Jewish apocrypha, that's when the three travelers come and he's given the gift of his son and so on. It's not just an arbitrary thing according to that story. It's rewarding Abraham for his faithfulness and his hospitality, his sheer goodness. But it's striking to hear Hugh tell that story, because he just chokes up. Means so much to him.
- Hank Smith: 11:57 So as we're coming into these chapters, that's something that definitely keeps in mind is why they're behaving the way they are is because of how seriously they take hospitality.
- John Bytheway: 12:06 Hospitality. Yeah.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 12:08 Yeah. It means more than just putting out a nice party spread. It's taking care of the guest, providing the shelter. You notice some things like he says in verse 4 of Chapter 18, "Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ..." The idea of washing the feet leaps out at me because in the ancient world especially for travelers in the desert, that's no mere formality. That's something you do to refresh them. They're dusty and dirty after traveling out there. And that that was a ritual practice, but a real practice throughout the ancient world, a friend of mine did a master's thesis, I think on the welcoming formula in Homer. And he's looking at *The Odyssey* and wherever Odysseus goes, he is received into a great house, they wash his feet. They wash him, give him a bath, anoint him with oil, and give him fresh clothing. And I think that ought to ring some bells with some people, when you're entering a great house, that this is something that is done and it goes back to very real world things.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 13:22 Two, just a small thing. He runs to Sarah and says, "Make ready quickly, three measures of fine meal, knead it and make cakes upon the hearth." And she's probably making pita bread. Later on, I noticed with Lot, he talks about unleavened bread. That's probably what it is. It's the same kind of bread that Bedouin make today. It's kind of like modern day pita bread, or almost like a tortilla on a flat stove. When she makes cakes, I don't think we should think of Betty Crocker.
- Hank Smith: 13:57 Right.

- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 13:59 So, but he's showing real honor to them. He runs and he gets a young calf. Now you don't do this for just anybody. You're not slaughtering your herd all the time, but when guests come, you do. And so he gets a good calf and dresses it and gives them, he takes butter, which is probably leaven, which is really more like yogurt. They still use it in the Middle East for cooking and in stew and things like that. So, there's a lot about this that still rings true in the Middle East. If you visited a Bedouin encampment, although the Bedouins are no longer quite what they once were. I remember taking a group of BYU students out to a Bedouin camp, we were told we were going to have a Bedouin experience. And I have to admit, I got a little suspicious when I could see a TV antenna poking out of the Bedouin tent, and when the Bedouin chieftain came out in an Izod t-shirt, I thought this is not quite Abraham. But still, some of those attitudes remain.
- Hank Smith: 15:01 Yeah. And these three men in verse two, what would we say? If someone were to say, "Who are these people?"
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 15:08 Yeah. Well, I think it's pretty... One of them is clearly identified eventually as the Lord and two of them are angels. And at one point, then the two angels go on and the Lord seems to exit the picture, when they go to Sodom, it's just two. We don't know what the Lord has done. One of the things that's striking to me is, the continuum between humans and deity, that they described as men. They're clearly not ordinary men and at what point Abraham recognizes that, I don't know. Eventually he's bargaining with him about the fate of Sodom. He ought to recognize he is not just three ordinary travelers passing through the desert. This is something remarkable. I don't know when he notices that. When he first starts in verse three, "My Lord," he addresses one of them as my Lord. He's not addressing as Yahweh or Jehovah. It's just a respectful term.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 16:03 But at some point he realizes this is unusual. And one of them is clearly the Lord appearing in human form with two angels. That's pretty good stuff, and I think for some of our fellow Christian friends, it's a bit of a problem, and poses a bit of a challenge. How does the God of the universe, who's without body parts or passions appear in the form of a human being? I guess He can do anything He wants, but it seems a little curious. So yeah, this is a divine visit. It's a remarkable visit. He entertains God and two angels out there in the desert. It's a theophany.
- Speaker 1: 16:49 Yeah, I guess so. And they ate.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 16:52 Yeah. It makes me wonder, well again, this is deep doctrine, I can't answer it. Who is the Lord in this case? He's eating. And in Luke, he shows that he's physical by eating.

Hank Smith: 17:07 Right.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 17:08 But he's eating here. Yeah. And so, it's pretty astonishing. But they've come for a very practical purpose, and I think this is time for Abraham's blessing to be fulfilled. He's to have a son. And so, one thing that I like about it is it shows how the Lord intervenes, not only on the massive cosmic scale, but also on very personal levels sometimes. This is about one man and one woman, having a baby. And the Lord and two of his angels come down. Now, Abraham is an important guy, I grant that, but still, begetting and bearing children is, it's not all together unusual.

Hank Smith: 17:51 Right.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 17:52 It happens. And so, they're coming down for that. The unusual thing, of course, here is the advanced age of Abraham and Sarah. So when Isaac is born, Abraham is a hundred years old. Pretty amazing. They immediately began asking about Sarah and he says, "She's in the tent," which fits modern Middle Eastern ideas. The woman is sort of withdrawn. We see this in the west as sexism, but in the Middle East, it's often regarded as treating the woman as a kind of hidden treasure. She's not to be gawked at by ordinary strangers.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 18:28 So, well, there's a house in Cairo that I really like called the Gayer-Anderson House, which is a traditional, kind of upper class, aristocratic, Islamic home, and there's an area where the guests would gather. And then there's an area upstairs behind Mashrabeya screens from which the women could listen in on the conversation. They would not come out and mingle with the guests, who would be all men. And so she's in the tent and the tent is kind of her sanctuary.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 19:01 And so he begins to talk to Abraham, knowing that Sarah can hear, says, yeah, I'll visit you again about this time next year, I think is what he's saying. And Sarah, your wife, will have a son by then. And she hears it and because she's so old, she laughs within herself, it says. She didn't laugh loudly. But this is the Lord, He knows. And she says, "After I'm waxed old." Come on really? And the Lord says, "Why'd she laugh? "Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed, I will return unto thee." Verse 14.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 19:38 And Sarah denied this kind of embarrassing, because she's lying now. Well, in a way she's telling the truth. I don't think she laughed out loud, but she denied saying, "I laughed not." She was afraid. And He said, "Nay, but that didst laugh." You can't fool me. But He's made this promise, which will then be fulfilled. And so, that's a remarkable thing as well. And then we shift to Sodom and Gomorrah, a very different story.

Hank Smith: 20:08 It's interesting, in our last lesson we talked about, they knew this blessing was coming, this, this seed, but they had tried to do some different things themselves, right? With Hagar, with maybe this is what God wants me to, maybe what this is God wants me to do, and no, no. Right. That's not it. That's not it. This is how it's going to happen.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 20:33 And I think that's often the case that the Lord will tell us to do something. He doesn't necessarily tell us how it will be accomplished.

Hank Smith: 20:40 Right.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 20:41 Sometimes he eventually will intervene because we're dumb and we're not doing it right and He'll finally say, "No, no, do it this way." But sometimes he just says, "Do this." And then it's up to the leaders of his church or the Bishop or whoever it is to figure a way to do that or a head of a family. You're supposed to do it, but how you do it is kind of up to you. We're not puppets and we're not led at every step. So they know it's coming, but so far it just hasn't seemed to materialize, and I'm a hundred years old now. How's this going to happen? I just can hardly imagine it being fulfilled.

Hank Smith: 21:18 It's a very human story, right?

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 21:20 Yeah. Yeah, it is.

Hank Smith: 21:21 Where we know we have promises. We know there are blessings, but it doesn't seem to be playing out maybe like we thought it would.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 21:29 Well, and I think that's one lesson I've learned over my life that sometimes when things have been fulfilled, I've thought, "Oh, so that's how it was going to happen. It's not how I pictured it. But now that I can see it, I get it." And I think that happens a lot of the time, that the Lord knows what he's going to do, but it won't necessarily come on our schedule, or the way we imagined it.

Hank Smith: 21:54 Yeah. And this being the original little family here of the faithful, maybe you should expect this. If this happened to the original family, all of you should probably expect this type of situation. Doesn't Isaiah say, "Look unto the rock from which you were hewn." Look to Abraham and Sarah-

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 22:13 Yeah. Right.

Hank Smith: 22:14 ... as kind of a model to...

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 22:17 They are a model, and I think that we should be constantly thinking of Abraham and Sarah as models in many regards, and they were set up to be that. So we're regarded constantly as the children of Abraham. There's a reason for that.

Hank Smith: 22:35 So you said, now we switch over.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 22:37 Yeah. And Abraham's still in the picture, because the men rise up. They're looking towards Sodom, and Abraham comes along with them to bring them on the way, it says. And then the Lord says, you know what? I'm not going to hide what I intend to do from Abraham, because Abraham's going to be a great nation. I trust him. All the nations of the earth will be blessed in him. I'm going to tell him. I know that he'll command his children to live my commandments. So the Lord says, I've been hearing complaints from Sodom and Gomorrah about oppression and wickedness.

Hank Smith: 23:10 Hearing complaints, I like that.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 23:13 And I'm going to go down. And it's interesting because he says, I'm going to see whether they've done it according to the cry of it, if not, I'll know. So it's interesting. I don't think it's really the case that God doesn't know, but He's going to do a very serious thing. And so, he will be a personal witness against them, that God himself will be. And so the men turn from hence. Yeah.

Hank Smith: 23:39 Dan, don't you think that's a good principle of, I've heard this. I better go find out for myself.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 23:45 Yeah. Oh yeah.

Hank Smith: 23:45 Just a good human principle of, I better not just believe what I hear.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 23:50 How many cases have I seen or experienced or been involved in or frankly, probably even done myself, where I've trusted a

report and then found out the report wasn't true? The bad things I was hearing about somebody within 15 minutes of meeting that person, I think, none of this was true. He's nothing like that.

Hank Smith: 24:10 Yeah. I mean maybe it's just a good human principle here, what the Lord's trying to give us as a good example.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 24:16 I remember an administrative decision that was made. A good friend of mine, he just committed one of the cardinal sins of an administrator. He did not seek out other accounts of that incident and he should have done that. You never make a decision, if it's going to be a serious one, based on one report from one person or something like that, because sometimes they're just unjust.

Hank Smith: 24:40 Yeah. There's two sides to every story. There really is.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 24:44 Yeah. But I won't point the finger at that person because I've done it myself and we maybe all have. Yeah. But the Lord says I'm going to be a witness myself. But the Lord stays there and the two men go off, the two angels, whoever they are, go off towards Sodom. And then you have this wonderful bargaining session between Abraham and the Lord. And I don't think it's so much that the Lord really is being bargained down, but I think he's allowing Abraham to demonstrate his compassion. That Abraham is the father of the faithful, as he's often called, and the friend of God, and he's a righteous man. But he's saying, don't destroy this city, if you can find even a few righteous in it. How about 50? How about 45? And he finally gets it down to 10.

Hank Smith: 25:37 Down to 10.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 25:37 Yeah. And the Lord says, "Okay, I won't destroy it for 10." The trouble is, when he gets there or when his servants get there, they can't find even 10, which means it's a really bad place. But, this bargaining again is, I just get a kick out of it. It is Middle Eastern in a way. I still remember a case where I took a family that was visiting Cairo once out to a shop in the bazaar area of Cairo.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 26:02 and they found something they wanted. I don't even remember what it was. Say, it was \$100. I can't recall. And they bargained with the guy and finally they'd decided, "No, it's a little too

expensive. No, we won't get it." And then I think two days later, it was a Monday, we were going to be taking them to the airport and they said, "That thing at the bazaar, we really do want it and we'll even be willing to pay a hundred bucks for it. Is it near the airport?" And I said, "Well, it's on the way. I mean, if you promise to be quick, we can go there." They said, "Okay, let's."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 26:35

So we took him there and I knew the shopkeeper just a little bit, and they said, "Okay, okay, we'll take it. A hundred bucks." He said, "No, no, no. You can't do that." I said, "What do you mean you can't do that?" He says, "You have to bargain." And I said, "We don't have time." And he said, "Okay, then I'll do it for you. I say \$100 and you say, 'No more than 60.'" And he did the bargaining on both sides and brought them to about 80 bucks, somewhere in between, and then sold it to them. And he says, "There. Now wasn't that better?" And I thought, man, you guys have just had a cultural experience. This shopkeeper left some money on the table because bargaining is part of it.

