

## Come Follow Me Class Insights 29 D&C Sec. 77 – 80

I'm Taylor and I'm Tyler. This is Book of Mormon Central's Come Follow Me Insights. Today, Doctrine and Covenants sections 77 through 80.

So 77 is a very unique section in that Joseph is working his way through the translation of the Bible, and he comes to the book of Revelation and he has a few questions for the Lord, so he's able to sit down in a - almost a Q and A, that's how the section was organized with the Lord, asking these very specific questions. Now before we get into any of those specifics, let's step back for a second and look at what is the book of Revelation? You'll notice, just, this is a really technical point, lots of times you'll hear it referred to as the Revelations, with an s, but it's actually just the Revelation of St. John. Now that's in the King James Version. Many of our Christian friends out there in their versions of the New Testament, it's actually not called the Revelation of St. John, it's called the Apocalypse, and so -- and to me this word makes this like, oh my gosh, the Apocalypse – the end of times, look out, it's terrible, but it's just, in the time of John it literally just meant the unveiling, to reveal- it's to reveal, it's to make clear, to show something, and that's – that's what he's trying to do.

Now keep in mind that there are all kinds of layers of scriptural interpretation. Let me give you an example. Did you – I'm going to use a different color and I'll write big here. We've used this example last year in a different way, but I want to demonstrate it again. I want you to pay close attention to this right here, and in your mind's eye I want you to start coming up with descriptions. Describe this. Adjectives, descriptor words. What is this? Now, most of you are probably scratching your head thinking this is a really silly activity, but in your mind's eye you're saying, well, it's a musical instrument and it has keys, some of them are black, some of them are white; it's got the scale A through G, 88 keys on that keyboard, it's – the hammers hit the strings and the strings – you're giving me all these things in your mind as you're thinking through this. But you'll notice what I did to you. I put this on the board and I said, describe this. And what did probably 99.9% of you do? You interpreted symbols and you jumped to the meaning behind the symbols. These are just red letters on a white board. That's it. That's all that is. It happens to be in English, we've all gotten together societally and decided that's a P.

And it sounds like P – and this is an I and an A and an N and an O, and I happened to draw them all in capitals, in upper case letters, so if we were to try this exercise again and I started over and I finished writing this over to here and I said, now describe this to me, the only accurate way to answer that request would be, well, Tyler, you've got five letters, P-I-A-N-O and it forms the sound in English of piano and we've all agreed that those five letters, when put in that order, represent that musical instrument that you were all describing.

Now, here's my point. When you put on lenses and you look through those lenses at certain things, those lenses help bring into focus, they help you – they help you make sense of whatever it is that you're looking at, that's what symbolic revelation like the Apocalypse or the Revelation of St. John is. It's a lens through which we can see things that otherwise we might miss – some – some symbolic meaning. Now here's the thing when it comes to scriptural interpretation. You can always, 100 percent of the time, you can – you can liken any scripture, in fact, Nephi - Nephi

invited us to liken all scriptures unto us that it might be for our profit and our learning. That's 100 percent. So you're always safe to do this, but occasionally, the scriptures will leave it open for a literal interpretation, and so it's fascinating as we open up section 77 to see how the Lord will at times give us a very literal interpretation and other times he'll give us the symbolic meaning of what's written there.

Here's the point. Whenever you're in scriptural interpretation mode, when you're looking at symbols and saying, hmm, here are the ways I see that, versus Taylor, from that angle, may look at the very same set of symbols and say, really? I see this. The key with symbolic, scriptural likening and interpretation is to recognize and be – quite frankly -- be okay with and comfortable with there being layers of possible meaning that can be uncovered like a mine or like an onion, layers that just keep unfolding, and the struggle is to not become so fixated on our own personal interpretation of a scriptural symbol or passage or doctrine, for that matter, that we become dogmatic. How would you define dogmatic?

It's dogs that automatically just say things that are just not always grounded in reality.

Okay, now that's not the dictionary definition. Dogmatism is to – to be so set and fixed in a particular idea that you leave no room for anybody else, and you say this is the only way to read that and everybody else is wrong, versus saying hmm, if God didn't make a symbol absolutely clear and he hasn't revealed through prophets exactly what that symbol means, that implies that he's left us free to think, to study, to look at the Greek, look at the Aramaic, look at the Hebrew, if it's in the Old Testament.

Or look at the cultural context; look at the history, because nothing exists out of context. Again, we don't think about piano in context, but those of us who know English, there is context here, and we all have that association, and most of it's just subconscious. It's important to note that the book of Revelation, as a literary book, is actually full of symbols, whereas other scriptural books may not have as much symbolism. Let's do a quick contrast. Let's take 3 Nephi 11. Is 3 Nephi 11 simply just full of lots of bizarre or unexpected symbolism that is left open to lots of interpretation, or is that a scripture that's intended to be very clearly expressing the truth that Jesus came and taught the core gospel principles to his people in the Americas?

So our focus here is primarily on the book of Revelation and the symbolism, but there are other scriptures out there where we have to pay attention to the fact that symbols might have multiple interpretations. But there are some scriptures like – there's not – when we talk about faith, repentance, baptism, and the Holy Ghost, that isn't something that's open to multiple interpretation, even though there's many ways of deriving insights. So I just want to make that clear.

