

Come, Follow Me Class Insights (Doctrine and Covenants 29)

I'm Taylor.

I'm Tyler.

And I'm Brent Top.

We've invited our friend Brent Top today because he has spent 45 years as a religious educator. So, as you spend time today on Come Follow Me Insights, Doctrine and Covenants section 29, we invite you to open the scriptures with us and listen to the word of God.

Thank you for being here, Brent. This is a real privilege. Brent spent years teaching seminary and then came to BYU, and he's been in the department of Church History and Doctrine. He's been a dean in our College of Religious Education and he knows a lot about the Doctrine and Covenants, and we felt like it would be really a blessing to you if he came in and helped us out with section 29 because this is the first time in our unfolding restoration of the gospel where we really grapple with and try to tackle the issue of end times and millennium and Second Coming kinds of questions. So, Brent, question for you is, what's going on? It's a couple of days before their conference in September of 1830. What's happening here that, if we understand that history, will help us unfold section 29?

I think with regards to any revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants, we need to understand that there are always circumstances going on around it, and to me the Doctrine and Covenants is a challenging volume of scripture because it's not like a story line. I mean, how many times when I picked up the Saints volume, I loved to read the Saints volume or any other church history, and then interspersed in that I hear about a revelation. But when we pick up the Doctrine and Covenants here, we just have revelation, and it's really on our part – we've got to go and find out what's going on there, and even in the historical headings that we have there, it doesn't give us very much information.

But the Church has given us a lot of great resources that are there. But September 1830, a couple of things that jump out at me that I think are important for us to understand before we dive into the revelation itself, is first of all, I think that we need to remember that section 29 is closely related, not just in the number, but with section 28, because as you talked about Hiram Page and the revelations that he was receiving by his stone, that Joseph now has Oliver Cowdery go and correct. And as you've talked about, Oliver Cowdery is the brother-in-law to Hiram Page, so that made it extra hard. But that was the real topic of Hiram Page's revelations, and so that becomes one of the real issues that we're going to address is, where is the place of the gathering?

Where is the place of the New Jerusalem? Where is Zion going to be established? And so now that is the speculation that is going on among the Saints because of this controversy with Hiram Page. Now later in the section you're going to see some other issues that are associated with it and that is, that at this time the Prophet Joseph Smith has been charged with doing the translation

of the Bible, and so at this time we're also going to be having doctrine coming forth out of the translation of the Bible which we would have in the Book of Moses, okay?

Now there may have been later some Joseph Smith Matthew things that are going to be related to this as well, but there are all kinds of things that are going on. Plus, I think when you say September 1830, this is the second general conference of the Church, and so here we are so excited to have the Lord revealing to us what our job is as members of the Church and as the elders of Church, these six elders with the Prophet Joseph, what is the work of the ongoing Restoration. And so, for them, the greatest thing that they have going for them in this Restoration is going to be the concept of gathering. Okay? And the Prophet Joseph Smith is going to teach them over and over again that a temple plays a significant role whenever Zion is going to be established.

So, there are all of these different things that are coming into play, how are we going to make it fit? So that's, to me, how I view the historical context and so that you cannot read section 29 without reviewing section 28 and maybe, we don't always do this when we're reading a book, going to the end to see what's coming up. But in reality, section 29 is going to make more sense to us as we read other revelations that are going to come subsequently. For example, the revelation to gather to Ohio, the revelation of the Lamanite missionaries going to the borders of the Lamanites, all of those things that we're going to see later are part of that historical context or culture of what is happening when the Lord reveals this.

Love it! So, now let's dive down into some of these verses, knowing this background, knowing some of the doctrinal questions that are swirling around this group and Hiram Page's situation. Keep in mind you have six elders who are there, and they're having this discussion and based on some of the historical record, we might not call it a discussion, but maybe a debate.

Oh no, they were strongly disagreeing. Joseph had revealed some things – they got this from the Book of Mormon and then this is new information that is coming to them, and so they're trying to put it all together and they're saying, well Adam this, and another one will say, no, that makes no sense at all, a New Jerusalem going to be on the border of the Lamanites? Oh, no. It's got to be somewhere else. I can just imagine, I know you know and Taylor you know when we get a group of us together to discuss doctrine, someone once said, it's the rearrangement of ignorance. And I kind of like that idea that maybe they were sitting around talking about things that had been revealed to the prophet that they couldn't fully understand yet, and that's why the Lord needs to reveal some things to them.

So isn't this a beautiful principle for us today, is that you get this group, in this case it's six elders with Joseph Smith and they're in this discussion that Joseph now enters, and they're asking and debating. And at the end of that debate they say, that's where we're going to find the answer. It's not here, it's not there, we're going to turn to God. Look at the very first word of section 29: "Listen..." (Doctrine and Covenants 29:1). Listen to what? Not just to each other, in this case, it's "Listen to the voice of Jesus Christ, your Redeemer, the Great I Am" (Doctrine and Covenants

29:1). To take it back into this big, Hebrew Bible context, “the Great I Am” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:1). I created the world. I brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry land, listen to me; I'll tell you how this fits.

