

Follow Him

Episode 3

Guest: Dr. Michael Mackay

Doctrine and Covenants 2; Joseph Smith--History 1:27-65

“The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn to the Fathers”

Show Notes

Podcast General Description:

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

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

Podcast Episode Description:

Episode 103:

Part 1:

Imagine Joseph Smith not as the prophet of the Restoration, but as a teenager with a cheery temperament. What was Joseph like before he was a Latter-day Saint? We get to know a teenager as he becomes a married prophet as Dr. Michael MacKay explains what it means that Joseph “has a work . . . to do.”

Part 2:

Suppose each religion and people are like a unique, indispensable fabric woven together by the golden thread of the Gospel, temple covenants, and the Savior; what is our part in the sewing? Dr. Michael MacKay reminds us that every human being has already chosen the Savior. Join us as we discuss how Joseph Smith brings forth what is to become the most inclusive religion the world has ever known.

Timecode:

Part 1:

- (00:02) *Introduction*
- (01:48) *The Story of the Restoration Can Change Lives in Minutes*
- (03:03) *Joseph Smith Ages 15-18*
- (09:57) *Seer Stones and Cultural Spirituality*
- (16:32) *Moroni Visits: JSH 1:27-49*
- (22:30) *A Work to Do*
- (26:28) *The Priesthood, the Temple, and Dispensations*
- (35:45) *Four Visits by Moroni*
- (38:26) *Latter-day Saints Sew the Quilt Through Temple Work*

Part 2:

- (00:05) *Introduction*
- (01:43) *Joseph's Probationary Period*
- (05:50) *Joseph Moves to Pennsylvania*
- (08:20) *The Lord is Raising Up Friends*
- (12:08) *Joseph Gets the Plates*
- (13:23) *The Church is Founded by Both Emma and Joseph*
- (21:28) *A Historian's Perspective*

Sources:

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Biographical Information:

Michael Hubbard MacKay is an Associate Professor of Church History in the College of Religious Education at Brigham Young University. Two years as a Visiting Professor in the History Department at Brigham Young University, followed by 3 years as historian/writer at the Joseph Smith Papers Project and adjunct professor of history at Weber State University. Member of the board of editors for *Mormon Historical Studies* and *The Journal for Book of Mormon Studies*. He has a Ph.D. in history from York University, England, with training in world history, cultural theory, history of science and medicine. He has published many articles and books including *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*, and *From Darkness Unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon*. Dr. MacKay was also the lead historian and author of the *Joseph Smith Papers, Documents Volume 1*.



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

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

INTRODUCTION

Hank Smith

(00:02)

Welcome to Follow Him, a weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their *Come, Follow Me* study. I'm Hank Smith.

John Bytheway

(00:10)

And I'm John Bytheway.

Hank Smith

(00:11)

We love to learn.

John Bytheway

(00:12)

We love to laugh.

Hank Smith

(00:13)

We want to learn and laugh with you.

John Bytheway

(00:15)

As together, We followHIM.

Hank Smith

(00:22)

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

John Bytheway

(00:37)

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

Hank Smith
(00:43)

[crosstalk 00:00:43]-

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

Hank Smith
(00:44)

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

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

Hank Smith
(01:09)

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

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

Dr. Michael MacKay
(01:19)
Yeah.

Hank Smith
(01:20)

How long did you do that?

Dr. Michael MacKay
(01:21)

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

Hank Smith

(01:29)

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

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

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

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

THE STORY OF THE RESTORATION CAN CHANGE LIVES IN MINUTES

Dr. Michael MacKay

(01:48)

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

John Bytheway

(02:43)

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

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

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

JOSEPH SMITH AGES 15-18

Hank Smith
(03:02)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay
(03:31)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay
(04:23)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay
(05:12)

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

Hank Smith
(05:26)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(05:35)

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

John Bytheway

(05:46)

Hank Smith is a pretty jovial person.

Hank Smith

(05:49)

[crosstalk 00:05:49]

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(06:37)

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

Hank Smith

(07:12)

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

John Bytheway

(07:30)

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

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

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

Hank Smith
(08:06)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay
(08:25)

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

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

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

Dr. Michael MacKay
(09:10)

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

Hank Smith
(09:36)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay
(09:42)
Thank you very much.

Hank Smith
(09:43)

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

SEER STONES AND CULTURAL SPIRITUALITY

Dr. Michael MacKay
(09:57)

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

Hank Smith
(10:45)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay
(11:06)

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

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(11:59)

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

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

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

Hank Smith

(12:57)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(13:09)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(14:07)

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

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

Hank Smith

(14:39)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(14:58)

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

Hank Smith

(15:32)

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

John Bytheway:

(15:43)

[crosstalk 00:15:43]-

Dr. Michael MacKay

(15:43)

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

MORONI VISITS: JSH 1:27-49

Hank Smith

(16:32)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(17:04)

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

Hank Smith

(17:49)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(17:52)

Oh yeah.

Hank Smith

(17:52)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(18:01)

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

Hank Smith

(18:36)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay
(19:24)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay
(20:16)

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

Hank Smith
(20:34)
Oh.

John Bytheway
(20:36)

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

Hank Smith
(20:56)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(21:06)

Yes.