That's beautiful, and to add to this a concept I learned from Bob Millett years ago is this distinction between – as we try to define our terms -- the difference between an interpretation and application. I love the way that Bob taught that usually – usually, traditionally, there's only one actual interpretation in its historical setting, whether it's Jesus teaching it or a prophet sharing something, they have something very specific in mind that they're trying to communicate, they're trying to teach that to us, one interpretation with multitude of – a multitude

of applications. You can have as many applications as you do people, in fact you can have more, because each person can have more than one way that they have been able to apply or liken a particular scripture to themselves.

So, what we're going to be getting section 77 is Joseph Smith asking these questions of God, getting some answers. Joseph in his role as a prophet, seer, and revelator who holds keys of the scriptures, their interpretation and as a seer to be able to bring to light things which have been hidden, perhaps they've been hidden under the symbol itself or because people haven't understood the historical context to be able to understand it literally yet. So Joseph is going to be getting answers to his questions from those first eleven chapters of the book of Revelation, and we're going to get the interpretation that God gives him as a prophet, seer, and revelator. But that doesn't mean just because we have the interpretation given to us by the Lord doesn't mean that you're still not free to look for additional ways that that could be applicable to you in other aspects of your life. This isn't intended to be a stop thinking kind of a chapter. Rather, it's more of a - oh, fascinating, if that means that, then how could that more powerfully apply to me? It should cause us to want to dig deeper and study more and think - think broader and deeper than we ever have before. That's what scripture study should do. It should - it should be opening our minds up to the heavens, not necessarily outward but upward to God as we go.

So there are some really great things about this section, D&C 77, and--that teach us some important principles. First of all, God does not reveal the full interpretation of the New Testament book of Revelation. It's actually just small bits and pieces, a few particularly confusing passages, and there are many in there. It's also interesting that Joseph Smith spent his time focusing on doctrines in the book of Revelation, even though there were times that he sought for specific meanings and specific interpretations around symbols. And I'll share just a brief story. Many years ago, as a home teacher I remember visiting with a man who was very diligent, seeking to study the scriptures and show his faith in God that way. I remember having this kind of long conversation; he just felt so much despair at not being able to understand the book of Revelation, and he felt like I'm not a good Christian, I can't be a good member of the Church, my testimony's not very good, I just - I feel like a loser. It was interesting. I felt the impression from the Spirit to say, God does not expect you to master the symbolism of the book of Revelation. He expects you to master the basics of the gospel, and God is not going to hold you liable at the pearly gates and St. Peter saying, all right, let's just do the multiple choice quiz, but see if you can figure out and identify correctly what all these symbols mean. And again, we are not required, if God has not revealed the final interpretation of a confusing or a very symbolic set of scripture, then we are not condemned for things that we do not know. But far more importantly there is beautiful doctrine that we can know, and when there's an opportunity that God has taken to explain his symbols, that can help provide some insight, and we just - more than anything kind of want to lower the temperature and not make any of us feel like we have got to master this book before we can get a temple recommend. I don't think that's a temple recommend question.

Can you imagine getting to the pearly gates and having this final exam there?

I would fail.

And the last, you know, 40 questions all come from the book of Revelation – yeah. Not fun. Here's – here's the conclusion to this introduction. Joseph Smith in 1843 from his view then, he said “the book of Revelation is one of the clearest books God ever caused to be written,”<sup>1</sup> that this – this is such a simple book, but the grand irony is, in another time, in a different talk, he realized that what was really clear to him who is a seer, who's had all kinds of visions of the eternities, of God, of the devil, of the degrees of glory, of ancient prophets – to him, he's - he has been bathed in this kind of life, this revelatory life, and so for him it's really simple to look at this stuff and say, oh, well, that's what that means and that's what that means and be able to work through it simply. But then at another time he realized that some of the missionaries who were going out were spending so much time in the book of Revelation, debating and discussing with people about what some of these symbols might mean or what they might not mean and sometimes it would probably turn into a Bible bash – trying to predict things based on the numbers and just doing numbers, messing up the math, it's like that is not why that book was given for you to come and run some kind of a calendar test about when God's coming. It's like actually, God wants you to love him and love his children, not spend time worrying about mathematical problems.

Yeah, so Joseph said in another occasion he said something like, I just wish the brethren, the elders, would leave that book alone. So understand that it's pretty complex, this - the reception history of this book, even in – even in our dispensation of the gospel. Just as a side note, Taylor talked about how some people are using this book to do math and to line up these symbols and try to put a date on the calendar as to when Jesus is going to come again, combined with some passages in the Old Testament and looking for the convergence of some of those symbols coming together. Can we just suggest that you can sum up the entirety of the book of Revelation in two words? I heard this from a biblical scholar. He said the way to summarize the Apocalypse or the book of Revelation in two words – that's the book. It's God wins. Satan is bringing all these efforts, there are all these attempts to try to overthrow the work and the power of God, but as you read the book of Revelation, put on those lenses and you're going to see, oh, maybe it is simpler to interpret than this really complex, cryptic puzzle that God's trying to get you to put together in strange ways. Just focus on God wins, Satan loses – this guy who's bringing the attack – and you're going to watch him do his work through time.

Keep in mind also, Nephi in the Book of Mormon had the fulness of this same revelation of St. John, and he was told in the Book of Mormon, don't write any more than what you've already done because I have appointed my servant John to write that in his day, and this is 600 years before John's going to be born.

