

Come Follow Me Insights (Doctrine and Covenants sections 14-17; Joseph Smith History 1:66–75)

I'm Taylor.

And I'm Tyler.

This is Book of Mormon Central's Come Follow Me Insights. Today, Doctrine and Covenants sections 14 through 17.

So today, we begin with the map, just from a 30,000-foot overview perspective. Joseph, and Oliver, and Emma are in Harmony, and persecution is starting to ramp up, to the point where Emma's family, who previously had been kind of antagonistic towards Joseph and his prophetic call, have now started to defend him against people who are threatening mob action.

Well, meanwhile, up in Fayette, New York, there's a family called the Whitmers. So, you have Peter Whitmer, Senior, and his wife, Mary, and their children. They live in Fayette, which is about 30 miles south of Palmyra. While Oliver had been teaching school up in Palmyra that previous year, he got to know David Whitmer, and they became good friends. And David was very interested in what Oliver was learning and experiencing with Joseph, and while Oliver has been down in Harmony, he's been writing letters to David up in Fayette, telling him about the amazing process of translating the Book of Mormon, and the revelations that were coming. And as things started getting more and more difficult in Harmony, Oliver asked if they could relocate to finish the translation process of the Book of Mormon in Fayette, at the Whitmer home. So, David has this discussion with his parents, and they agree, yes, you can go and get Joseph, and Emma, and Oliver, and bring them here to live with us while they complete this translation process.

It had been a very cold and wet spring, the spring of 1829, and planting and the work on the farm had been delayed, so here's the problem: Peter Whitmer, Senior doesn't want David leaving just as soon as the rain stops, because they have to rely on their farm producing enough crops to pay the bills and feed the family. So, he says, well, you can't go down and get them until you've plowed the 20 acres of land and put the plaster of Paris on it to prepare it for our planting.

So, David goes, and he asks the Lord for help, for guidance, direction, at his father's request. What should I do? And the feeling was, yes, you need to prepare the farm before going and getting Joseph, and Emma, and Oliver.

He woke up the next morning, and he went out to his fields, and there were about six of the twenty acres that were already plowed, that the previous evening, they were completely unplowed. He was able to finish that job much quicker, much sooner than otherwise would have happened, and David and his parents saw that experience as a sign from God that this was a divine work, and they needed to do everything they could to assist in bringing it forth. So, he

finished his work, went down to Harmony, picked up the three of them, and brought them north, into Fayette, to live with the Whitmer family.

Now, when they're there, you can imagine this: it's now the summer of 1829, living in this home and they're doing most of the translation work upstairs in the Whitmer home, and you have all of these people living in this home, needing to eat, needing to be clothed, have a place to stay. Oh, and by the way, since Joseph is there, that means that there seems to be a steady flow of visitors coming to the home, people like Joseph and Lucy, Joseph's parents, people like Martin Harris and others who would come to visit, and as they come, it's good hospitality to feed them and give them a place to stay overnight as needed.

It's fascinating to me as we read the Doctrine and Covenants, we see all of these stories. And we mentioned this last year, when we were studying the Book of Mormon: that what we have is a study of history, and it's beautiful. The problem is, there's a second story that's running parallel to history, and it's "herstory". Pardon the play on words here. But standing beside these men in the Restoration, or the men in the Book of Mormon, or the men in the New Testament, or the Old Testament, are the daughters of God who have roles to fulfill in carrying forth the kingdom, both in a big church setting, as well as in a more local home and family setting.

The thing that you're going to find this year, as we study the Doctrine and Covenants, is the vast majority of the focus is here. There aren't very many sections devoted to her story. But today, in this particular block of scripture, we get one woman who is integral to what's going on in the events in Fayette. It's Mary Whitmer; it's Peter Whitmer, Senior's wife. Onto her shoulders fell this added burden of cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry, and doing the chores around the house, and around their farm, to keep things running for all of these added people.