Hank Smith

(21:06)

--About experiences like this.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(21:08)

Yes.

Hank Smith

(21:09)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(21:22)

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

Hank Smith

(21:29)

"Yeah. I do remember that."

Dr. Michael MacKay

(21:30)

"Do you remember that?"

Hank Smith

(21:31)

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

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(21:59)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(22:54)

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

A WORK TO DO

John Bytheway

(23:30)

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

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

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

John Bytheway

(24:17)

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

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

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

Hank Smith
(24:55)

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

John Bytheway
(25:35)

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

Hank Smith
(25:54)
Right.

John Bytheway
(25:55)

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

Hank Smith
(26:08)

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

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

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

THE PRIESTHOOD, THE TEMPLE, AND DISPENSATIONS

Dr. Michael MacKay

(26:28)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(27:17)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(28:18)

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

Hank Smith

(28:33)

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

John Bytheway

(28:45)

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

Hank Smith

(29:25)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(29:54)

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

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

Hank Smith

(29:59)

That's verse 39. Yeah.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(30:01)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(30:55)

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

Hank Smith

(31:02)

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

John Bytheway

(31:09)

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

Hank Smith

(31:46)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(32:00)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(32:57)

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

Hank Smith

(33:17)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(33:39)

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

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

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

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

John Bytheway

(34:29)

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

Hank Smith

(34:37)

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

Hank Smith

(35:31)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(35:42)

Well, it ends up being four times, right?

Hank Smith

(35:44)

Four times. Yeah. The next morning, right?

FOUR VISITS BY MORONI

Dr. Michael MacKay

(35:45)

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

Hank Smith

(36:42)

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

John Bytheway

(37:13)

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

Hank Smith

(37:29)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(37:32)

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

LATTER-DAY SAINTS SEW THE QUILT THROUGH TEMPLE WORK

Dr. Michael MacKay

(38:26)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(39:14)

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

John Bytheway(39:49)

Please join us for Part 2 of this podcast.

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

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

MORONI CONTINUES TO VISIT 18-YEAR-OLD JOSEPH

John Bytheway

(00:05)

Welcome to Part 2 of this week's podcast.

Hank Smith

(00:08)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(00:28)

Like angel hangover.

Hank Smith

(00:32)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(00:56)

Yes, but he ends up telling him.

Hank Smith

(00:59)

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

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(01:22)

So, it's about three miles.

Hank Smith

(01:23)

So, he's exhausted.

John Bytheway

(01:26)

Now, go on a three-mile hike.

Hank Smith

(01:29)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(1:33)

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

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

Hank Smith

(01:59)

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

JOSEPH'S PROBATIONARY PERIOD

Dr. Michael MacKay

(01:43)

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

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

Hank Smith

(02:37)

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

John Bytheway

(02:45)

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

Hank Smith

(02:51)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(02:59)

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

Hank Smith

(03:11)

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

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(03:14)

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

Hank Smith

(03:36:)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(03:54)

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

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

Hank Smith

(04:45)

Yeah. Steve Harper said he worships his older brother.

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(04:52)

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

Hank Smith

(05:06)

--is 1824 . . .

Dr. Michael MacKay

(05:07)

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

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

Hank Smith

(05:36)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(05:43)

Yes. So you have pressures all around.

Hank Smith

(05:48)

And he comes home without them.

JOSEPH MOVES TO PENNSYLVANIA

Dr. Michael MacKay

(05:50)

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

Hank Smith

(06:06)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(06:15)

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

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

Hank Smith

(07:08)

He's closer to what Moroni was hoping for.

Dr. Michael MacKay

(07:09)

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

Hank Smith

(07:13)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(07:27)

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

Hank Smith

(08:04)

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

THE LORD IS RAISING UP FRIENDS

Dr. Michael MacKay

(08:20)

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

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

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

Hank Smith

(08:46)

--those early, early joiners--

Dr. Michael MacKay

(08:48)

Yeah.

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

John Bytheyway

(09:57)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(10:18)

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

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

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

And that's where you get--

Hank Smith

(11:21)

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

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(11:42)

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

JOSEPH GETS THE PLATES

Hank Smith

(12:08)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(12:23)

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

Hank Smith

(12:53)

Has he been changed, Mike?

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(12:55)

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

Hank Smith

(13:15)

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

THE CHURCH IS FOUNDED BY BOTH EMMA AND JOSEPH

Dr. Michael MacKay

(13:23)

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

John Bytheway

(14:52)

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

Hank Smith

(15:06)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(15:16)

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

Hank Smith

(15:45)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(16:14)

Yeah.

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

Hank Smith

(16:43)

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

John Bytheway

(16:48)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(16:52)

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

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

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

Hank Smith

(18:22)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(18:47)

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

John Bytheway

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

Hank Smith
(19:07)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay
(19:29)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay
(20:26)

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

Hank Smith
(21:03)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay
(21:23)

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

John Bytheway

"Yeah. I think that should be"

A HISTORIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Hank Smith

(21:28)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(21:46)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(22:54)

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

Dr. Michael MacKay

(23:41)

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

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

John Bytheway
(24:26)

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

Hank Smith
(24:33)

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