This is just a great insight. Imagine going to a soccer match and you know already in advance which team's going to win. Would you want to spend time arguing with your fellow fans about when the referee is going to blow the last whistle, because you know in soccer the official matches, there is not an official clock. Only the referee knows when the game's going to end. But could you imagine if all the fans spent their time distracted not on the fact that their teams going to win, and enjoying that truth, but debating when is the ref finally going to call? Good analogy.

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<sup>1</sup> *Documentary History of the Church*, vol. 5, p. 342.

You completely miss the excitement and the joy of the game and looking forward to the after party. So as humans, it's funny, like it's interesting, 2000 years of Christian interpretation, many people have missed this message and instead focused on let's look at all those numbers, when is the ref going to call that whistle? It's like it's irrelevant because we already know the match who's going to win, so take hope, take heart, God is in charge, and he will win. Let's just jump in and take a look at some of these.

Let's jump in, because this section is filled with question-answer, question-answer. Let's dive in. So our first question comes from John 4 verse 6 where he speaks of this sea of glass. What is the sea of glass? So I'm going to just number these. So what is God's interpretation?

Okay, so it says, "It is the earth, in its sanctified, immortal, and eternal state" (D&C 77:1). Think about that. You have all of these Old Testament prophecies that say things like, who shall abide the day of his coming, because his coming will be a day of burning, a day of purifying and refining. Well, what happens when he comes, the earth is turned into a terrestrial state, we're told in section 64 and other places that the wicked will be burned or consumed at his coming; they won't be able to abide his presence, and then at the end of the millennium we're told that the earth will then become the celestial kingdom for us. Did you catch that? God isn't coming down to this earth to take us off to heaven, God is bringing heaven here, and he's going to turn this earth into our heaven so it becomes a sea of glass in that interpretation.

I think we shared this before, but the word "fire" and the word "pure" actually come from the same root word. So if you want to become pure, as God is pure, you have to pass through the fire, the fire of God's love and goodness. Now we actually just saw in section 76 that the number of people who are really going to be thrust out, sons of perdition, is very, very few, that God is so merciful that he has different levels of glory that he can help purge people into.

So that's a beautiful interpretation for the end, but again, when you come back to the likening or the application for today, and the various ways that it can be manifest in my life today, isn't it powerful to think through those words from the hymn, "How Firm A Foundation"?<sup>2</sup>

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,  
My grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply.  
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design  
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine."

That's – it's not just – sometimes we get so focused on "end times" that we forget about "means times". We're living a means to that end and let's focus on today. Today is what I have, and I have control over today. I don't have a lot of control over tomorrow and the end times, but I can pass through fiery trials pleading with God to further refine me.

Maybe I should make one more comment about this, about focusing on today. Let's go back to that soccer analogy. Imagine if the players stopped to take the time to wonder when the ref is

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<sup>2</sup> Keen, Robert, and J. Ellis. "How Firm a Foundation." *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1889, [www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/hymns/how-firm-a-foundation?lang=eng](http://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/hymns/how-firm-a-foundation?lang=eng).

going to call the whis- blow the whistle, and they keep bugging him about it instead of playing the game. What's the chance that actually – now, God's going to win the game, but can you imagine what would happen if you stopped playing soccer and your team all gets around, starts calculating the time and the other team's still playing? And you're taking your time discussing when's the whistle going to blow?

It's not great. Yeah. So now onto the second question. "What are we to understand by the four beasts, spoken of in the same verse? They are figurative expressions, used by the Revelator, John, in describing heaven, the paradise of God, the happiness of man, and of beasts, and of creeping things, and of the fowls of the air; that which is spiritual being in the likeness of that which is temporal; and that which is temporal in the likeness of that which is spiritual; the spirit of man in the likeness of his person, as also the spirit of the beast, and every other creature which God has created" (D&C 77:2). It's pretty fascinating that God seeks to glorify and save everything that he can that he's created.

As we look around the world, you have everything from the entirety of the plant kingdom, from the simplest plant structures all the way up to the mightiest forests and trees, and then in the animal kingdom you have everything from the smallest microscopic – you know – single-cell organisms that are alive, all the way up through the insects and then the animals, and then – and then you have people. Brothers and sisters, God created all life in all of its varieties, even the earth itself is spoken of in scripture as a living organism, a living being, and yet there's something different about men and women; there's something different about the daughters and the sons of heavenly parents. They're more than just creations; they're offspring. That's the difference here. But isn't it beautiful the fact that God who gave life to all these animals, he still has joy in saving them to the greatest degree possible within the realm that they were created as well, but they won't be exalted – they can't become like – like our heavenly parents because they're not offspring; they're creatures, they were created by, but they didn't come from as begotten children of heavenly parents. And that's what sets us apart as children of God and, quite frankly, as we see that God has or sees beautiful value in the beasts and in the earth and in creation, we do have major responsibility to take care of and be appropriate in our stewardship over the creative elements that God has placed into our hands, that we're responsible for as well.

Now onto the third question, he extends a further question regarding the beasts. Are they “limited to individual beasts, or do they represent classes or orders?” (D&C 77:3). It's interesting he says from God: "They are limited to four individual beasts, which were shown to John, to represent the glory of the classes of beings in their destined order or sphere – or sphere of creation, in the enjoyment of their eternal felicity" (D&C 77:3). That's a word we don't use a lot, felicity is just a fancy word for happiness. Again, it's like God wants to spread happiness. Whatever order you're in, whatever level of capacity you have for happiness, God wants to help get you there.