One of the supplemental readings for today's Come Follow Me lesson happens to come from the book that the Church published recently called Saints, in chapter 7. You'll notice that there was a time, there, when Mary is – she's not complaining but she's feeling very, very burdened. she's having a rough time.

In Saints, it said this: "One day, while she was out by the barn where the cows were milked, she saw a gray-haired man with a knapsack slung across his shoulder. His sudden appearance frightened her, but as he approached, he spoke to her in a kind voice that set her at ease. 'My name is Moroni,' he said. 'You have become pretty tired with all the extra work you have to do.' He swung the knapsack off his shoulder, and Mary watched as he started to untie it. 'You have been very faithful and diligent in your labors,' he continued. 'It is proper, therefore, that you should receive a witness that your faith may be strengthened.'"

At which point, Moroni opened the knapsack and pulled out the gold plates, and he showed them to her, turning the pages. And he promised that she would be blessed if she would carry that extra burden that had been placed on her shoulders for just a little longer, until they completed the translation process of the Book of Mormon.

It's interesting, because when, to make this more personal, when I first got married to my sweetheart, I learned a lesson, and I had to learn it over multiple failures. My wife would have some struggle, or some burden she was carrying, and she would share it with me. And me, being the problem solver that I am, right? I would say, oh, well it's very clear, I know exactly what you need to do, and I would tell her precisely how to solve her problem, thinking what a good husband, to listen to her and then come up with these wonderful solutions for her. I had multiple of those experiences where I realized this wasn't making her day. She didn't see me as her knight in shining armor fixing all of her problems. In fact, sometimes it turned out to be exactly what she didn't need was for me to tell her what to do and how to do it. And then she taught me this lesson that I think many of you have probably already learned from your own experience, if not from listening to others. She said, Tyler, I don't need your solutions. I just need your sympathy. I can fix the problems. I just needed somebody to hear, somebody to recognize that this is hard for me, and that you understood what I'm going through. I got it. I don't need you to fix it.

Now, as our relationship has grown and matured over the years, we've realized that there's actually, it's like a Venn diagram, where you have at times, she needs my sympathy. And at other times she would share things and say, yes, actually this time I don't want your sympathy. I want you to fix it; I want your solutions. And then as we've grown further, we've realized there's another aspect. She, on one occasion, said, I need your support. And there are times when these all get clouded, or they share some common ground.

Here's my point, as we introduce today's sections: 14, 15, 16 and 17. Our God knows what we need. There are times when we do need things fixed. There are times when we need instructions on how to fix them, and other times when we just need him to fix it. There are times when you just need to cry at the feet of the Lord, and know that you're heard, and to feel that sympathy coming. And there are other times when you need that sustaining support as you move forward to do the things that you know you need to do.

In this case, for me, you have David Whitmer, who needed to go and pick up Joseph, and Emma, and Oliver. He needed some solutions, and he needed some support with the plowing of the fields. Now, you get Mary Whitmer, who is feeling very burdened. You'll notice that when Moroni came, he didn't help her with the laundry. He didn't help her milk the cow. He didn't help her with the food preparation, or the dishes in the sink that is very different from our sink, with not a lot of running water, and conveniences of a fridge, and freezer, and a washing machine, and a drying machine. He didn't fix any of that for her. And quite frankly, I don't think Mary Whitmer needed him to do any of that. She needed to know that she was seen from heaven, that her sacrifice was recorded in heaven, that God knew what she was going through in order to help to bring forth this great work of the Restoration. So, she has this part to play that doesn't make it into the scripture page. But without her doing that, you can see that she herself was providing support for the Prophet, and his wife, and for Oliver to do their work, and sometimes those support structures start feeling weak, and so Moroni is sent to strengthen her, support her, and

give her some sympathy as well, to recognize, hey, I recognize that you're carrying a very, very heavy load here.

So, brothers and sisters, whatever your situation in life may be, just know that all of your efforts to lift, and provide, and nourish, and strengthen other people is witnessed by the angels. They know what you're going through. And there will be a day when all of his story and her story will be told in their fullness, and I think we'll find that they aren't parallel stories, but they're just two halves of the same story, moving the work of God forward in a beautiful, beautiful way.