John Bytheway: 27:13

That's wonderful that maybe this comes from that culture that still exists today, I'd never thought of that before.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 27:20

Yeah. So it's this back and forth between the Lord and Abraham, "Hey, can I bring the price down a little bit? Will you spare them for this?" But at 10, he decides, I better leave off. I've pushed it too far. And the Lord says, "Yeah, I'll spare them for 10." And then ultimately he can't spare them at all. I read this and I feel like, man, I'm in a Middle Eastern bazaar here. Only it's not the shopkeeper with a tourist, it's the Lord with Abraham. But the Lord, really, is he really affected by Abraham? Maybe. I don't know exactly how that works, but I think it's a good opportunity for Abraham to demonstrate his worthiness. His posterity is not going to bless just Israel, but all the world. So his concern is for everybody, even the city of Sodom. He wants to save them if he can, and that's why he is who he is.

John Bytheway: 28:12

I use this when I teach the Book of Mormon about, well, if you cast out the righteous from among you, then this place is going to get leveled. And it sounds like a similar principle that even if there's a few righteous there, the Lord says, "I won't destroy it." But I've always loved verse 25 because it sounds like Abraham is showing God how to be God.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 28:31

Yeah, Yeah.

John Bytheway: 28:32 "May that be far from me. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" Do you know? Haven't you read the Handbook? You're supposed to be like this.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 28:39 And you can imagine, he'll say, "Well, I'm just dust and ashes. How do I dare speak to you?" And there's that, but he is speaking with the Lord. And I like the phrase at the end of 22, "But Abraham stood yet before the Lord." I think the standing before the Lord may be important here, because in the traditional court of the Oriental monarch, the proper pose before the Monarch is on your knees, forehead to the ground. I mean, you look at the standard prayer postures in Islam. When they touch their forehead to the ground, that's the time honored gesture of a Middle Easterner in the presence of a despot Oriental Lord. And Abraham is standing before the Lord. When Gabriel has asked who he is in the enunciation, he answers, "I'm Gabriel." And when Zechariah says, "But this is impossible. I am old," and Gabriel responds, "I am Gabriel. I don't care if you're old."

John Bytheway: 29:47 I'm old. I'm Gabriel.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 29:48 "I'm Gabriel and I stand before the Lord. I stand in the presence of God."

John Bytheway: 29:53 Wow.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 29:53 When he says, "I stand in the presence of God," it means he's a member of the divine court. He's not just some slave. He has status. And Abraham here, I think Abraham in a way, with the three visitors and God, Abraham is being made a member of the Divine Council in a way, temporarily. The Divine Council is at that tent in the desert, in the Southern part of Israel. In Amos 3:7, when it says, "Surely, the Lord God will doeth with nothing but he revealeth his secret unto his servants, the prophets," the word secret is *sôd*, which is richer than just secret. It means something discussed in a secret council. It's like the prophets are invited into the council. They at least get bits from the council that they can then reveal to people on earth. Oh, I think that's what Abraham is getting here. He is a member of the council. He's involved in a discussion with God about the decision of the council.

Hank Smith: 30:49 Dr. Sears, Josh Sears, told us that even once Jeremiah says to a false prophet, "You haven't been in the council. I was at that meeting. You weren't at that meeting."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 30:59 Exactly. So where do you get off letting out what you say are the secrets of the council? You don't know them.

John Bytheway: 31:04 You don't even come to the meetings.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 31:06 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 31:07 And I feel like Abraham, it sounds like he's getting more and more humble because he's very bold and he's standing, but he's, "Okay, I'm nothing but dust and ashes." And then finally, "Okay, don't be angry. I'm going to speak just one more time," in verse 32, and I guess it means suppose, right? It's a King James way of saying, "Well, suppose there's this many?"

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 31:31 Yeah, maybe. I don't know if that'll be true, but what if?

John Bytheway: 31:34 You're not going to destroy it for those 10 people, are you?

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 31:38 Yeah. So the standard is pretty low. Sodom doesn't have to pass a high bar. But it fails so that tells you how bad the place was. So here we get to Sodom, and here again I want to say, there's something else going on. Again, I think it's that hospitality issue as well. The men of Sodom want from these two visitors when the two angels go to Sodom, but they want it by force and they want to humiliate and dishonor the visitors. That's a violation of every human rule of not only hospitality, but just general human interaction. You just don't do that. So contrast the hospitality of Abraham in the preceding chapter with the attitude of the men have Sodom, who when these guests come what they want to do is violate them.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 32:28 Compare it even with Lot. Lot begins the chapter very much like Abraham. He's sitting in the gate and when the strangers come, he says, "Come to the house. I'll feed you. You can wash your feet." I mean, it's very much like Abraham in the preceding chapter. And then, by contrast, come the men of Sodom who say, "Where are they?" And Lot is saying, "No. No, don't do this to these men. They've taken refuge in my house. Don't do this." It's a violation, yes, we would say of the laws of nature. I mean, it's wrong. It's but it's also a gross violation of hospitality rules that are really important and that Abraham and Lot have just illustrated.

Hank Smith: 33:08 People become objects.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 33:09 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 33:10 I want to use that.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 33:12 Yeah. Yeah.

John Bytheway: 33:12 Treat people like things and things like people.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 33:15 Yep. I think that's one of the things that would've offended people in the ancient Near East. No wonder the cry of Sodom has been coming up before the Lord. This is a rotten city where the first thought they have when two strangers come into the city is, "Let's abuse." It was a terrible place and I would bet that it had happened to strangers before who had the misfortune of coming through Sodom and sought to put up for the night out in the middle of the desert. I mean, if you know where Sodom probably was, it's at the South Eastern end of the Dead Sea. Pretty miserable territory. If you're coming through there and it's late in the day, you haven't had any water and you need some shelter, you go into Sodom to get at those things, and then it turns out to be this violent, criminal town, a horrible place where you may not come out of it all right at all. So the Lord is sick of it and he sends his angels to take care of it.

Hank Smith: 34:13 It's interesting that Lot lives there, isn't it?

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 34:16 Yes. I've always wondered, what in the world would possess you to live in a town like that? So he's brought out of it and maybe he needed to be brought out of it before he succumbed to it. He evidently hadn't completely, but he's raising his kids there. I think, okay, not a good choice. One of the worst places on earth you could possibly raise them.

John Bytheway: 34:37 I think if you look at footnote 8A, there's a Joseph Smith translation. I'm looking at a commentary here. The Joseph Smith translation explains that, "The citizens demanded both the visitors and the daughters, but Lot refused both. All of this evil," the Joseph Smith translation adds, "was after the wickedness of Sodom."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 35:01 Yeah, much more edifying. This is a really horrifying story on a lot of levels.

Hank Smith: 35:07 Isn't that part of the Old Testament, Dan, are they just sharing the details?

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 35:13 They have a very different attitude toward these things than we do.

Hank Smith: 35:16 Where Mormon says, "I don't want to tell you. I don't want to tell you, I don't want to hurt your spirit."

John Bytheway: 35:21 Good point.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 35:22 Maybe they had a very different attitude toward a lot of these matters than we do. I can imagine. I grew up in the city. If you grew up on a farm, some things just come across differently to you. If you grow up with flocks and herds and you're always trying to get them to multiply, well, you have a little different attitude from a young age.

Hank Smith: 35:43 That's true.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 35:43 And I remember a Latter-day Saint woman friend of ours who was the wife of the branch president in Cairo, they lived in Yemen for a while, and she was invited sometimes to all women gatherings, sometimes on the eve of a wedding. She would just come away stunned that the conversations were quite different than you would hear among Latter-day Saints on an evening before a wedding. A little bit on the earthy side.

Hank Smith: 36:10 Earthy, I like that. Earthy.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 36:10 Maybe none of this needs to be shared with the kids.

Hank Smith: 36:13 Yes. A little bit on the earthy side.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 36:17 But this whole chapter, there's a whole lot about this chapter that's pretty awful, but he eventually leaves and the men have to take it into their own hands, the visiting angels. They reach out and they grab Lot and pull him back into the house, and then they smite the men outside who are staggering around trying to find the door. They no longer can. And then they tell him, "Look, you need to get out of this place right away because we're going to destroy it." And I don't know if the decision had been made to destroy the place until this event. They're there as the intelligence gatherers.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 36:52 Well, they've seen for themselves now so the decision has been made, "We're going to smite this place so you need to get out and you need to get out quite a distance." But he goes to his sons-in-law and they say, "Ah, you're joking. You're not serious." So they don't go. And then the angels take him. And then he lingers. I like verse 16. "Well, he lingered. The men laid hold upon his hand and upon the hand of his wife and upon the hand

of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful under him, and they brought him forth and set him without the city."

- John Bytheway: 37:21 This is not a time to linger.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 37:26 No. I'm thinking he's looking around, maybe, "Well, should I take this and should I pack that?" They say, "Just get out. Okay, if nothing else, we'll take you by the collar and just the scruff of your neck and drag you outside and plant you outside the city. Get out."
- Hank Smith: 37:45 What an interesting principle. I do that with my own sins where the Lord says, "Get rid of that sin. Let me linger here for a minute. I will. I will. I'll leave. I'll leave. Just let me linger here for a minute."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 37:56 Yeah. And I think that's a good moral to draw from this. When the Lord says, "Get out," get out.
- John Bytheway: 38:03 Yeah. Get out now.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 38:04 If you receive that kind of inspiration or that kind of commandment, quit. Don't linger. The fact is, a lot of us, and there's the famous prayer supposedly of Saint Augustine, "Oh, Lord, make me chaste but not yet."
- John Bytheway: 38:17 "But not yet."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 38:19 Give me a few weeks or months, and then I promise I'll get my act together. But the Lord means now. And I think this is, again, a good lesson for us to learn that you shouldn't linger. The longer you hang around, the more likely it is that you're going to start taking on the coloration of your environment.
- John Bytheway: 38:40 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Hank Smith: 38:41 The Lord's like, "We are leaving."
- John Bytheway: 38:45 "I'm going to yank you out of here."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 38:46 Yeah. I picture it, this is probably not fair, but Lot and his family suddenly just being plopped down in the middle of the desert and looking around blinking and saying, "How'd we get here?" "Now move."
- Hank Smith: 39:02 There's a great verse in Revelation. I think it's... I want to say Revelation 19, where the Lord looks at Satan's kingdom and he

says, "Get out of there, my people." It's Revelation 18:4. "Come out of her, my people, that you be not partakers of her sins and receive not of her plagues." It's really a, "Get out now!"

- Hank Smith: 39:24 Yeah, get out of Babylon right now.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 39:27 Elder Maxwell used to like to talk about people who... They want to have a house in Zion, but they like to keep a vacation home in Babylon too. You can't do that.
- Hank Smith: 39:38 That's exactly right.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 39:38 Linger, linger.
- Hank Smith: 39:41 I stay by the Tree of Life, but I weekend at the great and spacious building. And then I come back.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 39:47 Yeah. So, he used to ask the question and others have too, how many people are active and how many people are valiant? There may be a distinction there. It's an important one. We have to ask ourselves, which group do I fall into? Yeah, I'm there on Sundays, but am I really paying attention? Am I really into this or am I just kind of there? So leave the world behind. It doesn't mean withdrawing into a monastery, nothing like that. But really making a decision.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 40:20 There's a line from.... I'm trying to think, C.S. Lewis, who says that the Lord has promised to speak with us face-to-face. But one of the problems is we have to decide which face is ours. A line that I've always loved from the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, purity of heart, he said is to will one thing. If we're double-minded, as James says, then we're unstable. Purity of heart is to will one thing, to really be focused.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 40:52 But it has to be focused on the right thing. I'm sorry, I'm going to go a little bit astray here, far afield, but there's an essay by Bertrand Russell of all people, a famous atheist floss for the 20th century. You don't hear him quoted in church very often, but I've quoted him. He talked about once, he had an essay on the two most impressive men he'd ever met. And one of them was Vladimir Lenin. He rode with him for his... 24 or 72 hours in a train car. And he was deeply impressed by Lenin, but not positively. He said his impression was that Lenin was totally devoted to his idea of the revolution in a way, totally incorruptible, that he said he would have, without hesitation, leaned over and cut my throat and let me bleed to death on the floor of the train car and it wouldn't have bothered him a bit.