Love that. So you'll remember from the book of Revelation where he talks about seeing these beasts with six wings and eyes. We've got this question now about what are the eyes and what are the wings? What do they represent? Beautiful symbols.

So here in verse 4, the answer: "Their eyes are a representation of light and knowledge, that is, they are full of knowledge; and their wings are a representation of power, to move, to act, etc." We might remember Isaiah 6 where Isaiah sees angels with six wings and again, they have this power to move their arms shouting holy, holy, holy to God.

Beautiful, which, by the way, isn't it amazing when you – when you read all the scriptures rather than get so fixated on one particular book or one particular chapter or verse or concept of the gospel, then you can start to triangulate the concepts and your ability to find the meaning of the interpretation as well as the applications increases. You'll notice in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks to them about, "if [your eye offends you], pluck it out" (Matthew 5:29). "If [your hand offends you], cut it off" (Matthew 5:30). Now we're not talking hands here, we're talking wings, but you understand that for the beasts that's the equivalent. Now you look at his interpretation of what the eyes and the wings are here, combine it with other things Joseph taught about that particular passage and it just – it gives you more depth, more breadth to your understanding of how to now live our life. If there are things – the eyes, if there are things coming into your mind and into your life that are leading you away from the gospel of Jesus Christ, if there are voices that are teaching you a different gospel than the covenant path that Jesus has laid out for us, he's saying pluck those things out and the power to move, to act, if there are actions in your life that are not leading you to heaven, cut them off.

Go to verse 5. "What are we to understand by the four and twenty elders, spoken of by John?" The answer is: "We are to understand that these elders whom John saw, were elders who had been faithful in the work of the ministry and were dead, who belonged to the seven churches and were then in the paradise of God" (D&C 77:5). And just by the way, is the book of Revelation, it's actually a letter that John – it's a revelation – but he writes, it's written down and it gets sent to basically seven wards in what's called Asia. Back then Asia was what is now today the country of Turkey so if we were to see the country of Turkey in the ancient times, the time of Rome, that was called Asia, and so there were these seven wards or seven churches, and seven is a key symbol you see throughout the book of Revelation: seven scrolls, seven bulls, seven trumpets, seven seals, and you get twenty-four as well, these interesting numbers that are interesting and symbolic.

So that is the appli – or the interpretation for that audience. Now you go to verse 6: "What are we to understand by the book which John saw?" So there's a book, and you'll notice in scripture that often, like in Isaiah and there are other prophets who – Lehi is given a book, there seems to be this common pattern where God gives books to his prophets and he asks them to either consume them – eat them – or read them, and in Isaiah's case, it tastes sweet but then leaves a bitter taste in his mouth or some - it's got these funny symbols attached to that. So what's going on?

So it says: "We are to understand that it contains the revealed will, mysteries, and the works of God; the hidden things of his economy concerning this earth during the seven thousand years of its continuance, or its temporal existence" (D&C 77:6). So again notice these themes of seven,

this book has seven seals, we're talking about the seven – seven dispensations, we could – lots of sevens go on in the gospel.

So now when you consume a book or you read a book, it's revealing things, you internalize it, you digest it, it becomes a part of you. That's kind of what the prophets are doing. They become immersed in history, and history becomes a part of them, making them able to write things that are applicable to various generations of time, both past, present, and future from them. So it's this mission that they've been given by God that often is symbolized by the reading of, or the consuming of a book, which now brings you to the seventh question about seals. Which, I've never noticed this before, question seven is about the seven seals. I'm not sure if that was coincidence or not, but so the answer is, what are we supposed to understand about these seven seals, "We are to understand that the first seal contains the things of the first thousand years, and the second also of the second thousand years, and so on until the seventh" (D&C 77:7).

So if you can picture a scroll that is rolled up and this is the opening place, you can picture seven – in fact, let me do it with a different colored marker. And for those who struggle with the colors seeing these, you can just imagine in your mind's eye that we're drawing some red wax seals on this scroll. Here are these seals, and you could have various parts of this book that unfold, so if I break this seal right here, I can now take this and open it up and I can unroll this part of the seal and – or this part of the record – and I can read it, because it used to be sealed, but I've still got some seals over here that haven't been broken yet.

It's beautiful. In the book of Revelation when John is seeing this book sealed up in heaven and he's sitting there weeping, because he's looking around and nobody has the strength or the power or the ability to break those seals, but then one – one character comes forward. God the Father is holding this book in his hands in that chapter of Revelation when a lamb comes forward and takes the book out of the hands of God, and he has power to open each of those seals in turn, in succession, and so all of these events that Joseph is told represent these thousand-year periods that we also get from more recent prophetic commentary, that it's not necessarily a – an exact clock of one thousand three – one thousand years or 365 times a thousand days precisely; it's more these are long periods of time – you might call them maybe even dispensations in other contexts – it doesn't fit perfectly with the seven dispensations, but you and I are now living in the sixth seal, and here we are already in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which tells us the timing, apparently, to God doesn't have to be exactly measured with 365-day periods times a thousand from earth's perspective. But rather God is denoting that there's a period, an epoch period of the earth's history, that's contained within each of these – in each of these seals.