Now, let's jump in: section 14. This is the revelation given to David Whitmer, the one who was the most excited, the friend of Oliver who drove the wagon and the team down to Harmony to pick them up. This is given to him in June of 1829. Notice it begins in the way that most of the previous sections given to individuals begins. Look at the wording again. "A great and marvelous work is about to come forth unto the children of men" (Doctrine and Covenants 14:1). Look at the words. Look at the descriptive words for what kind of a work it is. It's a "great". This isn't just a "good", or a "nice"; this is a "great" work, and it's a "marvelous work".

What does the word "marvel" mean? It's something that you look at it, and you marvel. You wonder, how in the world could that happen? You don't have an explanation for it. It's a marvel. And in other places in the scriptures, he calls it "a marvelous work and a wonder" (2 Nephi 27:26; 2 Nephi 25:17; Isaiah 29:14). Look at all these words. People wonder, how in the world did you accomplish that?

I love the fact that God is using a poor farmer, and a school teacher, and then this family of farmers, the Whitmers, to bring forth his work. These aren't scholars at the most famous universities, or centers of study of linguistics, and ancient cultures, and history. These are simple people, and it is a marvel, and a wonder, how these incredible works are brought forth through them. And David is reminded of that, right here, out of verse 1, followed by, "Behold, I am God..." (Doctrine and Covenants 14:2). Now, keep in mind: David Whitmer has come to Joseph asking, what can I do to assist in this work? What can I do to help? What does God want me to do? Joseph asks the Lord, and he's now getting this revelation by reading from the Urim and Thummim, which is how most of these revelations are coming that we're studying.

So, picture it in this setting: David asking a question, Joseph then going to the Lord with that question, and the Lord answering through the Urim and Thummim, and David is hearing Joseph speak the words, "Behold, I am God; give heed to my word, which is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword..." (Doctrine and Covenants 14:2). Here's my point with that: Brothers and sisters, the very same mouth, Joseph Smith, Junior, the very same mouth that can carry on a normal conversation about what needs to happen with the farm, or what's been happening with the weather, or what's happening with family members -- when Joseph is talking like a man, like I'm talking right here, he's just a man. But God called just a man to then be his

mouthpiece. So now he's speaking, this is a form of divine investiture of authority, when you speak in first person, as if you are God. God's using you as an instrument.

So, it's interesting to me when people in our current world, today, look back through the corridor of time, and they see Joseph, and they try to slander him. Or they try to poke holes in his character, or show instances where he wasn't perfect, where he maybe said the wrong thing, or did the wrong thing, as if to say that everything he ever said, and everything he ever did, was intended to be this, or that he claimed to be, this extension of heaven, speaking for, and acting for, the Lord.

Joseph makes it very clear, on multiple occasions, that he's just a man who's called to do these extraordinary things, but when he's acting under that divine inspiration, there is no error in the record, so to speak, that he is being used by the Lord as an instrument in the hands of God to do God's work. And I love that when we open up the scriptures we see, not a farm boy, but we see "a marvelous work and a wonder", and one of those marvelous works and wonders happens to be the guy who's actually saying the words (2 Nephi 27:26; 2 Nephi 25:17; Isaiah 29:14). It's marvelous. How can he, of all people -- I mean, even Oliver had more education. Why not do it all through him? No, God chose Joseph, and to me, that's beautiful. It gives me hope. It gives me hope to be able to move forward, and do what God has commanded me to do in my own sphere, and in my own mission in life.

Notice verse 3: "Behold, the field is white already to harvest...". Have you noticed how often God uses that phrase with these people, in this early part of the Doctrine and Covenants? Hmm, I wonder if that could imply that God actually does speak to us according to our language, and our understanding, to use a phrase back in 2nd Nephi; that he will share parables with you in the New Testament that mean something to those first-century Jewish people (2 Nephi 31:3). With these 1829 farmers, what analogies is he using? He's using a lot of farm analogies: "...the field is white already to harvest" (Doctrine and Covenants 14:3). The grain, it's ready to be brought in. So, thrust in your sickle with your might, and you can treasure up for your soul everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God, which we're going to talk about a little later in verse 7.