And he said he was unnerving. And that's a kind of purity of heart, but it's not the kind the Lord wants. It's got to be purity of heart focused on good things, not evil things.

- Hank Smith: 41:55 On the right things. I like that. Wow.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 41:56 Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 41:58 That would be a little disconcerting to sit in a train car with Lenin.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 42:01 Yes.
- John Bytheway: 42:01 Nope. I think I'm not going to sleep on this train. Yeah.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 42:07 They're told not to look back. And there again, this story about Lot's wife is an odd one. But the idea of not looking back, we can take that as a metaphor very, very clearly and easily. Leave Babylon and don't look back. Leave Sodom and don't look back. Don't keep thinking, "Man, it would've been nice." Oh gee, I miss..." X, Y, and Z. No, just make a clean break. She looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Whatever that act means, I don't know. There are sort of salt pillars around that part of the dead sea, because it's a really salty lake and it's gone through various periods of expansion and contraction. It's in a deep contraction right now. And it's left pillars of dirty salt all around the area, and it stinks really badly. But I can imagine that that's what they're thinking of when they think of this passage.
- John Bytheway: 43:03 We had a bus driver pull over and point and say, "There's Lot's wife right there." So, I think there's maybe a spot where there's a particular pillar they like to...
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 43:13 Yeah. Well, some of them are about the height of human beings. I mean, they almost look like people. You can see people in them.
- John Bytheway: 43:22 It does sound like kind of a harsh punishment to become a geographic formation all of a sudden for just looking. I was so excited to ask Dr. Peterson this, because isn't there a hint in the Quran that she didn't just want to go back, but she actually went back?
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 43:39 Yeah, there is, yeah, that she went back and she's punished for that. Yeah, that's a Muslim tradition that it wasn't... It's not just a glance. We think that's too harsh. But if it's, "My heart's really there. I liked that place. I had a nice house. I had lots of good

stuff and I'd rather be there." Like Laman and Lemuel always saying, "Gee, wish we could be back in Jerusalem." They never really left in their hearts and look what happened to them.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 44:10 So, I've always thought along the way, by the way, Lehi is warned that they might wander off and be lost or something. And I think it would have been so bad? But he's a father, right? He cares about Laman and Lemuel, but he brings them along and looks at what they do.

John Bytheway: 44:27 Well, I've always wondered; couldn't Nephi just say, "You know what? You guys are right. Lehi, I'll take care of him. You guys go back. I'll stay with him," Because he sees what they're going to do to his posterity, and that might have been a temptation for me to say, "You're right. Dad's off his rocker. Just go back. I'll take care of Sariah and Lehi.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 44:48 Yeah, yeah. Or you like this area. I think that they probably were attracted to South Arabia. The Great and Spacious Building, I think, was an old South Arabian skyscraper. They still have them in Yemen. They had to go behind Yemen through the desert to get to the Old World Bountiful, because I think Lehi was afraid they might have stayed in Yemen. Well hey, would that have been so bad? Let them stay. Nice place here. You might want to just buy a house and don't come with us to the New World.

John Bytheway: 45:24 I guess we better bring along the opposition and all things brothers and-

Hank Smith: 45:28 That one looks like it'd fit you perfectly.

John Bytheway: 45:31 That one's great. That one's spacious. Yeah, try that one.

Hank Smith: 45:33 Hey John, I wanted to share a story from that talk with Elder Holland. It's "Remember Lot's Wife." And if our listeners have time, I definitely would... I'd take time for Elder Holland this week. If you've never read that, I would listen to it as well. It's Elder Holland. It's just the way he speaks. And he shares this one story.

Hank Smith: 45:52 He says, "I remember one fall day. I think it was the first semester after our marriage in 1963." So this is way back in the 1900s. I don't know if you guys remember the 1900s. But in 1963, he said, "We were walking together up the hill, past the Maeser Building." This is him and his wife. "On the sidewalk that led between the president's home and the Brimhall Building. Somewhere on that path, we stopped and wondered what we'd

gotten ourselves into. Life that day seemed so overwhelming and the undergraduate plus graduate years that we still anticipated before us seemed monumental, nearly insurmountable. Our love for each other and our commitment to the gospel were strong. But most of all, the other temporal things around us seemed particularly ominous."

- Hank Smith: 46:35 And then he said, "I turned to Pat and said something like this, 'Honey, should we give up? I can get a good job, carve out a good living for us. I can do some things. I'll be okay without a degree. Should we just stop trying to tackle what right now seems so difficult to face?'" He said, "In my best reenactment of Lot's wife, I said in effect, 'Let's go back. Let's go home. The future holds nothing for us.'" And then he quotes Pat, "Grabbed me by the lapel and said, 'We are not going back. We are not going home. The future holds everything for us.'"
- Hank Smith: 47:08 I like that idea of the past is better than the future, like Lot's wife, right? Let's go back. The future isn't going to be good. Where he's like... And that's part of his talk here. So, I would encourage everybody to go listen.
- John Bytheway: 47:24 Yeah. That's "Remember Pat's Husband's Story."
- Hank Smith: 47:27 Yeah.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 47:28 Well, I can imagine that Lot and his family maybe felt, look, we'd made a home in Sodom, a curious place, but we'd made a home there and we had to abandon it. And we were actually kind of forced out. These angels grabbed us and hauled us out. We've got nothing. And ... and now what? We're out in the middle of the desert, I mean, wow, this is real progress. And again, if people have been there, if they've seen pictures of it, this is a desert that makes Nevada look like a tropical rainforest. I mean, it's a really serious desert. So you've got to be thinking, again, what have we gotten ourselves into? Where are we going to go from here?
- Hank Smith: 48:11 Interesting that you bring up Lehi and Sariah, this, "We're leaving?" We're leaving what?"
- John Bytheway: 48:18 What they've always known.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 48:19 Yeah. They had to abandon everything.
- John Bytheway: 48:22 Laman and Lemuel, this is the land our fathers gave us. And I just feel like when they were uprooted from their land, they lost

part of their identity. And I've always wondered if that's why Jesus just keeps telling... When he finally shows up in the New World, "You are my sheep. You are the House of Israel," because their real estate meant more than just, "Oh, we're going to move here, we're going to move there," like we do today, you know?

- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 48:44 Right. Well, that's a really interesting thought. And yeah, I've sometimes thought I'd like to rewrite 1 Nephi from the standpoint of Laman and Lemuel, just because I think I can understand their complaint. "Come on, we're comfortable here. We lead a pretty good life. We're well off. I know Dad has these crazy religious notions and he wants to abandon everything." And I think if we demonize them and just say, "Oh, they're evil," we aren't learning from them, because if we were in that situation, wouldn't we have been tempted to react the way Laman and Lemuel reacted or the way Lot and his wife reacted? I'm comfortable here. I don't want to leave.
- Hank Smith: 49:30 I'm going to linger.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 49:31 Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 49:32 So what are the odds? What are the odds this is going to be destroyed? Come on, this city withstood the Assyrians.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 49:39 Yeah. And when fire and brimstone comes out of heaven, this is not something that happens regularly. They weren't anticipating that.
- John Bytheway: 49:46 That's not on the forecast. Siri said nothing about this today.
- Hank Smith: 49:50 Hey John, I've got one to share with your kids. Are you ready? That a primary teacher said, "The Lord commanded Lot to take his wife and flee into the wilderness and his wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. And the little student said, 'But what happened to the flea?'"
- John Bytheway: 50:06 His wife and flea.
- Hank Smith: 50:09 So share that one with your kids, John. I'm sure it'll get a good groan as we talked about earlier.
- John Bytheway: 50:21 Please join us for Part II of this podcast.



John Bytheway: 00:00:03 Welcome to part two of this week's podcast.

Hank Smith: 00:00:07 Okay. What do we do next?

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:00:09 Well, this next story is one that we really don't want to share with children, about Lot and his two daughters. But for one thing, it's trying to explain how the people of the Ammonites and the Moabites come to be. And I've sometimes wondered if it wasn't just a little bit of a dig at the Moabites and the Ammonites on the part of the Israelites. " You know where you come from? Here's your story." Because you read Moab as sounding something like from father and Benami, which becomes the Ammonites, which is still preserved, by the way, in the name of the capital of Jordan, Amman. Their name is still there.

Hank Smith: 00:00:47 Oh really? Yeah.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:00:48 You can get that name from Benami, son of my people. It's a kind of an awful story.

Hank Smith: 00:00:55 So the idea is the writer is trying to take a dig at his current neighbors who he doesn't like saying, "Hey, look where you came from."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:01:06 Yeah. I think so. You know, you're relatives, but you're enemies, and here's the really disreputable story of where you come from. It's like, if you really want to get in a dig at a member of the Church of England or the Episcopal church, bring up Henry the Eighth and his wives. It's not quite the highest spiritual level for the origin of a church.

John Bytheway: 00:01:29 And in the future, the Moabites, the Ammonites caused problems.

Hank Smith: 00:01:33 Yeah. I've wondered why, where this comes from. Like, but that makes sense. The current author looking way back is saying, "Hey, I have a chance here to-"

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:01:40 Think of the Moabites, the Ammonites were basically up around where Ammon is today, so directly across from Jerusalem on the Jordanian side of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea Valley. And then a little bit to the south are the Moabites. Yeah. Roughly where Petra is.

Hank Smith: 00:01:56 So that's actually really helpful because I've often thought, this is odd.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:02:00 Yeah. Oh, chapter 20, again, it's kind of an odd one. The story of Abimelech and Sarah, and Abraham is saying that Sarah's his sister, this is to try to protect himself. And it's kind of a half truth, she is his half sister, so yeah. Which today we would not see that as a legitimate marriage, but in the old days, people married within their clans and their tribes, and so this is not uncommon. But Abimelech, oddly enough, in both the stories he figures in, here and in a later chapter, well in chapter 21, comes across as an honorable guy. He says, "I haven't done anything wrong. And I didn't know that she was your wife. I mean, you said she was your sister and she said, you were her brother." And the Lord is saying, "Watch out." And he says, "Well, I didn't do anything." And the Lord says, "I know you were innocent." I mean, it's interesting that the Lord interacts with Abimelech, who is not an Israelite or a descendant of Abraham, but he's not a bad guy in this.

John Bytheway: 00:03:05 What does that name mean, Abimelech? Because it looks like father Melech, is it king?

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:03:10 Yeah. My father is a king, probably.

John Bytheway: 00:03:12 Yeah.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:03:12 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 00:03:13 Abimelech.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:03:14 Look at you, John.

John Bytheway: 00:03:15 I think members of our church know a lot more Hebrew than they think they do, when you start to look and read those words slowly, and Melchizedek and Zedekiah and stuff, and you start to, "Well, if that means this, then that's got to mean this," and ab means father. And I just saw, I just wondered what that means.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:03:33 Yeah. That's exactly what it means. And in this story, he's not a bad guy. But I don't know what else we need to say about that story, really. Other than that you had this little kind of awkward incident with Abimelech, and Sarah, and Abraham, and it turns out okay.

John Bytheway: 00:03:52 Well that's a lot of the old Testament is a series of awkward incidents, right?

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:03:55 Yes. Yeah.