The idea is, keep playing the game, right? We're going to win. And let's keep this up for just a minute because you talk about the lamb that has the power. Do you know of any sports teams that have lambs as their mascots? I mean, a lamb is not something you look to for, like, that's the powerful thing – go! fight! win! And if you think about the context for John, and he's – you know originally, it's these early Christians that get his writing, and they're in this powerful Roman Empire and they know about lots of powerful things – powerful beasts like bulls, and you have military people, and a lamb is the symbol of power, it completely upends and inverts the entire expected order and I just love the symbol of God is the lamb who has died on behalf of all

of us, and that we worship a God who has all power, and he has so much power he is not afraid to define himself by one of the most humble, docile creatures that has ever been created. He has no need to force us to see his magnanimous power all the time, and instead, he descends below all things and shows himself as a humble lamb willing to serve us.

Isn't it fascinating, though, that Jesus is also in other places described as the lion. So you have the lamb in the beginning who was slain from the foundation of the world, who in other symbols is portrayed as the lion of the tribe of Judah. If you look at the Old Testament, there are two kinds of prophecies about the Messiah. The first coming of the Messiah – it's going to be silently, it's going to be quietly, it's going to be as a lamb, he comes as a lamb. When he comes for his second coming in the clouds in his glory, with power and majesty and the trumpets blowing and Enoch and his band with them, it's - he's not going to come as a lamb; he'll come as a lion and with – with very clear power.

So the next question is referring to these angels who are spoken of in chapter 7 verse 1 of Revelation. What are we to understand by those four angels? "We are to understand that they are four angels sent forth from God, to whom is given power over the four parts of the earth," imagine east, west, north, south, "to save life and to destroy; they are they who have the everlasting gospel to commit to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; having power to shut up the heavens, to seal up unto life, or to cast down to the regions of darkness" (D&C 77:8).

So have you noticed a pattern in the Bible in ancient scripture? Have you noticed that often, not always, not every time, but often, when the scriptures refer to earth or humankind in general, it often comes in fours. It's almost as if four represents this earthly state, this mortal condition that we live in. It's usually the four corners of the earth, the four quarters of the earth, north, south, east, west, the four cardinal directions that help us navigate this earth. It's every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. It – not every time, but many times it keeps coming in this – in this cluster of four. And you'll notice in the book of Revelation, especially since we're talking about symbolism and the power of numbers and what they might mean and how we could find greater depth to our understanding in other scriptures through that, you'll notice that often the number three is used to represent heaven, the Godhead and this perfect presidency, so to speak, of heaven. To me, I find it fascinating that where heaven meets earth, when you add them, that's where we find completion, perfection, wholeness.

God already is perfect; he's already finished, he's complete. He's whole, he's lacking nothing. That's what the number seven, this perfect idea could symbolize, but for us, that perfection is only found when we combine with heaven, and the place that this happens most – most noticeably is in the temple and in our homes where we can make them a house of order, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of faith, a house of prayer, a house of fasting we'll talk about later on, a house of God. That's again, back to – lest we get stuck in the weeds or in the minutia of going through these miracles, it's important occasionally to step back and look at that God wins perspective, the overall view, and say wait, why should I care? It's God is doing all this effort – he's the one who's established the new covenant. He's the one who's bringing us the perfection. We cannot do it without him. We're stuck. That's – that's as far as we go. We can't

even get to the final minutes of a game without him coming and saying, let me bring my perfection so that you can – you can participate in it.

Now number 9: "What are we to understand by the angel ascending from the east?" Revelation chapter 7 verse 2. And here's the answer: "We are to understand that the angel ascending from the east is he to whom is given the seal of the living God over the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, he crieth unto the four angels having the everlasting gospel, saying: hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And if you will receive it, this is Elias which was to come to gather together the tribes of Israel and restore all things" (Doctrine and Covenants 77:9).

Which leads us into the very next question of when, what time are these things going to be accomplished? So this is Joseph asking the question when. "They are to be accomplished in the sixth thousand years, or the opening of the sixth seal" (D&C 77:10). And as you've pointed out here earlier, Tyler, that's the time we're living in.

So then the next question, "what are we to understand by the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand, out of all the tribes of Israel – twelve thousand out of [each] tribe?" (D&C 77:11). So you have in ancient settings, you have these ways to add emphasis to words or to concepts or to ideas that you're teaching. One of those ways, when it comes to numbers, is to multiply them by a thousand - or by themselves – or by themselves. Well, look what happens. It's a way of emphasizing. Exactly. It gives more - more power to it. The number twelve, what might that symbolize in antiquity? Well, the tribes of Israel, power and authority where we get the twelve apostles, and so if you multiply that by – so if you square twelve to add greater emphasis to this power and authority and this – the collective identity of the tribes of Israel, the house of Israel, that's the focus here. Keep in mind, what does President Nelson remind us – reminded us of? The name, Israel, is "Let God prevail"<sup>3</sup>, and the most important work we can be participating in today is to gather Israel on both sides of the veil, and God has given us the power and authority to do it. Now how do you emphasize and magnify and propel that authority in ways that becomes more clear? You multiply it by itself, that gives you a 144, and then what do you do? You multiply that by a thousand. So it now gives you – which is a millennium – 144,000 so it's a double portion of emphasis to the tribes of Israel, the house of Israel, the family of Israel, and the power and authority that comes from God in order to bring meaning to this. Ironically, this won't get you into heaven, and I could be wrong but I don't think it's going to be on the final exam at the pearly gates.