Right, well, and you've already discussed but in section 18 where the Lord himself says that through the scriptures you hear my voice. So, through the revelations, it is as if the Savior's going to stand there and just say – and I don't want to be too irreverent – but it would be like the six elders and the Prophet Joseph having the Savior with the white board and spelling it all out, but he has higher and better technology than is available to us today.

Yes indeed, thank heaven for that.

In fact, Tyler, if I could just for you at home, I have some little marks in my scriptures that I have marked verses 1 through 6. I've bracketed them out and I call that the prologue to the revelation, and it's setting the stage for what is going to follow starting over here in verse 7. And what I mean by that is, as you pointed out Tyler there, is where he's saying, listen to me. You've come to me for this revelation and then you see if you jump over to verse 6, as you are united in prayer, you're going to receive. And so, the Savior is honoring them for coming together.

But you know there are some beautiful promises to them individually even before we get to the revelation, and so you look right here where he says “...whose arm of mercy hath atoned for [them]” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:1). But jump over to verse 3 there: "Behold verily, verily I say unto you, that at this time your sins are forgiven you, therefore ye receive these things; but remember to sin no more, lest perils shall come upon you." As I look at that verse and I've thought about it where they come together and are seeking the will and guidance of the Lord in humble prayer, in mighty prayer, no wonder President Russell M. Nelson has asked us to have deeper and greater revelation in our lives. Have you thought about it? It's not that we're seeking for revelation there, not just to know about Zion, gathering, or Adam's role as Michael. It is as we come to know the voice of God and as we come to hear him, our sins are forgiven.

Beautiful.

And so, this prologue, setting the stage of saying to these men, and I think we're speaking to the Saints in general, is, your sins are forgiven you. I am speaking to you. And look at this part in verse 4: "...ye are chosen out of the world to declare my gospel with the sound of rejoicing, as with the voice of a trump. Lift up your hearts and be glad." This is the joyous prologue that's saying to them, you have been called. Now I'm going to tell you – and that's the next section, what you've been called to do.

And in the circumstances that are going to get pretty difficult, I think it's interesting that he opens up this section with such a sweet prologue. Absolutely. I mean look at the second half of verse 1, for instance. After introducing who he is in this – the Lord Jesus Christ – the second half says, "...whose arm of mercy hath atoned for your sins" (Doctrine and Covenants 29:1).

Yes, for your sins.

So, something that Kerry Muhlestein has taught beautifully is this dual side – this dual nature to Christ as far as you get this kind, gentle, loving, grace-filled Savior who can reach out and say, it's okay. I forgive you. Then as we turn the page over, we're going to see this very same being who is speaking in very forceful, very judgment- and justice-oriented terms and symbols and prophecies.

Section 29, probably when I was a missionary and maybe as a young seminary teacher, if I were to say, what do you remember out of section 29? I get eyeballs falling out. I get maggots and wild beasts devouring you. We get the apocalyptic view of things. And yet if you go back, he's set them up in the first six verses by talking about who they are, what his promises to them are, and then as you turn the page before you ever get to the bad stuff, the scary, apocalyptic, end-of-the-world stuff, he reminds them what they're supposed to do. Verse 7: "And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect." You're the ones that are going to do it. Okay? I have forgiven you of your sins at this point so that you can do this. So that you can have the power, the spirit to go forward and you are the ones that are going to be declaring the gospel and so we are going to gather people in, okay?

Now we come and before we get to the signs of those times, he then uses – look in verse 9. There are a couple of words that jump out of the page at me that I think were of concern to these six elders and the Prophet Joseph and was clearly the problem that the Saints were struggling with Hiram Page and they're going to be struggling with all throughout the history of the church, even up to 2021. And, quite frankly, they were struggling with it in the early, primitive church. Exactly. It's the same issue. And in fact, the Prophet Joseph refers to that here in section 29 when he talks about mine apostles that were with me there. So here are the words that jump out at me. See as you are reading along in your scriptures: "For the hour is nigh...", so I circle the word "nigh", "...and the day soon..." I circle the word "soon", "...when the earth is ripe and the proud and they that do wickedly shall be as stubble;" (Doctrine and Covenants 29:9). So, we've gone from the love of the Savior to the proud are going to be burned up, okay? "I will burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that wickedness shall not be upon the earth." Then verse 10: "For the hour is nigh," and soon to be fulfilled just like he's taught to his apostles.

So, let me interrupt you there Brent, and ask this obvious question: why, from your understanding of the scriptures and Church history, in the unfolding Restoration, why in the world would Jesus use phrases like "nigh", "soon", and in other places, 'I am at the door'? Why would he do that to people when now, we know this is 1830, we're talking nearly 200 years later and the Second Coming hasn't occurred yet. Why would he do that?