Hank Smith: 00:03:59 I've noticed, Dan, that Abraham is definitely not perfect. It's almost as if the Lord is saying, he's still my guy, right? Like, I'm going to show you that I chose him. He still makes mistakes. He still does things, very things that are somewhat foolish. He's still my guy.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:04:16 Right, and I think that's really important for us today. I will say one of the things that has bothered me sometimes, and I have enormous respect for the brethren. Please understand that, but we sometimes put them on a pedestal so high that then someone will come along and say, "Well, you know, Elder so-and-so and Elder so-and-so disagreed about something," or, "I once encountered elder so-and-so, and he wasn't maybe as friendly as I thought he would be," or something. And I think, they're not perfect. And I mean, they don't claim that.

John Bytheway: 00:04:45 None of them asked to be there.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:04:47 No.

John Bytheway: 00:04:48 None of them wanted to be there.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:04:49 No.

John Bytheway: 00:04:50 No one in their right mind would want to have a calling. "Hi, you're called till you're dead."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:04:55 It's funny. When Elder Gong was called to the quorum of the 12, I've known Elder Gong since we were students, and it was the first time in my life that my first reaction when I'd heard that he'd been called to the 12 was oddly pity. Because I thought here I'm about to retire and he never can.

John Bytheway: 00:05:13 Yeah.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:05:14 But you know, I just think they didn't ask to be there. They were just people who were doing their duty and trying to do the Lord's will, and they served as elders, quorum presidents, and counselors in Bishoprics. And then one day they were called to be in the 70, and then perhaps one day in the 12 or the first presidency. They never claimed to be perfect.

Hank Smith: 00:05:32 And we do that. We superimpose that on them.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:05:35 And I've actually run into people who have left the church or had their attitude toward the church damaged because they found out that the presiding brethren are human, and I think, of course they're human. Name me an old Testament prophet who wasn't. I mean, Abraham, we can see he wasn't. With a lot of them, Isaiah, for example, we don't know much about his personal life, but I'm betting if you knew Isaiah you'd think, "Well, he is a really good guy, but he has these quirks," or, "He's not as patient as he could be," or something. I don't know what it would be.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:06:06 I've always loved a line from Lorenzo Snow, who lived in the Joseph Smith household for a while, and he said he saw his imperfections. And did this disillusion him? Not even slightly. He said, "I thanked God that I saw what he was, and that gave me hope for me. God can use imperfect people because if he doesn't use imperfect people, then I'm out the window." And you know, he has to work with imperfect people as Elder Holland himself has said, because that's all he's got.

John Bytheway: 00:06:34 That's all he's got. Must be incredibly frustrating, but deals with it. I'm reminded too of a Steven Covey story when he had some sort of assignment where he would be working closely with some of the brethren, and somebody was like, "Well, don't lose your testimony." And I love Steven Covey's response was, "Well, they didn't give me my testimony and they cannot take it away."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:06:58 That's exactly right. That's the way it should be.

Hank Smith: 00:07:01 And maybe there's a lesson from Abimelech here of how do you deal when you find out the Lord's servant isn't perfect? He's actually pretty gentle with him. Like, "Hey, why'd you do that? All right. Well behold, my land is here before thee, dwell where it pleaseth thee."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:07:17 It reminds me a little bit of Pahoran and Moroni where Moroni unleashes some pretty unfair attacks on Pahoran. He doesn't

know the full story. Pahoran says, "I rejoice in the greatness of your soul." He could have gone after him and said, "You jerk."

John Bytheway: 00:07:32 Yeah, "You have no idea what we're dealing with up here."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:07:35 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 00:07:35 Yeah.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:07:35 But he doesn't. And I think what a wonderful response. Now talk about greatness of soul.

Hank Smith: 00:07:40 Yeah.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:07:41 You see it in that response.

John Bytheway: 00:07:44 And when Nephi sees Lehi murmur, right? He doesn't say, "Well, I'm never going to deal with you anymore. I'm so disappointed." He puts more trust in him.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:07:52 Yeah. Yeah.

John Bytheway: 00:07:53 More faith in him.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:07:54 You know, I just think there's a lot to be learned from this. And yes, the old Testament is full of very human people. Some of them do terrible things, even some of the good people do, but we should learn from that. Is it Ambrose Bierce in his Devil's Dictionary who describes the Bible as a work of scripture, admirably suited to the needs of my neighbor.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:08:16 We should be reading this and not saying, "Boy, that's just like Bob." You know, we should be saying the question that's asked at the last supper, is it I? Is it I, Lord? Is it I?

John Bytheway: 00:08:25 Yes.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:08:27 Am I the one? Am I guilty of this? And the answer all too often is yeah. Yeah, you are. And those have been the, some of the greatest moments for me in studying the scriptures. When I suddenly realize, man, I've kind of done this. Maybe not as bad as this character did, but I can't point the finger at him. Who am I to judge?

John Bytheway: 00:08:47 I can't remember who said it, but I thought it was brilliant. They say the Pope is infallible and nobody believes it. Well in our church, we say our leaders are fallible and nobody believes it.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:08:57 Right?

John Bytheway: 00:08:58 Or nobody will let them be, you know?

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:09:00 Right. Speaking of callings, I remember a kid when I was serving as a singles ward Bishop over by UVU. I had a kid that I'd been working with who had some issues, and we worked with him for weeks, maybe months. And finally there was one evening where I said, "I think you've done everything I asked you to do. I think I can say on behalf of the church and the Lord, I feel comfortable saying, I think you're done. You're good to go." And he said, "Oh, thanks. I'm sorry I've taken so much of your time." And I said, "Oh, that's why they pay me the big bucks," to which he responded, "Yeah. I've always wanted to know, how much do they pay you to be Bishop?"

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:09:38 And I thought, you've got to be kidding. My response was, "They don't pay me a nickel, nothing." And I said, "I wouldn't do this for money. I'll do it for free, but I wouldn't do it for money."

Hank Smith: 00:09:52 That is such a great story. That's Mother Teresa, someone saw her cleaning up a leper, and the guy said, "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." And she said, "Neither would I."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:10:03 Exactly right. Sorry. I'll go on another tangent here. I had an experience, I'm so old that I was in Switzerland at one point, and Harold B. Lee came through. He was president of the church then, but President Lee came through and he had been with my mission present. My mission in those days, Switzerland, was responsible for much of the world. I mean, if it wasn't under a mission, it was under Switzerland because Switzerland was neutral. And so most of Eastern Europe, most of Africa, north of the Congo, the entire Middle East, everything over to Afghanistan. Because we could do things out of Switzerland that didn't offend countries there. So President Lee had gone on a circuit of some of the mission, trying to get legal recognition in Athens and in Jerusalem, and it didn't work. It failed. We failed in all those places at that point.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:10:52 Then he came through and he spoke to the saints at the Swiss temple in Zollikofen, and I remember seeing him, and it was the first time I'd heard about an ashen complexion. I'd never seen one before, and it turns out he died a few months after that. He had heart issues, but I remember seeing him and thinking he looks terrible. I mean, he doesn't look healthy. And so I wasn't actually surprised when he passed away.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:11:18 I saw him speak to the saints in the meeting house there in Zollikofen adjacent to the temple. And then he stood outside and shook hands with everybody and talked with them for a good hour and a half afterwards, looking like he was about to fall over. Again, I felt sorry for him. I thought he knows he's the first president of the church to have visited since this temple was dedicated in 1955 by David O. McKay. He's there for the saints and he can barely stand up. I'm sure that if he could, he'd like to go lie down and nap, but he can't. And I thought, who would want a position like this?

Hank Smith: 00:12:02 Waste and wear out your life, literally.

John Bytheway: 00:12:03 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 00:12:03 Just kind of-

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:12:05 When President Kimball was told by Dr. Nelson, you may remember this, "You need to preserve your strength." He says, "For what?" I'm doing what I'm supposed to do. I wear myself out and then the Lord calls somebody else. Yeah, that's the way it goes.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:12:23 Well, I guess we probably ought to move on to chapter 21, which is an important chapter. So this is where the Lord visits Sarah, as he had said, and he did unto Sarah as he had spoken. She conceives and bears Abraham a son, and they call the name of his son Isaac. And it's important to know that the name Isaac has to do with the Hebrew idea of laughter. It means he laughs. So there's all sorts of punning in this chapter about Sarah laughs, and people will laugh with me, or some interpreters, she says, "Well, you've made me a joke now because I'm so old. And people will laugh at me." But anyway, the idea of laughter, and Abraham is a hundred years old.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:13:05 So he's now got two sons. He's got Isaac and he has Ishmael, who was around before, and is probably substantially older, maybe around 10 or something like that. And in verse nine, Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Now there is disagreements about how to take that. Sometimes he's just laughing. Here, it's kind of a derisive mockery. Others have him actually playing with, he's playing maybe with Isaac. So I don't know exactly how to take it, but in any event, the thought that occurs to her is he's older, and there could be a disagreement about who the proper heir is, even though I'm the primary wife. So I want him gone.

- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:13:51 And this is not maybe Sarah at her best, but again, it's human. It's very human for her to say, "I don't want that boy around, and I don't want mother around. His mother made fun of me, probably, for a lot of years. She was able to have a baby and I wasn't, she's a slave woman. I'm the primary wife, but did I get respect from her? No." So she said, "I want her cast out, son of this bond woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:14:18 And how does Abraham react? Well, he's upset. I mean, it is his son. You know, he's raised him. It was his only son as far as we know, for a long time. And so he loves Isaac, and Isaac will be his heir, but it's not like he hates Ishmael. But God says, "Don't be worried. I'll take care of Ishmael and the bond woman. Do whatever Sarah wants, because you know, Isaac, don't worry. Isaac will be the one in whom my seed is called." But also of the bond woman, verse 13, will I make a nation because he is thy seed. And we often forget that. That's a point that I think ought to be made.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:14:57 Of course, I'm an Arabus, so I would make it. But you know, I've heard Howard W. Hunter and others make that point too. Remember, Abraham has other children, not just the children of Israel, but the Arabs. There are also Ishmaelites, descendants of his other son. And there are promises to them as well. And God here is saying that, that I will make him a nation. Don't you worry about him. He'll be fine.
- John Bytheway: 00:15:22 So what would I write under here in verse 13? A nation, the nation of Islam? Would that?
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:15:28 Yeah, the Arabs, basically. The Arabs, I would say. Most of whom are Muslims. And so they are the children of Abraham as well. Not the children of the first born, but they're not without scriptural promises and not without scriptural status. In Islam, Ishmael is regarded as a prophet, so is Isaac. So they venerate both of them.
- Hank Smith: 00:15:50 Dan, I think our listeners love just a little bit of a rundown of the beginnings of Islam, and how that comes about, and how it ties to Abraham and Ishmael.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:15:59 Yeah. The Arabs have long regarded themselves, and the traditional genealogies make them descendants of Abraham through Ishmael. That's universally accepted in Islamic tradition. And so they venerate Hagar, they venerate Ishmael. In fact, part of the annual pilgrimage involves what's called, well it's a run between two little hills called Marwa and Safa. And they run

between them and they're reenacting the search of Hagar for water for her son, Ishmael, who's about to die in the desert, and then is saved by God.

- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:16:33 They actually believe that that happened in Mecca, and that Ishmael and Abraham restored the Kaaba, the shrine there in Mecca, the well that sprang up at God's inspiration is the well called Zamzam in Mecca. So that's where they think that happened. But yeah, Islam begins in Arabia in, well with the birth of Muhammad in a way, in 570 AD, then his call in 610 AD when he's 40 years old. He is working as a shepherd, among other things, and as a caravan leader, and he is regarded as a descendant of Ishmael, a proper heir, so he's a legitimate heir to the prophets. They see themselves as continuing the line of prophets.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:17:16 They recognize Abraham, and Isaac, and Ishmael, and Jacob, and Moses, and all of the others as prophets, including Jesus. And then Mohammed is the latest in that line of prophets, but they all come through the prophetic line, which is essentially the biblical line.
- Hank Smith: 00:17:35 Yeah. And you've got the Lord saying here to Abraham, "And also of the son of the bond woman, will I make a nation."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:17:42 That's right.
- Hank Smith: 00:17:42 "He is thy seed."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:17:45 Yeah. So I hear some Latter Day Saints feel as if they have to choose between the Jews and the Arabs. Well, I'd like to say that the Arabs really conflict, first of all, is much more complex than a lot of people realize. The more I learned about it, the harder it was for me to choose one side and just say, "Boy, they're right all the time, and that side is wrong all the time."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:18:03 Because there've been good things and bad things done on both sides, especially for Latter day Saints, we ought to recognize they are both children of Abraham. And we ought to be trying not to have the one smite the other, but we ought to be hoping for peace between them as Abraham, I presume, is hoping.
- John Bytheway: 00:18:20 Yeah. Yeah. Good point. What does Abraham want to happen here? I think I've heard that in the Muslim belief is that Abraham was going to sacrifice Ishmael.

- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:18:32 That is what most Muslims today, I think, would believe. But here's the interesting thing. I remember once in a class years ago, when I first started teaching at BYU, I had some Palestinian students in my Islamic Humanities class and I gave a basic history of Islam. I think they took the class because they thought it would be an easy A, when they got their first D on a test, I think they realized it wouldn't be as easy as they thought. Growing up in the neighborhood doesn't necessarily equip you to answer the questions. But I said to them, you know the interesting thing is the Quran never actually identifies the son who is nearly killed by Abraham. And one of them sitting in the front row said, "That's not true. That's not true. It says it was Ishmael." I said, "Okay, you go home and you find the passage in the Quran that says it was Ishmael and then come and show it to me."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:19:19 Well, he never did because it's not there. The Quran says he nearly sacrificed Ibnahul, his son. That's it, it doesn't identify him. And I checked once years ago, the greatest commentary in early Islam comes from about the nine, well about 930 AD. And it kind of summarizes all the previous commentaries. And even then about half of the commentators that I [inaudible 00:19:43], the author of this commentary, cited said it was Ishmael and about half said it was Isaac. They were still disputing over that. I think now if you asked almost any Muslim, they'd say it was Ishmael, but I suspect that may have more to do with the Arab Israeli conflict than with anything else. It's our guy, not their guy, but the Quran doesn't actually say that. And for centuries, at least, it was an open question for even Arabs about whether it was their ancestor or the other people's ancestor.
- Hank Smith: 00:20:15 And the fight continues, doesn't it?
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:20:16 Yeah. Yeah, it does. But it's an intra familial fight, which is kind of what makes it especially sad. I've had some experiences where on the street, unless they're dressed in peculiar ways, you can't always tell an Arab from Israeli. Some Israelis look really European, but many don't. I remember being in a hotel in Nazareth years ago that was jointly run by Palestinians and Israelis. And I would go up to the desk and I'd say, taking a look at him, I'd say, "Shalom," and start to talk. And the person would say, "Salaam." I'd say, "Okay, sorry, sorry, sorry." Next time I'd come out and say, "Salaam," and the person says, "Shalom." I thought, okay, from now on it's hello. I just can't tell. So they are very, very similar and genetically, I'm told, they're very, very close. It would be hard to tell a difference. And so that's what makes the conflict in so many ways, so sad.

Hank Smith: 00:21:13 Yeah. And when we take our trips there, I was expecting to see a lot of division, but yet a lot of them.... Our bus driver, Mahmoud, is a Muslim and our guide is an Israeli and they get along

John Bytheway: 00:21:27 And they're up there talking and laughing and you're going, this is not what I saw on the news or what I perceive. And yeah, same thing, Hank. I know we're talking about the same guys too.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:21:38 Yeah. And I've seen that many times, some of them are good friends, slapping each other on the back and telling jokes. And so there's.

John Bytheway: 00:21:47 Did you hear the one about the flea?

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:21:48 Yeah. Right. That gives me hope sometimes. And then sometimes I lose hope, but anyway, they are related. So this story about Hagar's an important one. It's the background story to the Arabs as they themselves would tell you. And another story about a [inaudible 00:22:07] looks like a good guy. But I think we ought to get onto chapter 22, which is a hugely important chapter. It says that God did tempt Abraham in verse one of chapter 22. I think really it should be tasked or proved or something like that. He tested him and said, "Abraham." And He said, "Behold, here I am," and He said, "Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah. And offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Now, especially if you remember the book of Abraham where Abraham is trying to get away from people who do sacrifices, and he's nearly sacrificed himself.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:22:46 Then God comes to him and says, "Sacrifice your son. You know, the one that you've been waiting for for 100 years, the son in whom your seed will be born and who will fulfill the prophecy that I gave to you, the son that you love, the only son of your primary wife." This has got to be, boy to talk about as a gut punch, a punch to the solar plexus, it's got to be an understatement of the century. He must have been horrified, but he believed it was God. And so if God asks it, he says, "I will do it." And of course that's the thing that is later on accounted to him for righteousness, that he's willing to do it. Now people have talked about this and talked about it, it's a major thing in not only Jewish lore, the *Akedah*, and the binding of Isaac, as it's called among many Christians. It shows up, as we've already hinted at, among the Muslims. Everybody talks about, everyone

is horrified by the story and what to make of it. Some people say, well, that shows the God of the Old Testament is evil.

- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:23:52 Well, but he doesn't actually follow through on it. He doesn't have Abraham sacrifice his son. And it may be that Abraham believed, I think there's an interesting line here where he says to the young men that are with him, in verse five, "Abide thee here with the ass, I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you." Now, maybe he's just lying, but maybe also, some commentators have said, maybe he thought that if he fulfilled this requirement, God would raise his son again from the dead and that they would return.
- Hank Smith: 00:24:23 Yeah, we'll be back.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:24:24 Yeah. But he tells them, "we'll be back both of us." And so he's confident in God in some way I think. It may just be that he's telling them a story, we'll be back. And then he'll back with
- John Bytheway: 00:24:37 So they don't go stop him. Yeah.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:24:39 Right. But that is an interesting way of reading it, that he thinks, no, we will be back. However, this is going to work out I can't imagine. It takes three days to journey to where he goes, they're coming up from down by Hebron, or even further down by Besheva, the extreme south of Israel. You know from Dan to Besheva used to be the formula from the north end to the south end of Israel. So going up to Mariah, which is roughly where this must be, Mount Mariah, is there, some people say under the Temple Mound itself. It's quite a journey. It's three days. What do we know about this by the way? It suggests that Isaac is old enough to walk. He's old enough to be three days away from his mother. He'd been weaned in the preceding chapter or a couple of chapters ago, a couple of chapters ago.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:25:26 So he was at least three then. Jewish tradition says, that it puts sometimes as old as 37, that he was an older, he was old enough to know what was going on. I would say, I would guess that he was at least 10 or 12 and maybe in his teens, maybe even older than that. So that's one thing I want to say about Isaac is that at some point he knows what's going on and his father is old. He could have said, "Are you kidding me? You're demented. I'm going to... This is not going to happen. This is not really God." But he trusts God. And he trusts his father. And he's willing to do it. He lies down upon the wood. It says that he put him on the wood, but he laid him on the altar, upon the wood. But I'm guessing that Isaac is old enough. He could have resisted. He didn't. So one thing that I would say for Isaac here

is total submission to the will of God in faith. And it's boy, we talk about Abrahamic tests. This is the Abrahamic test.

- John Bytheway: 00:26:34 Yeah
- Hank Smith: 00:26:36 And it's an Isaac test apparently as well.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:26:38 Yeah, I think so. Yeah. And he's asking these questions along the way. I see the fire on the wood verse seven, but where's the lamb? We always have a lamb for the burnt offering. Abraham says, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." So they went both of them together, God's going to handle this. Okay. But then at some point he realizes what's going on. Abraham builds an altar, and this isn't done in 15 seconds. This takes a while. And so Abraham is right to the point where he stretches forth his hand and takes the knife to slay his son. And only then the angel of the Lord calls him and says, "Abraham, Abraham, don't do it. Don't lay your hand upon the boy. Don't do anything to him. Now I know that the fiercest God." And the King James fear here is probably not the word we would use today.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:27:29 I think it's reverence God, you hold Him in awe, you respect him. You so respect Him seeing thou has not withheld my son, thine only son from me. I mean, this is the only son of the primary wife. And then Abraham looks up and sees this ram caught in the thickets by its horn. And the ram is sacrificed instead. This is obviously, for Christians, a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ. That we are about to be punished for our sins and Christ steps in on our behalf and takes the punishment for us. In some way, we don't understand, we don't know how this works, but in some way he is the sacrificial ram, the ram caught in the thicket in a way. Except that he's more like Isaac in some ways, because he's voluntary. And I think when you see him in the garden of Gethsemane, and he's saying, "Lord, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:28:26 I put a lot of weight on those words. I think it's possible that the mortal Jesus may have even thought, maybe just maybe at this point, my willingness is enough. I am willing to do it. If it be thy will, I'll do it. But if there's another way of doing this, I just assume not. But if you want me to, I will. And then He has to do it. But I think some, I've heard some Christians talk about it as if, "Well he's God, it's easy for him." No, I think we have to assume that it was terrible for him. If you don't, then it doesn't mean as much. It was agony. It was prolonged agony and so on. So he's, in this way, I think it's an attractive idea to think that Isaac is old

enough to know what he's doing as Jesus was. Jesus knew what he was going to.

- Hank Smith: 00:29:20 And he's carrying the wood, right?
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:29:22 Yeah. Yeah. He's carrying, like Jesus carrying the cross to the hill. He's carrying, it's digging your own grave. You're carrying that wood eventually knowing what it's for.
- John Bytheway: 00:29:37 When you said that about suffering, I thought, yeah that's... That last year, section 19, I God have suffered these things for all that they might not suffer. Like you said, it's not just, oh, well he's a God, this is easy. No, he suffered. He suffered and he told Martin Harris, which suffering caused myself even God and went through that, bled at every pore and suffered both body and spirit.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:29:58 And it's not just for a few minutes, it starts in the garden, we Latter day Saints know. And it continues until he says, "It is finished." And that's a long time; and I don't want to get into the gruesome details, if my wife was sitting here she'd be elbowing me right now. But I think we need to understand that crucifixion was a gruesome, gruesome, horrible way to die. And he's already in terrible crisis from his experience in the garden of Gethsemane. I don't like crucifixes that shows mutilated Jesus on a cross. It's not an image I like to contemplate. But every once in a while I think, well maybe we should just realize the price he paid. It wasn't like, oh, well, I go and I get my self nailed to a cross and I die and whoopee everything's better. It's hour after hour after hour of intense suffering, and mockery and injustice and assumed powerlessness. He could have stopped it, but he doesn't.
- Hank Smith: 00:30:56 Yeah. And King Benjamin hints that it's even more suffering than a human could suffer, because the human would die.
- John Bytheway: 00:31:02 Yeah. A human would die. But the idea that Jesus said over and over, "No man taketh my life from me." And so it was a voluntary sacrifice. And I see Isaac here, I don't read anything that says he resisted, he said, "What are we doing?" As you were saying, Dr. Peterson, it's a willing sacrifice there.
- Hank Smith: 00:31:22 Dan, I was going to ask you, what do you say to someone who says, "I just don't believe in a God that would do this, would ask this man to sacrifice his son or that would sacrifice his own son." I've heard that before. How do you?