In the book of Revelation, you all understand that Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, "let God prevail", I'm going to do a - right here, remember that 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, remember that Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, had his twelve sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulon, Joseph, and Benjamin. We can all count and that's twelve. The irony here is, or the wrinkle is, that Jacob – Israel - he adopted

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<sup>3</sup> Nelson, Russell M. "Let God Prevail." *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 3 Oct. 2020, [www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2020/10/46nelson?lang=eng](http://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2020/10/46nelson?lang=eng).

Joseph's two sons, the firstborn was Manasseh, the second-born was Ephraim, he adopted them as his own. Technically, we have thirteen tribes of Israel. That's a baker's dozen. It's a baker's dozen, cheaper by the dozen, right? We have thirteen tribes. I don't know why this is. I'm sure there are people out there who know the reason, but in the book of Revelation when John is showing this vision, he lists all of the tribes but for some reason, he leaves out Dan. He doesn't list Dan, so you get twelve instead of thirteen, twelve times twelve times a thousand is a 144,000, but we don't get a thousand – or, sorry, if we don't get twelve – twelve thousand high priests from the tribe of Dan, I don't know why. That's not going to get you into heaven, but there you go, that's how it can still add up to only a 144,000.

Now, Taylor, do you think that whenever this particular event, the 144,000 high priests are now sealed and given this power to go out into the world and do their missionary work, do you think it's a literal – there's going to be somebody standing there with a counter?

And I'll get up there – I'll be this guy right here, and God's going to say, oh, done. Sorry, too bad for you, my love and mercy doesn't count past 144,000 people, my power and atonement really does not go from all eternity to all eternity, it really only gets to twelve times twelve times a thousand, that's it. There you go. Obviously I'm just being a little silly.

So here's the reality. These are verse - verse 11 the answer is, they're going to be ordained unto the holy order of God. And by the way, don't you love how God refers to the priesthood as an order? We'll talk more about that when we get to section 107, but they were "ordained unto the holy order of God, to administer the everlasting gospel; for they are they who are ordained out of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, by the angels to whom is given power over the nations of the earth, to bring as many as will come to the church of the Firstborn" (D&C 77:11). We talked last week in section 76 about the church of the Firstborn.

So this - this is the superlative, the greatest emphasis on the most powerful and authoritative group of missionaries in the history of the world to go out into every nation, kindred, tongue and people and gather the elect into the church of the Firstborn. So the numbers are less important than what they represent, by looking beyond, kind of like the word piano, perhaps you look at the 144,000 and see there the superlative power and authority to gather Israel and say, wow, that's going to be a - an amazing missionary force when the Lord comes to that point in the unfolding restoration.

Now for the sake of time, there - there are some additional questions down to – down to verse 15, let's cut to the chase. Chapter 11 Revelation, the question is "What is to be understood by the two witnesses, in the eleventh chapter of Revelation?" (D&C 77:15). So the answer is, they're two prophets that are, that are "raised up to the Jewish nation in the last days at the time of the restoration, and to prophesy to the Jews after they are gathered and have built the city of Jerusalem in the land of their fathers" (D&C 77:15).

So what I'm going to share here is also not going to get you into heaven, it's a bit of speculation, but I think it's interesting that we have other – if you look at the book of Revelation it talks about these two prophets who go preach and then they're killed in the old city of Jerusalem, and what I think is fascinating – again, this is just my own speculation – is we have two prophets

who sealed the opening of the last dispensation, Hyrum and Joseph, and they were killed in a place called Carthage. And it turns out that Carthage is an old, Semitic word that means new city. I think it's fascinating that to seal the closing of the last dispensation, you'll have two prophets who will die in the old city. So I just – if there really is a symbolism there, I just love how God can – the old city and the new city. It's the old Jerusalem and the new Jerusalem, these symbols keep coming back together to reveal and to give us an apocalypse, a view, an unfolding of more things.

As we now turn our attention to section 78, some interesting things are happening here. Keep in mind, with so many of these sections, as well as many of the chapters in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, that these were happening in historical settings, in real places, at real times in history. You've probably heard this little phrase or this concept before. The past is a foreign country, and whenever we study history or the past, we're visitors there. We don't have control over what's happening. We can try to interpret and try to understand what's happening, but we're visitors. We don't always understand their language, their customs, why they do what they do, so that's important to remember. With section 78, we're – we're visitors going back to this particular time and place, and Joseph Smith and the other leaders of the Church at that time, they're – they're struggling with some things regarding opposition to the Church and people trying to destroy the Church, literally trying to bring it down, to bankrupt it and to slander him, and to destroy the work.

And you also have the regular challenges all of us face. How am I going to pay rent? What am I going to do to get food, my basic living? And so Joseph Smith as a person in the Church has these needs for sustenance and assistance and material and financial support.

So we have this United Firm, that this - the temporal affairs of the Church that God is giving them some directions on how to build up, but because of the enemies of the Church – so again, we may not understand why all of this is happening, but if we understand that we're guests in this foreign land called the past, then maybe it helps us to understand why Joseph Smith actually used code names starting in section 78. He uses those code names in these sections as well because they had to protect their identity, because these revelations are going out and the enemies are getting those revelations, reading them, and then laying plans to destroy the very foundation of the financial aspects of the Church, as well as attacking all of the spiritual aspects of the Church.