Notice verse 6: "Seek to bring forth and establish my Zion. Keep my commandments in all things." These are repeat concepts; we've seen them before, and we're going to see them again. "Seek to bring forth ... Zion" (Doctrine and Covenants 14:6). Notice that in the olden days, in ancient scripture, and in antiquity, we are so focused on the group, on the collective identity of the family, the tribe, the nation. It's where you find your identity. Today, we live in an age where you will notice that the identity is focused on the individual. It's about me. What do I want? What do I need? It's self, self, self; self-fulfillment, self-actualization, self-everything. Fill in the blank. It's all about me. But in antiquity and early Church history, God is trying to get people to take the focus off of yourself and turn it into "seek to bring forth ... Zion" (Doctrine and Covenants 14:6). It's not seek your own prosperity, and your own happiness, in isolation from everyone else. In fact, stop and think about it. There is no ultimate or lasting happiness or joy in

complete isolation. That everlasting joy comes as we are bound together, by covenant, with God, and with our families, and with our extended families, and by extension, our wards, and our stakes in the Church, and all of God's children on the earth together, bringing nations together in unity. It's a Zion.

Notice verse 7: "And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God." I love the fact that, here are these people who are struggling to eke out a living on this planet, and God is telling them, if you just keep my commandments and endure to the end, I'm going to give you eternal life, and it's the greatest gift. I could give you a prosperous farm, I could give you lots of gold, lots of investments that are doing very well, lots of power in this world, but none of those things are going to last. None of those things are going to mean anything in the eternities. But if you'll just keep my commandments and keep enduring to the end, you will have eternal life "which ... is the greatest of all the gifts of God" (Doctrine and Covenants 14:7).

Let's look again at verse 5. "Therefore, if you will ask of me you shall receive; if you will knock it shall be opened unto you." "If" is one of the shortest words in all of the English language, but it's a hinge, it's a pivot point, it's a very powerful invitation. God repeats it twice: "if". He's basically saying, all you have to do is ask, and you will get. I also want to turn this around a bit. There's a famous painting that's showing Jesus doing the knocking. When I was younger, I loved this picture, and it wasn't until I was in college, my roommate was my cousin, Joel Balstead, pointed out something, and I appreciated it because I have to be taught things quite explicitly. I'm a bit of a slow learner. He pointed out that door doesn't have a door knob. And we are the ones inside, and God is knocking, and we are the ones who have to open from the inside to let him in. So, let's turn it around. Similarly, imagine we're now at the door, and God is inside. He wants us to come in, there isn't a door handle on the front. The only way in is to knock, and God's just waiting, just waiting for that door to knock so he can open and welcome us in. We just have to knock.

So, wherever you're at in your life, you might want to ask yourself, do I have a righteous desire that I have hid up in my heart, that I've not expressed to God? Talk to God. Let him know. And as we talked about earlier in the lesson, maybe he'll give you sympathy. Maybe he'll give you a solution. Maybe he'll give you some support. But just know, as he promised to these early Saints, his promise is alive and well today, that if you ask, you shall receive.

Now, look at verse 8, because you get a foreshadowing of some significant events that are going to take place shortly for David Whitmer in verse 8: "And it shall come to pass, that if you shall ask the Father in my name...". Once again, you'll notice we're talking here about, these are the words of Jesus Christ, and you get that down in verse 9. So, he's saying that "if [you'll] ask the Father in my name, in faith believing, you shall receive the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance, that you may stand as a witness of the things of which you shall both hear and see, and also that you may declare repentance unto this generation" (Doctrine and Covenants 14:8). There is the

foreshadowing of, David, you're going to be a witness for me, for this work coming forth, because David is going to be one of the Three Witnesses that we talk about at the beginning of section 17.