All right, well, this is my opinion, okay? So, let's put it up here, okay? Remember, your mission is the Gathering of Israel, okay? So, the Prophet Joseph Smith learns from the Lord, your mission and you have been called – you have been called and now sanctified that you can fulfill this mission. And now he's going to use – we have a prophet today kind of teaching the same

concept. I just kind of get the impression that President Nelson is teaching the same thing, 180, 190 years later. I believe “at the doors”, “eleventh hour”, you see those terms all throughout the scriptures. Why? Because “urgency”. It is not a revelation to these six elders and to the saints both in 1830 and in 2021 and in the future to give us the date, okay? So, it is not to emphasize the date as it is to emphasize the attitude toward our mission. So, you see the difference. We look at the words “nigh”, “soon”, “at the door”, at the “eleventh hour” and we immediately are thinking, that means this is going to be in July, or it might be in February, and we've got it narrowed down. And I think the Lord in ancient times and in modern times is saying, what matters is how you are approaching your mission.

That's beautiful, and the fact is that for every individual whether you are alive on the earth when he comes in the clouds of glory or whether you're in the grave, the fact is, if I live my life as if Jesus is going to come 200 years from now, it's going to be very different than if I live my life with what you're describing, Brent, the sense of urgency, that you know what? I can't just sit back and relax in the vineyard of the Lord in trying to build up the kingdom of God on the earth, this gathering effort. I've got to be on it because, quite frankly, I don't know how much longer I'm going to live, with pandemics, with natural disasters, with normal diseases, with accidents, with old age, with life. I don't know when my call will come to have to be prepared. And for all of us, this sense of urgency is really, really important as we move into these prophecies to say whether it happens in 2021 or in 2031 or in 2051, it doesn't matter.

In fact, isn't there a scripture in section 64 that –

Yes, let me just show you what I think because that is the same – that is exactly what the Lord was trying to say to his apostles, his disciples on the Mount of Olives that we read about in Matthew 24 and we also get the restoration view of that in Joseph Smith Matthew. So, if I were going to write on the board here, is we see that we have certain signs, okay? We have certain signs to see the progress of the work of the Lord, okay? So, it is not trying to say on this day it's going to happen but I am going to give you some signs and you can see it along the way. But if you use just the words “soon” or “nigh” - as dads here, and every parent has had that experience of taking a child maybe to Disneyland or to Lagoon or to any place where they are so excited to go – and they say to you those infamous words: how much further? Are we there yet? We hear the words ‘are we there yet’ and no matter what mom and dad say, it does not satisfy.

So, we can say, all right, now watch here, and you're going to see some signs, okay? And so what we're going to look at here is going to be not the distance. If I were to say, and when we took our children to Disneyland, and if I were going to say to them, we still have 575 miles to go, wouldn't mean a thing. But if you say, okay, if you count to 6000, or I want you to start seeing how many red cars there are on the road, anything we do to occupy the attention of our children would be in a way a – maybe it's an irreverent way of saying it – but it is a way to say, okay, you can occupy your time doing some things here by looking at the signs, but you really, the only way you know, the only way you know the date, is when you arrive. Okay? There's not going to

be knowing when the Second Coming is going to occur until it happens. So, in the meantime, we've got a responsibility, and that's where as you pointed out, Tyler, in section 64. With my students this issue comes up I emphasize over and over and over again what the Savior said, that no man knoweth the hour or day of my coming. And then I've had students say, yeah, but if you know the year. No, it doesn't work that way. You know it doesn't work that way, but in Matthew 24 – and I think we sometimes forget that in Matthew 24, there are a few verses about the signs, but there are three times more verses about preparing rather than on the signs.

So, look at section 64 as you brought it up here. In section 64, and it really goes well with the signs of section 29 and the burnings and the eyeballs falling out and all those graphic things that we're familiar with, but look at verse 23: "Behold, now it is called today until the coming of the Son of Man." Okay? So, we have, today is when the signs are happening, okay? And so, arrival is at the Second Coming when we know that the Lord is here and that he is establishing his millennial reign among us and then verse 23: "it is a day of sacrifice, and a day of tithing of my people; for he that is tithed shall not be burned at his coming." Now how many times we use that scripture and – but we think of burnings and those come up in the revelations over and over and over again, but look at verse 24. And I tell my students, after I taught them that the Savior has said, no man knows, and then I'll say, but I can tell you exactly when. And so, they'll say, well, Brother Top, you told us no man knows. I say, yeah, but I know. I mean and that's what everybody's kind of does. I know what Jesus said, but I really know, I've got it figured out. No. But this is from the Lord himself: "For after today cometh the burning" (Doctrine and Covenants 64:24). Okay, so there's going to be burning. We're going to talk about what that means. "...for verily I say, tomorrow all the proud and they that do wickedly shall be as stubble;" (Doctrine and Covenants 64:24). So, the Second Coming is going to be tomorrow. Today is everything that takes place until the Second Coming and the Second Coming's going to come tomorrow and so what does he say to do? Verse 25: "...if you believe me, you will labor while it is called today." Okay?