So in section 78, we don't see it here now because we've since figured out the codes, who each of those names represented, for instance Joseph's name here was Gazelem. You'll find Gazelem, the name, in Alma chapter 37 verse 23. And then they use it here – and they use it here to represent him or Enoch, those are the two names. You've got others like Ahashdah, that was Newel Whitney. You have Pelagoram, that was Sidney Rigdon, and more and more. So while it looks really strange to us and we're scratching our head like, why are you – why are you all of a sudden using code names? They were doing it for their own safety and protection and to try to build up the kingdom without the enemies having access to all of their plans.

So as we jump into this section, just a little bit more background. So Newel K. Whitney has a store in Kirtland, and he is going to be called to support the Church materially and financially, and there was an organization that's put together by revelation called the United Firm. Later it gets called the United Order. In all these sections that we've listed out here are revelations around managing United Firm that started around March of 1832, and about two years later, it actually gets disbanded, and there's other organizations that God reveals to help support the Church, and it's very interesting that Newel Whitney actually put forth a lot of his own means and resources to support Joseph Smith and the Church and ends up actually forgiving a whole bunch of debt to Joseph and to the Church. I'm aware of like \$3600, which in the time of Newel K. Whitney, this is about as much money as Martin Harris had gone into debt to publish the Book of Mormon, and you know, it's our equivalent of around \$80,000 today, I mean not - not an insignificant sum of money, and to Newel Whitney's credit, he never showed any bitterness to the fact that he lost material things in the cause of Zion. But we just want to point out these sections all kind of connect to the same idea of how do we manage the affairs of the Church on a temporal – in a temporal way? And that was the whole point of the United Firm and the United Order, and we'll spend a little bit of time now looking at what is the – some of the specific principles that God wants the people who join the United Order to live.

So let's begin there with verse 5 and 6: "That you may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things." Isn't that fascinating how God is giving us this - this sandbox, so to speak, to practice in becoming more like the eternal aspects of heaven, that he is saying, you've got to be equal in heavenly things but you have to practice this with earthly things. Look at verse 6: "For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things." There's a beautiful principle there in our need to care for the poor and the needy. Brothers and sisters, far too often we look at that phrase – to care for the poor and the needy or to provide for the poor and the needy thinking, oh, they are so needy, and I have to help them so much. If you look at it from a heaven – heavenly perspective, you need the poor and the needy just as much as the poor and the needy need you. It's part of this – this trial of our faith to get to the point where we can actually let go of some of these things that the world makes so powerful for us, our money, our power, our prestige, to let go of that and become equal. We need to share with those in need just as much as those in need, need us to share with them for a different reason, but the need is the same in the heavenly perspective.

I'll try the analogy of the sports team again. Teams win as teams. And God is saying if you want to be on team heaven, I need you to run some practices, okay? So this is – the real game is heaven, but to get prepared for the real game of heaven that -- I put you on a team and everybody is out on the court, or out on the field, all playing at the same time and I want everybody to be united in the goal of winning this game with me.

Now look at – let's jump over, clear over to verse 17: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye are little children, and ye have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath in his own hands and prepared for you; and ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours." Isn't that amazing, this, again, the comparison of earthly riches versus

heavenly and eternal riches. And he's saying, if you can just not cleave to those earthly riches and cling to them, but if you can be free and equal and open with all, your hands are now open, I can now fill them with eternal blessings. It's a beautiful principle.

Some years ago I spent a week in Morocco, absolutely lovely people, lovely country. Many of them are Muslim, and it's interesting, when they are praying, they will pray like this. Now when I pray, I fold my arms and put my hands like this, it's kind of how I was taught, and it's interesting some Muslim friends that I had there would have their hands like this, and I'm like why do you pray like that? And they said it's a symbol that we are ready to receive everything that God has for us. So I'm like, wow, I like that. There is nothing wrong with going like this, and I still pray like this today. I like that, that's a little bit of holy envy where you can look at what other people do and say, there's some beauty there. I like that.

Now go to verse 19 to finish that section, our discussion here. Verse 19: "And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious." How much? All things. Yes. So I've struggled with this one. I've had hard times in my life, and when I pray at night I don't like tick through all the frustrations of the day and say, God, thank you for the people who cut me off in traffic, you know, thank you for whatever, and it's really interesting, that power of gratitude as President Nelson taught gives enormous blessings and gives us joy right now. Absolutely. I need to work on that one. Give thanks for all things, it's beautiful.

Now on to section 79. This section is given to Jared Carter who – I'm just going to say it – in - from my view, from my study, Jared Carter is one of the short list most successful, best missionaries in the history of our Church who is often overlooked. Now we've had other incredible missionaries that their stories are often told. Jared Carter often gets overlooked. He gets called on a mission here to go east, and he goes back to his – his birthplace, and along the way, let me tell you a little story about one person of many, I believe it was over seventy people that he was able to teach and help become converted to the gospel on his mission. One of them, his name was John Tanner, a very wealthy man who had a leg disease. He had invented this wheelchair to help him get around, and he was told that he would never walk again.