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:31:37 It's a difficult thing. Paul talked about it, that it's a stumbling block and it's foolishness to some people. We have to understand. First of all, it's an expression of compassion on the part of Jesus. I'm not sure I understand the idea of the atonement. Because I think that atonement is maybe the crucial concept in the gospel. And someday when I understand it, I'll be there. You know what I mean? That it's beyond. I see Enos, Lord, how is it done? I don't know exactly how it's done. Except that there was, as I understand it and correct me if I'm being heretical. But my sense has been that in some sense, there are laws that God himself cannot break. And there is a law. There is a kind of justice that needs to be satisfied. And in some way, the atonement satisfies that justice. It has to be done.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:32:27 Mercy cannot rob justice. And so the law has to be satisfied and Jesus offers himself a willing sacrifice to do that. It's an act of, I wouldn't concentrate on the cruelty of it, which I don't think, I don't think you have a bloodthirsty God up there, kind of delights in this sort of thing. He agonized through it. The Father did. And the son obviously agonized literally through it, but it's an act of incredible compassion. As Paul says, most of us would find it hard enough to die on behalf of a good person. But while we were yet sinners, He died for us. He died for people who, a majority of whom are maybe going to mock him right through most of their lives or ignore him. They're not going to pay any attention. He does that for, not just saints, but sinners. So, I'd focus on that. But I think that there was just no other way to do it.

Hank Smith: 00:33:21 That's what it seemed. Yeah. There is no other way.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:33:24 I don't like the image of God the Father, as some sort of sadist who says, "You have to buy me off." I still remember being invited by a chemistry professor I got to know in Cairo, an Egyptian Muslim, and we got to talking and he asked, "Oh, you're studying Islam. You're studying Arabic." And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Are you a Muslim?" And I said, "No." And he asked, "Why not?" Which is a question I didn't like, I don't want to say, "Well, here are the flaws I see in your religion." So I decided to answer it affirmatively, I'm a Christian because I believe in Christ and so on and so forth.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:34:00 And he said, "Well, let me ask you a question," he says, "You believe that God has a son," which of course everyone knows is nuts. God doesn't have a son, because that's something that Muslims can't accept, "And then you believe that God sent his own son into earth and then tortured him to death to buy himself off. Is that what you believe?" And I said, "Well, no, not

exactly. And I wouldn't put it that way, but it's something on that order. It is something on that order." And I said, "Yeah I do believe that." And he said, "How could any intelligent person believe that?" And I said, "Well, intelligent people have believed it for 2000 years."

- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:34:34 A lot of highly intelligent people have found this a believable doctrine that something had to be made right. And we couldn't. And so the son steps forward to make it right on our behalf. And how that happens, I don't know exactly. I hear various theories on the atonement and I am persuaded and see issues with all of them. And I think I just don't get it, but someday I hope I will.
- Hank Smith: 00:35:03 Yeah, that's wonderful. Thank you for the answer. Focus on the compassion.
- John Bytheway: 00:35:09 My fallback verse for a lot of things is second Nephi 2:24, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. I guess somebody's smarter than I knows what's going on.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:35:20 And I like the line from Nephi who says, "I don't know the meaning of all things, but I know that God loves us,"
- John Bytheway: 00:35:28 Loves his children.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:35:28 Yeah. And so.
- John Bytheway: 00:35:31 First Nephi 11:17.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:35:33 I get that issue a lot of times, I have to say, with critics of the church who'll come up with this or that issue. And I say, "There are some issues where I'm not sure I have a really good answer that would satisfy you. In a couple of cases I'm not even sure I yet have an answer that fully satisfies me. But there are things that I know, and those are so powerful that a lot of the other stuff, and it's usually lesser stuff, just doesn't bother me because I know this to be true. And the rest seems to follow along. Do I understand it? No.
- Hank Smith: 00:36:03 That's John 9, right? When they said, well, Jesus is a sinner. And he said, "Well, whether he's a sinner or not, I know not, but-
- John Bytheway: 00:36:09 This much I know.
- Hank Smith: 00:36:10 I was blind.

John Bytheway: 00:36:10 I was blind.

Hank Smith: 00:36:12 Now I see. That's pretty important to me.

John Bytheway: 00:36:15 You guys go debate that all you want. I'm going to go enjoy my eyesight.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:36:20 Yeah, a little different comment is when someone says to Brigham Young, well, Joseph was this and that. And Brigham says something like, well, he wasn't obviously granting this, but he says, " Yeah, even if Joseph swore a blue streak as long as your arm, still he brought a doctrine that will save you and me." So, these other issues are peripheral. I stay with things I know that are hugely important, and the atonement works on my behalf. How exactly it works, I don't know. But I don't know how my computer works. I don't know how my car works exactly. There are a whole lot of things that I turn on and they're mysteries. Just black boxes.

Hank Smith: 00:36:56 It doesn't stop me from using them.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:36:57 No. So, this is a remarkable story. And then the angel of the Lord calls to Abraham and says, "Because you've done this thing and haven't withheld thy son, I swear that in blessing," verse 17, "In blessing I will bless thee, in multiplying, I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven." And in blessing, I will bless thee. In multiplying, I will multiply. That's a kind of Semitic way of intensifying. You use the verb and the very end of the verb in Arabic still today, you say, "I hit him a great hitting," or something like that. You repeat the verbal form as an...

Hank Smith: 00:37:36 I have dreamed a dream.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:37:37 Yes, exactly.

John Bytheway: 00:37:38 I have seen a seeing, yeah.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:37:40 Yeah. I've used that actually. It was great Arabic grammar to my students. You want to see one of these? Book of Mormon, be able to have dreamed a dream.

Hank Smith: 00:37:47 I think it's called a cognitive-

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:37:51 A cognate accusative.

John Bytheway: 00:37:52 A cognitive accusative.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:37:52 A cognate accusative.

John Bytheway: 00:37:53 How dare you accusative my cognitive.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:37:59 And then I see "Shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because thou hast obeyed my voice." And so, that's a hugely important verse there. And so, we're promised in the oath and covenant of the priesthood, Section 84 for example, that if we are faithful, we become the sons of Abraham, the children of Abraham. So Abraham becomes literally the father of the faithful and everybody who is faithful, we're adopted into... Even people who receive Patriarchal blessings who may or may not be literal descendants of this or that tribe, become... They're adopted into in a way into the tribe.

Hank Smith: 00:38:31 The same as, right?

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:38:33 Yeah. Which is by the way, let me say, another old Arabian idea; people were often adopted into tribes after the rise of Islam. The tribes were really important. And then people would join Islam. And then in the first generations, they didn't quite know how to handle that. So, they'd make them honorary members of tribe X or tribe Y. And then after a few years, it didn't matter anymore whether you were really a descendant of X or Y. You now were a member of the tribe. And I think that's the same thing here; Abraham becomes the father of all of us in a way.

John Bytheway: 00:39:07 Could I go back for a second?

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:39:09 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 00:39:09 I just remember reading one of Truman Madsen's books and he mentioned a conversation he had had with President Hugh B. Brown and why would God put Abraham through that knowing that Abraham... He knew what Abraham would do. He has fore knowledge; he's God. But the answer that I liked from Hugh B. Brown was that, yes, God knew, but Abraham needed to learn something about Abraham. And I've always loved that answer and thought, the Lord could kind of just put us in one of those kingdoms in Section 76 right now and say, "Well, I already know what you're going to do." But our process of becoming would be taken away and learning about ourselves, I guess. So that answer has helped me. I don't know.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:39:53 Yeah, I like that. Can I just add a story maybe, that Truman told me once about his grandfather who was Heber J. Grant. I don't know if this is written up anywhere or not, I haven't seen it. But

that doesn't prove anything. But it was when Heber J. Grant was a young member of the Quorum of the Twelve. And he was called very, very young. And there was a prominent member of the church who had been excommunicated. And the question had come up of his being reinstated in the church. And I think it was John Taylor who presented it to the Quorum of the Twelve. And everyone was pretty much okay with it. He'd paid his dues and he could come back. Except Heber J. Grant who felt that he had disgraced himself, he had disgraced the priesthood and saw him, he said, "No." And apparently this went on for some time.

- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:40:39 It came up once again, and then President Grant went home, and Elder Grant at that point, went home and he picked up the scriptures and opened the scriptures and read the passage, "I the Lord will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men." And he said, "It hit me right between the eyes that I was being too harsh." And he said, I went back to President Taylor's office and I said to him, "I was wrong. I take back my objection." And President Taylor said to him, "Heber, I didn't really need your approval to authorize his rebaptism, but I wanted you to learn something really important." And he says, "I feel that you have." And maybe President Taylor even had a sense, who knows, that Heber J. Grant would someday be president of the church and he needed to learn this. But sometimes it's not about the problem itself. It's about us learning how to deal with the problem, or what we are, or what we're capable of.
- Hank Smith: 00:41:38 Sometimes when you read these blessings, you think "I want to be in the family of Abraham." But then you learn about what's asked of Abraham. You're like, "I don't know if I want to be in the family of Abraham anymore," right? It's this much is given but much is going to be required.
- John Bytheway: 00:41:55 Well, and we even have people claiming that just kinship to Abraham alone was enough. And that's what Jesus would say, "Well, God can make of these stones..." Or was it John, The Baptist.
- Hank Smith: 00:42:04 John the Baptist, I think.
- John Bytheway: 00:42:06 Yeah, Jesus can make of these stones children of Abraham. It's not your pedigree chart. You've got to act like it, you know?
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:42:12 No, there's, again, a pre-Islamic Arabian story about that one guy who's a... He started off as a slave and then earned his freedom. And people used to attack him for his lack of lineage. And he says, "Well, I represent the beginning of my line. You

represent the end of yours. You come from good family, but what have you done? You're nothing." And I think that it's important to understand that those things don't mean anything. I would say too, there have been times in my life where I've wondered, "Is it really a blessing to be an active member of the church?"

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:42:52 I grew up in a part member family. My father wasn't a member, my mother was marginal, and I sort of activated myself. And I remember going through a period in my high school years... This is California in the '60s. You can imagine. And all my friends were doing things that I couldn't allow myself to do. And I would feel guilty about being three minutes late for a sacrament meeting. And they never felt guilty about anything. And I thought, "Is this really an improvement?" And I've told people before that for me, the time when my testimony is... I commented before we were setting the time to do this that I'm a kind of living, walking, breathing violation of the Doctrine and Covenants. I aspire to retire to my bed early, but I just keep doing things, and I just can't go to bed. So early morning is rough for me.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:43:42 And when I've been in leadership positions that required early morning priesthood meetings or leadership meetings, that's when my testimony is at its lowest. When the alarm goes off, I don't want the church to be true. I'd just like to go back to sleep. Other people sleep in on Sunday; what's wrong with me? But I think, yeah, where much is given, much is required and that's true of the children of Abraham. So, it's in that way, a mixed blessing. It's a huge blessing. And ultimately the blessings will outweigh the demands by far. But in the short term sometimes you wonder, "Wow, this is rough."

John Bytheway: 00:44:23 Yeah, chosen to do a job, to bring in the harvest, to bear the ministry is not chosen to sit on a throne and be admired. It's a different kind of chosen.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:44:33 I remember a friend of mine that I had known, he was a faculty member at BYU who was called into the 70. And I ran into him once overseas, and was just talking to him. I said, "So, how are you doing?" He says he'd had a bad day, I think. He says Dan, let me tell you, the law of consecration is a check with an unlimited number of zeros. It just goes on, and on, and on.

John Bytheway: 00:44:55 Wow.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:44:56 But I've thought to myself of friends who've been called as well. One in particular, I think was a mission president, who

interrupted a really lucrative specialist medical practice to go and serve as president of a mission. I remember him saying to me once, he said, "You know, I just thought to myself I've been preaching sacrifice for the kingdom of God all my life. When this call came, it kind of shocked me." But he said, "I finally decided, okay, talk is cheap. You've got to put your money where your mouth is." So he took a real hit and he came back. He was hoping to retire. He's still working, because he had to make up for the three years of lost income and so on and so forth. But it is demanding. It was never meant to not be demanding, I think. That's the blessing, and if you will, the challenge of being children of Abraham.