So, you go back to section 29, you go back there to section 29, all the signs that he's giving them is to see, this is going to come upon the wicked, but your job is to keep focused on gathering. Keep focused on your preparation to know.

That is such an important distinction to make because you tied us into Matthew 24 and Joseph Smith Matthew. It's very easy to get filled with fear or carried away with the apocalyptic disasters that are prophesied, but Jesus makes it very clear when he's talking to his disciples on the Mount of Olives, that Olivet discourse about the End Times, he clarifies why he's telling them about these signs that you've been describing that you're going to see along the way.

They're guide posts along the way.

The reason he's telling us about these terrible things that are going to happen is precisely so that we won't be scared when they start happening, so that we won't be running around saying, oh no, everything's just falling apart and the world's going to pot and is God not in charge? In fact, he's

saying, I gave you these signs so that as you see these terrible things and calamities being poured out, you can say, oh, yes, we're getting closer, we're getting closer, because he told us this was going to happen. And now it's happening.

I mean it's like when we tell our children as we're going to Disneyland, we're going to say, okay, when you start seeing Joshua trees that you don't see in Utah Valley, you know we're getting closer. Okay? When we start seeing the Southern California traffic, you know we're getting closer, but it's not until you pull up in front of Disneyland that you know you've arrived.

Beautiful.

I think the other thing is for us to remember that God, and the same is true in section 45, section 101, section 133, he's not just throwing bad things in there as just saying, okay, these are guideposts. They are. It is a direct compare and contrast. So, as we started in section 29 where he says, I've called you to your mission, I've forgiven you of your sins, and I want you to go out and call – declare repentance to the world. The reason why we want to declare repentance to the world, to our families, to our brothers and sisters of the world, is because if they don't repent, then these things happen. And so, it becomes not just a curiosity. It is, look at the terrible things that will befall the wicked, and if we love our fellow human brothers and sisters, we want to avert that by preaching the gospel and bringing them unto repentance as opposed to all of the terrible calamities that befall the wicked.

What I would rather have is, look in verse 13, and it says, "For a trump shall sound both long and loud, even as upon Mount Sinai, and all the earth shall quake, and they shall come forth – yea, even the dead which died in me, to receive a crown of righteousness, and to be clothed upon, even as I am, to be with me." So you can focus on the devouring fire. You can focus on the wars and rumors of wars, the abomination of desolation, the overflowing scourge, or you can focus on the crown of righteousness and to be clothed with Christ. And that is the point that I think he's saying to these six elders, is you have a responsibility to help avert this, not just sit back and watch it happen. Just watch the show and eat popcorn.

Isn't it interesting that back in verse 7, the second half, he defines who his elect are? You're going out to find them. Well, how do you know who they are? He says, "...for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts;" (Doctrine and Covenants 29:7). And then this initial call that we started with of gathering the house of Israel, look at what he says in verse 8: "Wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of this land, to prepare their hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth upon the wicked." So, you have this initial idea that we're going to find a center place of Zion, a gathering place upon the face of this land where we're going to bring people in physically and we're going to gather them.

Brothers and sisters, this was the – in the unfolding of the Restoration through the history – this was the initial effort for decades, and then there came this time when the Church is now

established and prepared and big enough organizationally, where we're now a world-wide organization. It's not just a gather to Kirtland or gather to Missouri or gather to Nauvoo, or gather to Salt Lake, come to this one place, because that was the call in those early days. Then they realize, wait, this message is to bless – the gathering effort is to bless every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, and they're not all supposed to come to Utah. So, what is the gathering point, Brent?

Zion, stakes of Zion, there you go. Zion in the heart. In fact, what you pointed out there, Tyler, where it says gathered in one place. What was the purpose of the gathering was the sanctification of the people. As I pointed out the Prophet Joseph focuses about the object of the gathering is ultimately going to be a temple and the ordinances of the temple, etc. And so as you look at it, where you pointed out that those that are righteous hear my voice and harden not their hearts, if you draw a line straight across the page there to verse 17, if you're reading your electronic scriptures, my diagrams won't help you much, okay? But in verse 17 look at how he defines the wicked. He says: ..."I will take vengeance upon the wicked, for they will not repent;" (Doctrine and Covenants 29:17). Okay? Then you turn the page over again, clear at the very, very end in verse 44: "And they that believe not unto eternal damnation; for they cannot be redeemed from their spiritual fall, because they repent not. For they love darkness rather than light, and their deeds are evil, and they receive their wages of whom they list to obey."

So, what this is doing whether it was for Kirtland or Independence, the purpose of this Zion, whether it's the stakes of Zion in Utah or whether it is in Poland or in Liberia, Nigeria, the purpose of this is for us to hear the voice of the Lord, to be sanctified, to be purified. And ultimately, Zion, gathering to Zion is what is going to have us clothed with robes of righteousness, with crowns upon their heads. And so that contrast – wicked will not hear the voice of the Lord, will not repent. Righteous are those that will hear him and follow him and then through him be clothed in his righteousness and in his mercy.