Notice verse 9: "Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who created the heavens and the earth, a light which cannot be hid in darkness...". And he's saying, I am going to "bring forth the fullness of my gospel...", and you're going to help me, David (Doctrine and Covenants 14:10). You're called to assist.

Did you see in verse 9, "Behold I am Jesus Christ..."? Look at verse 11: "And behold, thou art David...". I love that, that clear relation, I am Jesus Christ, I'm the Savior, I'm the creator of worlds without number; and you're David. I'm calling you by name. I know you, David. I have a mission for you. And what is that mission? You are called to assist. He didn't say, David, you need to go and do my work. He said, David, I need you to assist me while I do my work. The Lord of the vineyard doesn't send apostles, and prophets, and missionaries, and mommies, and daddies, and bishops, and teachers, and leaders out into the world, out into the vineyard, and say, good luck to you. The Lord of the vineyard says, come, walk with me. Labor with me in the vineyard. Assist me in bringing forth the cause of Zion. Notice, if you do this and are faithful, you shall be blessed both spiritually and temporally, and great shall be your reward. He doesn't promise an overabundance of temporal wealth and worldly goods, but he says you will be blessed both spiritually and temporally. If we put God first in our life, and we pay a faithful tithing, and move forward in faith, He will provide for our needs, both spiritually and temporally, like only a God who has created worlds without number can provide, and that's beautiful.

So, we'll come back to David when we get to section 17. In the meantime, let's go to 15 and 16, with David's brothers, John and Peter Whitmer, Junior. You'll notice, just as you look down at your scripture page, section 15 is word-for-word with section 16, with the exception of the name in verse 1: John in section 15, and Peter in section 16. And then there's one other little, tiny, non-significant difference between the two, and it's in verse 5 of section 16, where he says, three lines down, "which I have given unto you according to my commandments," and there's no "unto" in verse 5 of section 15. That's it. They're identical, and these two brothers have both secretly been asking God the same question: what do you want me to do? Verse 4: "For many times you have desired of me to know that which would be of the most worth unto you." So, both of them have had this desire, and this request of God, and he tells both of them, what is the answer? It's in verse 6: "...I say unto you, that the thing which will be of the most worth unto you will be to declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father. Amen."

Now, you'll notice when you read that, the first interpretation most of us would give to verse 6 would be, oh! He's telling everybody we have to put on the missionary tag and go out and declare repentance, cry repentance unto the people, go be a missionary, which is absolutely true for certain people, at certain times of their life. But brothers and sisters, you don't have to be

wearing a black missionary tag to fulfill verse 6. Think of all of the ways that men and women through the history of the Church have been able to "declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them..." (Doctrine and Covenants 15:6, 16:6). Think about what mommies and daddies do every day with children. Think about what Relief Society presidents, Young Women presidents, Primary presidents, bishoprics, stake presidencies, high councilors, general leaders in the Church, and General Authorities, apostles, and prophets, what are they all doing? They're "[declaring] repentance unto this people" (Doctrine and Covenants 15:6, 16:6). What is repentance? How can we interpret that?

One of the great lessons we get from the Doctrine and Covenants is that we can personalize this for ourselves. As Tyler pointed out, these sections are often given to specific individuals, and God names them. You could do the same for yourself; you could insert your own name. We could say hearken, my servant, insert your own name. These revelations were deeply personal at a very specific time and place, but they're also preserved in canonized scripture for you, so insert your name.

And let's think again about this word "repentance". There are several important things to consider here. First and foremost is that, think about all the things that God could have revealed, all the things he could have talked about. Almost always when he is revealing himself and inviting people to assist in his work, he's asking them to share the message of faith and repentance, not the mysteries of the kingdom. So, we invite you to consider, when you engage in the gospel, when you teach others, when you seek to study, where's your focus? Is it the so-called mysteries, the things that haven't been revealed? Or is it these simple, plain, and salvific doctrines that God has consistently and purposely revealed over time, specifically repentance? So, our plea is to, let's stay focused on what matters, and it is Jesus, faith in Him, and let's turn to Him.