- Hank Smith: 00:45:48 Yeah. That's awesome.
- John Bytheway: 00:45:50 Yeah, a blessing and a burden. It's both. But like you said, and I think it's good to end with that, the blessing outweighs the burden. We have such joy and connection to such joy. And it's probably hard to say that.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:46:04 And that's just in this world.
- John Bytheway: 00:46:07 Yeah, that's just now.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:46:09 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 00:46:10 Good point.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:46:10 And the life to come, incomprehensible blessings.
- Hank Smith: 00:46:15 I've had many friends say as Bishop, they said, "It's tough, but it's my favorite calling."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:46:20 Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 00:46:21 I help people.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:46:22 I felt that I had some callings where I thought, "Well, I'm really busy, but am I really doing any good?" I won't name the one particular calling which I've dreaded being called to ever again. I just spent long Sundays, and at the end of the day, I couldn't think of a single useful thing I'd really done.
- John Bytheway: 00:46:40 There's some that, in administrative callings, a lot of administration and that's got to be hard. That's a talent that they have, and it's hard to find the same kind of joy in administering than ministering, yeah.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:46:54 When I was a Bishop, I'd come home at the end of a day, or sometimes early in the next morning. And because I had a ward where people sometimes couldn't do interviews until I got off of work at 12:30 or 12:45.

John Bytheway: 00:47:06 Oh wow.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:47:07 "Will you still be there?" "Yeah, I'll still be there." But I'd think, "Okay, I am really tired," and this sounds cliché, but it's a good kind of tired. I feel like I did some good today. And occasionally when you could tell someone, "I think you're okay with the church now. I can give you a temple recommend," I think, "Okay, this is worth it. Wow, this feels so good."

John Bytheway: 00:47:31 Absolutely.

Hank Smith: 00:47:32 I think you're exactly right, that it is hard work, but it's a good kind of work.

John Bytheway: 00:47:38 The hymn says "Sweet is the work," and I've felt that expression before when I was a bishop.

Hank Smith: 00:47:46 I tell my students all the time, the Lord never asks us to do anything addictive. You don't really see people going, "No, I need to pay my tithing. I'm having withdrawals," or, "Oh, I need to go serve, I'm having withdrawals," because he knows when we do it, we'll love it. We'll love it. I think the adversary is just the opposite. He knows you're going to figure it out, I've got to get you addicted.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:48:06 Yeah. Yeah, that's right, that's right.

Hank Smith: 00:48:08 Before you figure it out. Is there anything in chapter 23 that...

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:48:10 Well Sarah's death and this kind of curious negotiation between Abraham and Ephron, the Hittite, it's probably sort of ritualized. I mean, they all say, "Well, let's just give you..." But they weren't really going to do that. This is just kind of what you say. And they bargain back and forth, and Abraham just wants a cave. Eventually he ends up with the field and the trees, and the cave, and everything else. He's bought more than he maybe wanted. But these are important parts of the claim of the Israelites to the land that... For example, that Abraham digs a well, and then he has Abimelech certify, "You dug the well." And then here he buys the land for burial. His people are buried there, including himself is buried there a little bit later. And this will be part of

the historic claim of the people of Israel to the land, that they've been there and they own property.

- Hank Smith: 00:49:10 That would be important to the author of Genesis-
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:49:14 I think so. Yeah. I think so. And to subsequent generations, "This is our land. We've been here for a long time. We owned it. It was bought. We got it legitimately."
- Hank Smith: 00:49:27 Because they're going to leave, they're going to leave and go to Egypt.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:49:29 Right.
- Hank Smith: 00:49:30 And then come back, and they're saying, "Part of this document of Genesis says we have claim on..."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:49:36 Right.
- Hank Smith: 00:49:37 "On this land, even though we were gone for so long."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:49:40 Yeah. So I think that's an important part of the story. And then of course, just Abraham's affection for Sarah and the passing of an important... She's not a patriarch, she's a matriarch, but it's the passing of an era really. Verse 20, "The field and the cave that is therein were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a burying place by the sons of Heth." So the inhabitants of the territory have given him land in that area. And this is a site that's still venerated today. You can still go. Although I wouldn't recommend going to Hebron right now. It's kind of a politically dicey place. But you can still visit the Cave of the Patriarchs there, and the Mosque of Abraham where the Muslims, and it may be the right place for all I know, venerate that as the burial place of the patriarchs.
- Hank Smith: 00:50:29 Yeah. I never put this together before, but I'm just looking at the Lord saying, "Wow, you've done it with this Isaac situation. You're going to be blessed beyond all blessing." But he still buries his wife, right? So there's a humanness to that of blessings, blessings, blessings, but not free from...
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:50:50 No, great blessings come to you. President Kimball has the Revelation on Priesthood and spends his last years in serious physical ill health. Well, many of his last decades, really. Every prophet goes through that. They're human, just like the rest of us.

Hank Smith: 00:51:05 I remember watching President Hinckley bury his wife, and the grief on his face, right? And you're thinking, "Oh, he's a prophet."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:51:13 They'd been inseparable for years. He was confident of seeing her again. But there's a separation there and that's painful. We had a friend who passed away a few years ago who lived to an advanced age, an emeritus member of the 70. But I got to know him only after he'd been made emeritus. He was the brother-in-law of someone I know quite well. And so we spent a fair amount of time with him, and I just saw him as he and his wife, especially his wife became more and more ill and less and less able to do things, and having to cope with immobility and so on. And he'd been a member of the 70 and a temple president and so on. But it's the human condition, we all go through this.

Hank Smith: 00:51:56 It's like watching President Monson. His first talk as president of the church where he is wiggling his ears, and his last talk where he can barely hold himself up.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:52:05 So they're not exempt from that kind of thing. And again, I think sometimes some members of the church expect them to be like Superman. Sometimes they are. I mean President Nelson, I don't know what to make of him. He may live forever.

John Bytheway: 00:52:20 Yeah.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:52:21 But quite often, they're not. And I'm sure that President Nelson has his days. If you're that age, you've got to have them. Can I tell you a Marion D. Hanks story? I once had the opportunity, several stakes in Denver decided to do a Book of Mormon weekend or something. So, they invited a group of us to come over and speak. And there were four of us. It was Jack Welch and Truman Madsen, and me and Elder Hanks.

John Bytheway: 00:52:46 Oh my gosh, can I go? That sounds fun.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:52:48 Elder Hanks and I were paired off and we spoke in one set of stakes one night, and then we switched the next night. By the way, we went to a gospel doctrine class that Sunday.

John Bytheway: 00:52:59 How intimidating.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:53:00 Oh, my word, I thought this poor woman teaching the gospel doctrine class was going to faint. I hadn't even thought about it. It wasn't so much me, but I thought Truman Madsen, Marion D.

Hanks, Jack Welch... Good grief, that was all awful. That was kind of cruel in a way.

- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:53:18 But anyway, Elder Hanks told me a story. The one thing I really remember about this trip is more than anything else was his... He told me his favorite story of calling a stake president. It has nothing to do with anything else that we've talked about today, but I've loved the story and I've shared it multiple times since then. He said he was at a stake and he interviewed and interviewed and interviewed. And he said, "I just hadn't found the stake president. Nobody there jumped out at me as the stake president." So he said, "Can you bring me a list of the high priests in the stake?" And they did. Then he said he went down the list and there was one name that sort of glowed on the page, sort of pulsed. And he said, "Was this person here today?" "No, I don't think so." "Is he active?" "Oh yeah, he's active." "Does he live far away?"
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:54:03 And they said, "No, he's fairly close to the stake center." "Could you take me to his house?" They said, "Yeah, sure." So they drove him to the man's house. He rings the doorbell, the wife answers the door. And he says, "Is brother so and so here today?" And she says, "Yes, he is. He was feeling a little under the weather. So he didn't go to the meetings today." And he said, "Well, could you invite him upstairs?" And she said, "Yeah."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:54:25 So he comes up, the man does. Hank says, "You know why I'm here today, don't you?" And he says, "Yeah. I do. The other day it occurred to me that I would be stake president. So I thought if I just didn't go to the meeting, you wouldn't call me." Brother Hank says, "That's not how it works." And he called him to be stake president. He said, "And he turned out to be an exceptionally good one." But he said that was his favorite story because it was sort of like Jonah.
- John Bytheway: 00:54:56 Yeah, Brother Jonah. I was just going to say.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:54:59 Maybe if I just stay away.
- Hank Smith: 00:55:03 He'll choose someone else.
- John Bytheway: 00:55:03 Drop a stake.
- John Bytheway: 00:55:08 You can run, but you can't hide.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:55:09 That's right.

Hank Smith: 00:55:11 Dan, this has been absolutely fantastic. I think everybody listening has ... I can just see them in their cars and in their living rooms going, "This guy is amazing. This guy is so good."

Hank Smith: 00:55:23 I think those listening would be a little bit interested in your journey, this vast education that you've had so much exposure to the world, especially Islam and the Middle East. And here you are a faithful Latter-day Saint. I think our listeners would want to know a little bit more about that. Can you share a little bit that with us?

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:55:45 Sure. Well, I was born in a part member family in Southern California. My father was a very inactive Lutheran from North Dakota and my mother was a semi-active mostly inactive Latter-day Saint from Southern Utah. So I was raised occasionally going to church. It was sort of a social thing. But I think if you had asked me at the age of 11 or 12, I was a thoughtful kid. I think I would've considered myself an atheist. Church didn't appeal to me. It was boring. I didn't want to go. When we did go, I didn't enjoy it that much because I didn't have that many friends at church. For some reason my ward didn't have a lot of kids my age. And so even in high school, I didn't have any Latter-day Saint friends. There were just none. But one of the things that first hit me was I stayed home from school one day. I was sick. Or maybe I was really sick. I don't know. I can't remember now. But I was home and we had inherited a book from my grandmother who had passed away some years before. It was by Nephi Anderson. It was called Added Upon. It was a little novel, basically kind of a forerunner, I suppose, to some of the musicals, Saturday's Warrior, the plan of salvation laid out.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:57:04 I've tried to read it since then and haven't been able to. It's pretty stilted and it's just, it's dated, but I read it then because I was bored, staying home. And it laid out the plan of salvation in a way that I had never heard before, or hadn't been listening. I don't know, just the whole sweep of the thing from premortal existence on through immortal life and life afterward and the potential destiny of human beings. I just thought this is the grandest most spectacular thing I have ever read in my life. I've never ... This has never registered with me. So the church is not just about boring Sunday school lessons. Sacrament meetings, I think will go on forever. This is dramatic. This is amazing.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:57:49 And so I began to pay attention and I became pretty active. And my parents weren't. My father wasn't even a member. So I would go to church on my own when I could drive and I became quite serious about it. And another turning point for me was when some friends in the ward who knew that I didn't get much

support at home, but thought that maybe I could use a little, a little more nourishment said, "Well, we're going to be having education week nearby," I think it was in West Covina. I grew up in San Gabriel. "We're going to be having education week and we are going. It's three days or four days," whatever it was. I think it was four. "And we'll take you if you'd like. We'll pick you up in the morning and we'll take you and you can stay as late as you'd like."

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:58:31

And I went there and it was a feast. I mean, I look back, I think Daniel Ludlow was speaking there. Truman Madsen spoke, the 3Ds did music. Who else spoke? And Bruce R. McConkie of the first quorum of the 70s spoke. I don't know if he ever did that again, but he did it that one. And Hugh Nibley spoke. I mean, it was ...

Hank Smith: 00:58:55

Oh yeah.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:58:55

It was like a paradise feast for me. I thought, "Okay, if that's what the gospel is about, I'm in. If that's what BYU is about, I'm going." No question where I want to go. This just thrilled me. I loved it. I mean, Truman was giving lectures on existentialism and logical positivism, but he was making them so interesting that even those of us who didn't know anything about them were just eating it up.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:59:16

And so to me, early on, there was a sense of the grandeur of the vision of the gospel and the intellectual excitement of it that has never left me. I still feel that, that this is the grandest vision, the greatest story that I can imagine. There's just nothing better.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 00:59:34

And so I came to BYU initially as a mathematics major. I wanted to be ... I had a poster, a life-size poster of Albert Einstein on my dorm dresser or dorm cupboard or closet. And I wanted to be that. And then decided, no, that really wasn't me. So I switched of all things to Greek and philosophy. I'm sure that my parents were so pleased. What a lucrative field to go into. You can just really make a fortune doing classical Greek and philosophy.