I love it. Now let's take a step back. We've set the stage and we've talked a lot about it, now let's dive straight into it. The signs, as you've described them, signs of the times that show us, hey, we're getting closer, he was at the very doors, now his hand is on the doorknob or he's turning the doorknob, we're even closer.

I call it in my classes, we're nigher. We're nigher now.

We're nigher today than we were yesterday. So we set the stage with trying to prepare the way for these robes of righteousness, to be clothed in them or to be endowed, to put on that robe of righteousness like we've been talking about in previous weeks, and with crowns upon their heads. Look at verse 14: "But, behold, I say unto you that before this great day shall come," there's your first apocalyptic sign, "the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall be turned into blood, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and there shall be greater signs in heaven above and in the earth beneath." And then he goes on to the weeping and wailing and the hailstorms destroy the crops of the earth. Question for you, Brent, is do you see this – sometimes we get into this

mode in our scripture study of, you read some text and we want to pigeonhole that text into one singular event. The question is, is it possible that these prophecies are kind of like Isaiah's writing where it can be dualistic, where it can be fulfilled multiple times at increasing depth?

Yeah. And I think you could also – I think that's a great example there, but then you could also add these words: “literal” and “figurative”. Okay. So, as we're talking about the destruction of the wicked, as we're talking about why we're going to gather them, is it multiple times? Is it figurative? Is it literal? And I've got a one-word answer: yes, exactly, it is. And we see that over and over again, and I think the Lord is trying to say to us, ultimately, those that will not repent are going to be destroyed.

I think what we're seeing is the Lord is giving us these signs to say, I'm serious about this. I'm very serious. In fact, if I could just share this thought from President M. Russell Ballard. He says, can we use scientific data? Because I've had people try to identify where does this fit on the timeline? All of us have – well, now instead of it being a black board, a white board with our power point, everybody has a Plan of Salvation chart. We have it all mapped out and in fact, section 29 has everything on it right in section 29, and we want to map it all out, but it doesn't work that way because it is happening all throughout time. And it's happening in every generation like you pointed out here, and what is it for? Is it to say, hey, it's going to be 13 years from now, or is it saying, hey, I mean what I say and you need to be at your work?

But listen to what Elder Ballard says. We had the Mayan calendar. Every time we have some new event, even with the pandemic, is this the overflowing scourge? President Ballard says it so beautifully. He says, can we use scientific data to extrapolate that the Second Coming is likely to occur during the next few years? Or the next decade? Or the next century? Not really. President Ballard then continues, I am called as one of the apostles to be a special witness of Christ in these exciting, trying times. I do not know when he is going to come again. As far as I know, none of my brethren in the Council of the Twelve or even the First Presidency know. And I would humbly suggest to you, that if we do not know, then nobody knows, no matter how compelling their arguments or how reasonable their calculations. And I think that's what the Lord is trying to say to us is, there will indeed be very specific signs, both positive and negative. We like to focus on the eyeballs, but holy cow, the Restoration of the Gospel. Do you know that it may very well be that Come Follow Me, home Church, the changes that we have seen in recent years are more significant signs of the times than the eyeballs and the wars and rumors of wars. But we don't like to hear that. We want to focus on the sensational.

We want the fantastical.

Exactly and rather, we want to know the “when” rather than the consistently having a sense of urgency of being righteous and doing the Lord's work in gathering. And so, the answer, that's a long, long answer, is it literal? Yes. Is it figurative? Sometimes. Is it multiple applications? Absolutely. And the Lord is trying to say to us, be ready. “...labor while it is called today” (Doctrine and Covenants 64:25).

Love that. Look at verse 23: "And the end shall come, and the heaven and the earth shall be consumed and pass away, and there shall be a new heaven and a new earth." So now he's talking about, if we were to do a timeline, we were to say there is going to be the Second Coming that's going to occur sometime. He will come, absolutely, in the clouds of heaven. And then there will be this millennial reign where he's on the earth reigning for a thousand years, towards the end of that millennium, there's going to be an increase in wickedness, and then he says that, verse 23, "...the end shall come, and the heaven and the earth shall be consumed and pass away....".

So, at this point, notice what his promise is to all of us. Verse 24: "For all...". What percentage is that?

Even with growing up in southeastern Idaho and taking arithmetic there, that's 100 percent.

I think that doesn't leave very much wiggle room. "For all old things shall pass away, and all things shall become new, even the heaven and the earth, and all the fullness thereof, both men and beasts, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea; And not one hair, neither mote, shall be lost, for it is the workmanship of mine hand" (Doctrine and Covenant 29:24-25). Brent, what would you say to somebody who maybe isn't going to be living at that point? But they're living right here sometime pre-Second Coming. This promise of "...all old things shall pass away..." is not just an allusion to the ultimate, literal event here (Doctrine and Covenants 29:24). But what about somebody who is waking up every morning and quite frankly, they're just struggling to get out of bed because they are wrestling with depression and everything is just gray and they have no motivation to live and they're struggling with this mortal tabernacle that they've been given, what would you say to them?