He heard that Jared Carter, this missionary of this Church was in the area, and he came to listen to him in order to try to confound him. In the process, he found that he was moved and impressed by the message of Jared and his companion. So after the meeting he invited the missionaries to his home to talk more and to learn more about their beliefs, and he said, I confess that I believe what you're teaching but because of my physical condition, I can't be baptized, I can't support myself. It's physically impossible for me to get baptized. At which point Jared Carter said to him, you believe in the power of the Lord to heal your leg, do you not? And Tanner said he most assuredly did, and then Elder Carter said in a loud voice, placing his hand heavily on the shoulder of the sick man, "John Tanner, in the name of Jesus Christ I command you to rise and walk."<sup>4</sup> At which point John lifts out of the chair. He hesitated to set his lame foot on the floor, and Jared Carter said, in the name of the Lord, set down your other foot and do

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<sup>4</sup> Tanner, George S. *John Tanner and His Family: A History-Biography of John Tanner of Lake George, New York, Born August 15, 1778, Hopkinton, Rhode ISLAND, Died April 13, 1850, at South Cottonwood, Utah.* John Tanner Family Association, 1974.

not be afraid. Tanner set it down. It was healed and he walked without difficulty, and he went and praised God for the miracle and was baptized. Two years later he moved to Kirtland, and John Tanner becomes one of the biggest philanthropists of our earliest Church members. He gives – you want to talk about being equal in earthly things, here's a guy who was extremely wealthy who gave it all up to care for the poor and the needy around him and to build up the kingdom of God on the earth, and he was brought in through the preaching of Jared Carter.

You'll notice verse 3 of section 79: "Inasmuch as he is faithful, I will crown him again with sheaves." And Jared paid attention during his mission to this revelation. He carried it with him everywhere, and he kept a good record of all of those sheaves that the Lord gave him. When he got home to Kirtland, Joseph approached him and said, I have another mission I need you to go on, a specific mission. Now, for fun, let me read a story to you out of a book called History of Joseph Smith by his Mother Lucy Mack Smith.

So do you remember back when God commanded the group of elders in companionships to go from Kirtland down to Independence, Missouri, to dedicate the land, and they arrive in section 57, and remember that Hyrum Smith was told to go up to Detroit and then come down. Lucy, Joseph and Hyrum's mother, she thought, hey, this is a great opportunity for me to go and visit my brother's family that live in Detroit and in that area, Pontiac, Michigan. So she went with Hyrum and those elders on the boat to take them to Detroit, and while she was there, here's what she says, she was introduced to a minister named Mr. Ruggles of a church there in Detroit. So here's the conversation.

And you, said Mr. Ruggles, upon shaking hands with me, are the mother of that poor, foolish, silly boy Joe Smith who pretended to translate the Book of Mormon. I looked him steadily in the face and replied, I am, sir, the mother of Joseph Smith; but why do you apply to him such epithets as those? Because, said his reverence, that he could imagine he was going to break down all other churches with that simple, Mormon book. Did you ever read that book? I inquired. No, it's beneath my notice. But, rejoined I, the scriptures say prove all things; and now sir, let me tell you boldly; that that book contains the everlasting gospel; and it was written for the salvation of your soul by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost. Pooh, said the minister, nonsense. I'm not afraid of any member of my church being led astray by such stuff; they have too much intelligence. Now, Mr. Ruggles, said I, and I spoke with emphasis – keep in mind Lucy is very short. You can picture this woman maybe wagging her finger at him saying, now Mr. Ruggles, and I spoke with emphasis for the Spirit of God was upon me, mark my words--"as true as God lives, before three years we will have more than one third of your church, and sir, whether you believe it or not, we will take the very deacon, too."<sup>5</sup> This produced a hearty laugh at the expense of the minister. Well, she goes on to say, When I returned, I made known to Joseph the situation of things where I had been, so he dispatched Brother Jared Carter to that country. And in order that he might not lack influence, he was dressed in a suit of superfine broadcloth. He went immediately into the midst of Mr. Ruggles' church, and in short time, brought away seventy of his best members, among whom was the deacon, just as I had told the minister. This deacon was

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, Lucy Mack, et al. *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*. Cedar Fort, Incorporated/C F I Distribution, 2016.

Brother Samuel Bent, who now presides over the high council at the time that she was writing this later on in Nauvoo.

It's fascinating because Jared Carter went on all of these missions. He was a special missionary and Joseph recognized that, and when Joseph's own mother had made a prophecy, Joseph goes to Jared to help fulfill that prophecy, and he did and had great success. Sadly, later on, Jared Carter is going to – after Joseph's death in 1844, Jared Carter's going to leave the Church and he's going to join the group led by James Strang, but then two years after that he's excommunicated from that group and he gets rebaptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But by then his health has declined and he dies – he passes away in DeKalb, Illinois and doesn't make it back to Utah, which is where he was wanting to go. I love the story of Jared Carter. It gives us hope that as we do the best we can to fulfill these missions that God gives us, that you can even have mess-ups along the way like Jared did, but in the end, he is able to reconcile, and his life is an example of having many, many sheaves piled upon his back from the efforts of his missionary labors and his love.

You'll notice in section 80, this is given to Stephen Burnett, it's kind of the opposite story. Here's a guy who didn't fulfill his mission. He didn't go and do the best he could and rely on the Spirit of the Lord, and so the promises and blessings that are given to him here are not fulfilled because of his use of agency.

Now in closing, brothers and sisters, know that as we've studied scripture, that God ultimately is more interested in who you're becoming than in all of these fancy doctrinal interpretations and applications. I want to finish with two words that we had on the board before. We already know the end. God wins. And I want to be on his side. I want to be found on the Lord's errand, because if we already know God wins, then if we're combined with him, then we also know in the end, that you'll win too. And we leave that with you in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. Know that you're loved.

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