Hank Smith: 01:00:02

Huge demand.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:00:03

Yeah. Huge demand. To their credit, they didn't give me a lot of trouble. I mean, I might have had I been in their place, but they didn't. They were quite supportive. And meanwhile, interestingly enough, I was having conversations with my father. And then the time came for me to serve a mission. And about that time I had just stopped talking with him. He would always

argue with me. They were good natured arguments, but he'd always sort of push back. And finally I decided, "No, this isn't going anywhere. It's never going to happen."

- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:00:33 He actually raised the issue with my much older brother, 10 years older than I am, half brother actually. He said, "Isn't Dan interested anymore?" And my brother said, "Well, he's given up on you." And so my dad began reading on his own, and reading Hugh Nibley was one of the factors that influenced him.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:00:49 So the night I was set apart as a missionary, no, the day I gave my farewell Sunday, my parents put on a little missionary farewell. They're kind of discouraged now a little bit, but we did them in those days, invite everybody over. And my dad came up to the Bishop and said, "Bishop, is there any chance that I could be baptized before my son leaves?" And I think the Bishop nearly fainted.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:01:10 They'd known my dad for years. His nickname among some of the less reverent members of the ward was Bishop because he'd helped build the chapel and things like that, but he just wasn't interested. Well, he joined within a year, actually slightly less. He was in a bishopric himself. But anyway, so that's how we all got to be in the church. When I got back, we were sealed together in the Los Angeles temple.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:01:36 But I decided fairly early on that the kind of work Nibley did fascinated me and that I wanted to see if I could pursue it further. And so I began with classical Greek and I did some other languages. And then I heard Nibley give a talk once on Arabic. Now, if you wanted to study anything, study Arabic. He was in one of his Arabic phases. I learned later they lasted about a week and a half each and there were about five of them. But he got me. And so I began studying Arabic and that kind of led me to where I ended up.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:02:10 But my other interest has always been not just Islamic studies, but the gospel and seeing how the gospel fits, not just into the Middle East, but philosophically. How rich are these doctrines? How profound and powerful are they? And so I was sort of caught between Truman Madsen doing the philosophy side of things and High Nibley doing the ancient world. And I have not been disappointed.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:02:35 I think the gospel is as rich as it can be. And that when we ... I see some people who say, "Well, it's as shallow as a puddle." And I think then you haven't done the work because to me, that's just absolutely not true. And to me, the answers it gives,

the meaning that it suffuses life with. I mean, ordinary acts of daily mortal life become really important when viewed in the context of this, what some people have called a three act play or in the second act, right? They don't make any sense if you don't know about the first act, but because there is a last act they're important. They lead to what's going to happen in the third act.

- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:03:12 To me, the gospel just gives so much significance. I cannot imagine living in a universe that I thought was objectively meaningless as some of my atheist friends do. I just don't. I don't know how you ... Why get up in the morning? Why do anything? I can sort of see amusing yourself until you die. Yeah, and be nice to the people around you because that's enlightened self-interest. They'll be nice to you when it comes time for turnaround. Other than that, I just, I can't see any reason to go on.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:03:42 And I know people do because they distract themselves with things, if you're frenetically active all the time. Like the old scene in Man's Search For Happiness, you go to the amusement park and it's just noisy and loud and bright lights. But if you ever step away from it and start thinking, "Boy, that's, it's just not a very nourishing diet."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:04:03 So I've spent a lot of time. I've been involved in what some people call apologetics, defense of the church for a long time. And I've seen, there may be a major argument out there that I haven't seen, but I doubt it very much. People will constantly come to me and say, "Well, you weren't aware of this." "Oh yes, I am. Have been for a long time. You'd be surprised."
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:04:25 I had these inclinations when I was young. I was reading stuff about the Mountain Meadows Massacre and plural marriage when I was 17. So no, you're not going to surprise me. And I don't believe because I don't know about those things. I see the big things that are true and many things I think we have answers, even on the few things where I think, "Oh yeah, I'm a little puzzled. I'd like to talk to somebody about that when I meet him in the next life." Still it's not enough to knock me out because there's certain things that I'm quite confident of. Am I confident that the Book of Mormon is true? Yes. Am I confident that Joseph Smith was a true prophet? Yes I am.
- Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:05:04 I'll tell you one thing. This recent Witnesses film that we did and the docudrama that's coming out shortly, the witnesses are part of the secular anchor to my testimony. It's not the spiritual side. That's something altogether different. But I have studied the

witnesses for decades. I don't know any way to get around them. They're sane, they're honest, they're intelligent, and they claim to have seen the plates, held the plates, heard the voice of God, seen an angel.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:05:35 And it's not just the 11. When we get to the docudrama, we'll be talking not just about the three, but also the eight, and the unofficial witnesses. You've got something on the order of 15 people, 16, 17 people maybe, just found one ... Well, a friend found a month or two ago another unofficial witness to the plates that I'd never heard of. And I don't think any member of the church ever has. I will wait until he writes that up and disclose it. It's just a minor experience of going to the Smith household asking to hold the plates and Lucy Smith said, "Yes, you may." And he held them. And he said they were very, very heavy. I'd never heard of this. Boy, I can wait to see that published.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:06:13 But there was clearly something there. And he didn't see an angel or anything, but others did. To my mind, that's powerful stuff and I don't know any way to get around it. And so what this tells me is the gospel is true. More important than that Joseph is a prophet, is that Jesus is the Christ and that there is a God and that this life has meaning and it doesn't end at death. And I've not seen any evidence that would convince me otherwise.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:06:44 Unanswered questions, sometimes yes. No knockout blow, no serious counter evidence, and lots of evidence for which I think some of our critics ignore. I have spiritual testimony, but intellectually I'll close maybe with this. I have tried, I think honestly, and seriously to concoct a counter explanation for Joseph Smith and his claims. Is there a way that I could explain them without invoking the divine? I can't and I've tried hard. You might be able to account for this element, but not that element. And sometimes the explanation for this one contradicts the explanation you'd come up with for that one.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:07:24 The simplest explanation for me is it's true. If I were going to offer one single secular argument for the truth of the gospel, it's that no counter explanation works. It doesn't account for all the data.

Hank Smith: 01:07:37 Ah, and he's been, Joseph's been dead a long time. You've had your time to come up with an alternative theory.

Dr. Daniel Peterson: 01:07:45 If the Book of Mormon was shallow fraud, man, it should have been obvious a long time ago.

Hank Smith: 01:07:49 All right. 192 years now it's been, since it's been published. Dan, this has just fantastic, really. It's been so good. We want to thank Dr. Daniel Peterson for joining us today. Wow. What a great day.

Hank Smith: 01:08:05 Thank you to all of you who stayed with us today and listened. We love you. We're grateful for you and your support. We want to thank our executive producers, Steve and Shannon Sorensen and our sponsors, David and Verla Sorensen. And we hope all of you will join us for our next episode of followHIM.

followHIM *favorites*

with Hank Smith & John Bytheway



"Why would God command Abraham to sacrifice Issac?"

- Hank Smith: 00:00 Hello, everyone. Welcome to Follow Him Favorites. My name is Hank Smith. I'm the host of a podcast called Follow Him. I'm here with my amazing co-host John Bytheway. Hello, John.
- John Bytheway: 00:09 Hi, Hank.
- Hank Smith: 00:10 John and I love to discuss the gospel. And we are using a question per week for Follow Him Favorites this year. And the question this week, John, is a pretty common question. As we're studying Genesis 18 through 23, people might look at the story of Abraham going to sacrifice Isaac and think, "What is going on? Why would God command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?" So if someone approached that question with you, how would you help them?
- John Bytheway: 00:42 It is a great question because we all know that Abraham was almost a victim of human sacrifice himself, knew the evils of it, and then just the irony of it. And he must have been really having a hard time. The one answer that I heard, I was listening to Truman G. Madsen's Joseph Smith the Prophet. I guess he was in the company of President Hugh B. Brown, who was a member of the first presidency many years ago. And he asked him that question, "Hey, if God knew Abraham would be willing, God knew Abraham would be willing to do that. Why did he put him through the torture of making him do that, travel three days to Mount Moriah, everything, and put him through that whole torture of doing it?"
- John Bytheway: 01:25 And President Hugh B. Brown's answer was fascinating. He just said, "Abraham needed to learn something about Abraham." And I've thought about the whole idea of the gospel. Our chance here in mortality is to become something. And Abraham now knows something about himself because he went through

that. And I guess God could just stick us where we're going to end up, but that would violate the process of us becoming something. And I don't know if that's a good answer or not, but I love that idea that Abraham learned something about Abraham. And we all learned something about Abraham, and that we might have difficult tests as a result of reading that story.

- Hank Smith: 02:04 Excellent. Yeah. I think so, too. I like that idea. God already knew, but Abraham didn't know. So let's find out about Abraham. I would include Isaac in there as well, that Isaac needed to find something-
- John Bytheway: 02:16 Willing to sacrifice.
- Hank Smith: 02:17 Yeah. Isaac needed to find something out about Isaac. They both needed to know that they would go to the ultimate test for God. And I would say too, John, this is pretty uncommon. I wouldn't have any expectation whatsoever that any of our listeners or anyone would think, "Okay. God is asking me to kill this person." This is...
- John Bytheway: 02:42 I'm really glad you said that.
- Hank Smith: 02:43 Yeah. This would be very unique. So I wouldn't think that, "Oh, this is what God does with everyone. This is all the time." One, I think it's Abraham's unique experience, like you mentioned, from Abraham, the Book of Abraham, that this is something his father attempted to do to him. And he probably had some serious trauma from that. And so the irony of it, the bitter irony of it is going to be something that's not lost on Abraham, right? He's going to know, "God, come on. This is the one thing that maybe he still needs to face from his earlier life." The second is, I think the story is unique because the Savior's mission is unique. We see that Isaac carries the wood up the mountain, right? Just like the Savior carried his cross, that Isaac was willing to give his own life. Right? I don't think it ever says that Isaac went after his dad and they wrestled and he's like, "Dad, you're crazy."
- John Bytheway: 03:45 [crosstalk 00:03:45] He said, "I'm getting out of here." Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 03:45 Right? No, he willingly was offering his life. So this unique story of the Old Testament should point us to the Savior's atoning sacrifice, his willingness to lay down his own life for all of us. I don't know. To me, John, I would say let this story teach you about Christ's willingness to sacrifice. Not necessarily that God

is some sort of bloodthirsty person. I mean, this is the same God who's going to sacrifice Himself, who's asking Abraham to do this. So let that story point you to Jesus, wouldn't you say?

- John Bytheway: 04:24 Yeah. And that's an aha moment for all of us when we read it. When the angel of the Lord stops him and says, "Because you have not withheld your son, your only son," and we all go, "Oh."
- Hank Smith: 04:35 Right.
- John Bytheway: 04:36 "Oh, because God was not going to withhold. God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten son." And we connect the dots and go, "Oh." And so just for that teaching moment, Abraham learned it. But all of us, we maybe relate to Abraham, and then through Abraham can relate to Heavenly Father giving His only begotten son. And that's a big aha moment for all of us, I guess.
- Hank Smith: 04:58 This story reminds me of something President Monson used to say all the time. He used to say, "The greatest lesson we can learn in mortality is when God speaks and we obey, we will always be right." So no matter what it is, right John? We obey. That's a recipe for success in our book.
- John Bytheway: 05:19 His motive is always our good, what's best for us. And it helps just to know that, that we have a loving, personal God. "He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world."
- Hank Smith: 05:31 We hope this has been helpful for you, answering this difficult question. You can send us more questions. Come over to followhim.co, followhim.co. You can use our contact page. Shoot us a question and we'll see if we can answer it here. And we hope that you will join us next week for Follow Him Favorites.