Well, I've been there and done that. You know there were days when I served as mission president when that alarm would go off real early in the morning and I thought, this is kind of like Groundhog Day, you know, it's going to be the same thing, day after day after day. And that, I think, is one of the great challenges of mortality, is that sometimes it's not the catastrophic and cataclysmic events that try our faith as the consistent labors of life that try our faith and that we just keep working. But if I have this mortal body I can look forward to the day when old things, this old thing, is going to become new. And I've had so many students say, well, are we in the prime of our life when we are resurrected? And the answer is no, we are so much better than ever in the prime of our lives. We become new and some will be caught up to meet the Savior there, those that have died will be resurrected there, those that live and are twinkled during the millennium, that will become new, and so the Lord is promising us, the righteous are going to be transformed into new creatures in Christ.

I love it. This promise to me. I guess what I'm trying to get at here, is sometimes we put so much emphasis on the fantastical, the apocalyptic, the Zion, pure society, perfect society, this thousand-year millennial reign, and we put so much focus on future events that we have no control over, that sometimes we overlook those daily discipleship steps of faith that Christ is asking us to make today. Where – I used the example of depression there. What about the mom

who wakes up and has the child with either a mental or a physical or an emotional disability and it's just heavy, and it's hard, or the husband who is struggling to find work or the individual who is struggling to find work and provide for their physical needs, and what about the person who's been given a Church calling that they feel absolutely overwhelmed by? It's – to me, this is the power of section 29, is not in the big, huge eschatological, the apocalyptic side of things, but it's in the daily side of things to know that I have a God in heaven who has power to make big, grand things happen, the sword side. He's capable, he's on my side if I choose to enter that covenant and stay in that covenant with him. But I also have this God who has made promises to me today, not just to those people at the end of the millennium or the people who happen to be on the earth at the Second Coming, whenever that occurs, but the promises are, “...all old things [are going to] pass away...” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:24).

I am not going to be tested with physical, mental, emotional, spiritual tests of mortality for the rest of time. I'm going to do the best I can with his help to endure well, knowing that then the promises are sure that all of these old things are going to be made new.

You know it really is that day-to-day – and you know you think of our little children, that we don't see a lot of the growth on a day-to-day basis, but then when we take them to grandma and grandpa's house after the pandemic and they haven't been able to see them for a long time, they'll say, oh my gosh, you've grown so much. And I think our Heavenly Father is saying the same thing to us. We don't see our spiritual change. We see the old thing. But we are changing just day by day by day and by our faith we are being clothed in righteousness, and ultimately, when that day comes, we're going to be surprised at what a glorious day it is. We tend to focus on “the great and dreadful day of the Lord”, as opposed to thinking of the great and glorious day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5-6).

And I think in section 29 that's exactly what the Lord is trying to say to those six elders. You want your family, your friends, you want everyone to have the glorious, not the dreadful.

Amen.

You know one of the things, and you talk about signs, and it's a temptation again as you've pointed out, to focus on all of the signs and the guideposts that are pointing us up to that event and even the conditions of that thousand years. And maybe what will help me get through that day with all of those challenges, are looking for the signs of God's hand in my life that day. You know, instead of just looking for the big things. I mean if I could just share with you one quick experience: as I served as a mission president. The very first day we were in the mission home, the phone just started ringing and it was nonstop. I could set my watch by when the phone started ringing at nine o'clock at night and at about seven o'clock in the morning, and problem after problem after problem and there were so many challenges, I started having panic attacks every time that phone rang because I knew it was nothing good. And yet when I asked our missionaries, when I asked the sisters and the elders to call me each day, when they had seen the hand of God and saw a miracle in their life that day, those phone calls were delightful. And what

happened was the whole culture of the mission changed because instead of focusing on the problems and the bad things, their focus was on how God is blessing and guiding me in this moment.

Now let's turn the page over. Look at verse 30. This is really important. I think he's making a distinction here. To me it ties into Isaiah when he says, "...my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are [my] ways [your] ways, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). I'm on a different plane of intelligence and of vision and of knowledge and power than you. Look at verse 30: "But remember that all my judgments are not given unto men; and as the words have gone forth out of my mouth even so shall they be fulfilled, that the first shall be last, and that the last shall be first in all things whatsoever I have created by the word of my power, which is the power of my Spirit." He opens up by saying, all of my judgments are not given unto men. I'm not giving you all the details, it's not all right here, I'm giving you enough to create a firm foundation for your faith to move forward. But it is going to require faith. I'm not giving you all of my knowledge. That isn't the message of the gospel.

And then he goes on to speak about "...the first shall be last, and ... last shall be first...", being this creation (Doctrine and Covenants 29:30).

That word in verse 30, right where he says, "I have created", that is the transition (Doctrine and Covenants 29:30). That's where I put a little bracket mark, because that now is shifting gears in this whole revelation.

Now isn't it fascinating how if you understand the historical setting, it unlocks some of these verses. The JST project begins in June of 1830. Now we're three months after that. Well, the first stuff he received was Moses 1 through 6. That was the creation and fall story, absolutely, that's coming through right here.

Yeah, in fact that is where if you look at verse 31, that really has the same language as what you have right here in Moses. And if you look down in your footnotes you see that cross reference to that statement where he says, I created all things both spiritual and temporal. And so now we're getting an allusion – maybe more than an allusion – a very direct reference to that plan of salvation even before the world began.

Verse 36 is probably when it's talking about the war in heaven. This is really the first time in the Restoration that we are seeing the doctrine of pre-existence this clearly taught. And so, you're seeing that plan of salvation and our pre-mortal existence, the spiritual creation, the war in heaven, then we are introducing Adam and Eve into the garden which, as we talked about beforehand, was part of the discussion of these six elders that really leads to this revelation.

Isn't that interesting how he's describing that pre-mortal conflict, that war in verse 36 where "[the devil] rebelled against me," and what was it (Doctrine and Covenants 29:36)? I want your honor. I want all the glory. And what's the bottom line in 36? Because of their agency.

They used their agency to rebel against God. Really, what we're learning here is that he wants that glory, he wants to depose God. It is an open rebellion against God and Christ.

Which is so ironic because if you have faith in Christ and follow the plan of Heavenly Father, what is the promised reward? It's to become a joint heir with Christ and to receive all that he has. You're given a throne, you're exalted, but that isn't enough for Satan. He doesn't want to be a God; he wants to be the God.

When he says thine honor, it is that – it is the rebellion, it is a usurpation of God's power. And again, I love that phrase, it was because of their agency. It wasn't a passive rebellion; this was an open, active, agency-driven knowledge-driven turning against God in all ways.

They're not down in hell today sitting there thinking, what happened to us? How did we get here?

It was just a one, bad vote. I just had one bad day.

Now look at me.

It doesn't work that way.

Yeah, "...there is a place prepared for them...", he says "from the beginning, which place is hell", which they chose (Doctrine and Covenants 29:38). They chose this.

Now let's go back really quickly to verse 34 to set the stage for the other part of the discussion that they're probably having regarding the fall of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden question because keep in mind you've got these six elders coming in from various backgrounds of religious teachings and trying to make sense of this new stuff that we're getting regarding the Fall because, quite frankly, for 5000 X number of years, it's been a belief that the Fall is this terrible tragedy, this grave mistake that Adam and Eve made, and now you get kind of a different flavor on what's going on in Eden.

Well – and you couple that with what the Book of Mormon teaches in 2nd Nephi. It is – that is really throwing them on their heads because it is so 180 degrees different than what they had believed and had been taught. I had a really unique experience like that. And every semester prior to the pandemic, we would have a group of evangelical students come to visit BYU and we would have an interfaith dialogue group with Latter-day Saint BYU students, and one day one of my students that was in the interfaith dialogue group came into me and said, Brother Top, you need to come in here. We are at a logjam. We can't break this. And I said, what are you guys talking about? And he said, well, we're talking about Adam and Eve. I said that's the problem. That's the problem is because you're talking at it from the Book of Mormon and modern revelation viewpoint, and they're looking at what the Bible says. And that then explains exactly why those six elders are feeling like Adam's spiritually dead; he's created all this terrible mess for us, and now we're learning some other things here.

And now we see that the Creation, the Fall, and the Infinite Atonement of Jesus Christ were put into place as three pillars upholding the plan of our Heavenly Father before the very foundation of the world. That's right, because that Fall was not a mistake. It was pre-planned. Exactly, and I've loved that, is that it has to be that way. And you look at that, that God has prepared it, is otherwise, Jesus becomes a backup plan. And you can't imagine the Savior as the backup plan. He is the plan. He's the center.

So, it's fascinating. Let me just point out one little thing here. If you turn in your Book of Mormon back to 2nd Nephi chapter 2, this great chapter where Father Lehi is teaching Jacob, his son, about agency, about the fall of Adam and Eve, and, quite frankly, sharing some truths that if all you had was the Book of Genesis and the Bible, what it talks about coming into this, 2nd Nephi 2 is a bombshell that just explodes on the scene of the Fall. Look at how he describes this in verse – let's go to verse 5: "And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever." You'll notice here an interesting connection. Father Lehi is talking about two laws, a temporal law and a spiritual law. And by the temporal law they were cut off" (2 Nephi 2:5). Adam and Eve broke a temporal law of the Garden of Eden which was don't eat that fruit if you want to stay here, to use Joseph Fielding Smith's interpretation which I really like in this context. They broke a temporal law that was temporary, it had time – tempo attached to it. It was specific for Eden. And they chose – with their agency they chose to break that law, and in breaking that law they then are promised by the Lord they're going to die physically but also spiritually.

It's such a beautiful thing that he's now introducing this plan of salvation and so then as you get through it and they, Adam and Eve, over in verse 41 because of the transgression they become "...spiritually dead which is the first death...". And that becomes the source of much of the discussion of those six elders, but ultimately, the bottom line is in verse 42: "... I say unto you that I, the Lord God, gave unto Adam and unto his seed, that they should not die as to the temporal death." Well, wait a second, we all are going to die, so it's clearly talking about this permanent temporal death and they're not going to die a permanent spiritual death because, look at right there, "I, the Lord God, should send forth angels to declare unto them," the Plan of Salvation and we know that happens, through "repentance and redemption, through faith on the name of mine Only Begotten Son. And thus did I, the Lord God, appoint unto man the days of his probation – that by his natural death [the temporal] he might be raised in immortality unto eternal life," that deals with the spiritual, "...even as many as would believe;" (Doctrine and Covenants 29:43). Then that becomes the transition again for those that won't repent. They're the ones that are going to suffer because they choose to follow the devil rather than to follow light and truth. And so, I think that really helps us to see the Plan of Salvation in a big, panoramic view.

Isn't that amazing that, to tie that in to the events immediately after the Fall, they're driven out of the Garden of Eden, they build that altar, and you'll notice in the Moses account it's after many days that they've been performing sacrifices on this altar. They know what to do and they know how to do it; they just don't have any clue as to why. Why do I have to perform? This is a pretty graphic thing to have to kill an animal and burn it on an altar. And isn't it fascinating that it's an angel who comes to them to teach them. That angel teaches through a question. "Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord" (Moses 5:6)? And Adam and Eve's response is clearly, we don't have any idea other than the reason why we're doing this is because the Lord commanded us. And then the angel clarifies, you're doing this in a symbolic way to be able to point you forward to the ultimate sacrifice of the Son, the Only Begotten Son. And everything you do in life is going to be focusing you on that perfect Son of God who has the power to cleanse you, forgive you, purify you and bring you to be presented spotless before the Father someday.

And you know, I think the section ends with another one of those bombshell revelations that once again came from the Book of Mormon, and the beautiful promise that the Lord gives which again is revolutionary in 1830. It is absolutely revolutionary that little children cannot sin. As you look in verse 47, "...for the power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable...". I think as we are looking at these verses – and the same thing when we studied in Moroni in Mormon's words, but how revolutionary this is and how wonderful it is for parents to know that those that are mentally handicapped, those that die before the age of accountability are alive in Christ and that though they cannot exercise their agency in the same way as others, it says that they – they are alive in Christ. "[They] are redeemed from the foundation of the world through mine Only Begotten;" (Doctrine and Covenants 29:46). That again brings back the beautiful atoning sacrifice and mercy of Jesus Christ for little children that play a different role in this plan of salvation, but it brings us back to the very first verses of section 29 when he says to those six elders, you now are clean. I can choose to listen to the Father and the Son and follow him. And I think that's really the message of section 29, and I would just say, don't get bogged down in the middle part that you forget to look at the bookends and those bookends are the mercy of Jesus Christ.

Now to finish this off and to kind of summarize everything from today, the way I see it is you have the gospel of Jesus Christ and the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ that we're going to diagram symbolically like this. Joseph Smith in the first vision he gets a fairly major part of the reality and then with Moroni you get more. And his knowledge and the keys and the authority and the priesthood and then the Book of Mormon comes and this circle of knowledge of what Joseph knew compared to the expansive nature of what's going to ultimately be revealed, I love the fact that we're seeing this unfolding restoration.

And then you get people coming into the church, including Joseph, who have some ideas that they think that's part of the truth. And then we learn from revelation, no, that's not part, we've got to change that, and others then we say, well part is, part isn't. And it's this growing body of

knowledge and experience. And, brothers and sisters, instead of getting frustrated with what we don't know, what hasn't been clearly distinguished or revealed yet, our invitation is, follow the prophets that have been appointed by God. Spend more time reading your scriptures when it comes to questions of signs of the times and Second Coming and the Millennium and apocalyptic kinds of things than you do on Google. Follow the prophets as this expanding revelation continues to unfold, not just collectively with the Church, but individually in your own life as you go back to those things that you know.

I think that's really well said, Tyler. I appreciate that, and you know, if I could have just a closing, you know, testimony of section 29, maybe as I read this revelation I ought to have as my theme, instead of the signs of the times and trying to figure out all of that, maybe I ought to have as the theme of section 29 for me, for Brent Top, is verse 3: "...at this time, your sins are forgiven you, therefore receive these things." But I love this and hope that all of our listeners today and all of us as we study section 29 will look at this phrase, "...remember to sin no more..." (Doctrine and Covenants 29:3). That, I think, is the great message of section 29. I can't maybe understand all of God's workings in this panoramic view, but man oh man, I can't misunderstand that invitation.

Amen to that. Brothers and sisters, just know that Jesus Christ lives. He loves you and he will come again someday, and at the end of the day we can all apply what Brent just pointed out. I can try a little harder to be a little better at repenting and sinning no more today. Know that you're loved and we leave that with you in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.