So, let's spend just a bit of time on this word, "repentance", because I don't know about you guys, but when I was growing up, that word scared me. I was scared of the word "repentance". It was something I didn't want to deal with. I think I was on my mission before I finally came to understand that "repentance" simply means "change", and actually, change for the better.

Now, if we actually take an ancient perspective on this, in the ancient Hebrew, the word for "sin" literally means "to miss the mark". Imagine that you're doing archery, and you aim at the target, you miss. What should you do? You re-aim, and you shoot again. So actually, the word "repentance" in Hebrew means "to turn", or "return". So, if you can imagine you're shooting at a target and you miss, do you sit around and say, woe is me, I'm terrible, I'm awful, or do you practice it again and turn a bit, re-aim and try again, and even if you miss again, just turn a bit more, and you keep trying? You keep changing, you keep calibrating, and you draw upon the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, which gives you the agency to keep trying to get better and better. So, it's the Hebrew perspective on repentance, of changing, returning, of returning back to God.

In the Greek, the word is very interesting. It's "metanoia", and it literally means "to have your mind changed", to have your perspective enhanced, or enlarged or, again, changed. So, all action begins with thought. So, if you find yourself doing actions that you shouldn't be, change your beliefs, change your thought. Again, focus on Jesus. If we are aligned and thinking about Jesus, we are far more likely to be doing the right actions.

So, wherever you are in your life, just know that what God most needs from us is our change, our repentance, our desire to have our minds turn towards him, and our actions aligned with the path that he has trod and laid out for us. And please, have no fear of change. God has pled with us from the creation, all the way down to the present day with modern day prophets, pled with very loving kindness, change. Don't fear change. Know that you will feel greater love, and have a greater capacity to love others, and to feel God's love. This is our invitation to you.

So, to conclude sections 15 and 16, whatever your role, your calling, your family relationships in life may be today, you can "seek to bring forth ... Zion" in your own little sphere of influence that you and I may have (Doctrine and Covenants 14:6). We can do that by declaring repentance, this idea of encouraging, supporting, having sympathy for, giving solutions at times to people around us, to get up, and to turn, and to adjust, and try again, and move forward again, to learn from their experience. And notice, I love the closing again of verse 6, "...that you may bring souls unto me...". All of our declaring repentance efforts, whether it be with our family, or with our callings, or in a formal mission, or some other setting, the end goal here is to bring souls unto Christ. It's not to bring them to ourselves. It's not our kingdom we're trying to build in these efforts. Our declaring repentance efforts need to be focused "with an eye single to the glory of God", because Jesus taught us how to make these offerings of, Father, "Here am I; send me", and the glory be thine forever, to give the glory to him, and to bring the souls to him (Doctrine and Covenants 4:5, Isaiah 6:8).

All right. Let's finish with section 17 now. This section is very significant. This happens in June of 1829. You have Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery at the Whitmer home in Fayette, New York, so you've got David Whitmer there, and then Martin Harris comes for a visit. And as they'd been doing the translation on the Book of Mormon, they'd seen, in a couple of ways, this allusion to witnesses, how God uses witnesses for things.

So, if you take a quick field trip with me back into the Book of Mormon, let me show you what we're talking about. If you go to Ether chapter 5 in the Book of Mormon, notice verse 3; so, you can picture Joseph and Oliver, and at times, upstairs in this translation process, you would have Emma scribing for him. At other times, you would have David Whitmer scribing for him. We don't know who the scribe was for Ether chapter 5, but it had to be pretty clear to them, both Joseph, and whoever was scribing, and whoever was in the room listening, what this would mean. Listen to verse 3: "And unto three...". Actually, let's go back to verse 2: "And behold, ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates unto those who shall assist to bring forth this

work; And unto three shall they be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true" (Ether 5:2-3).

They're not going to have to take your word for it, Joseph; they're going to know for themselves, of a surety, that these things are true. And then verse 4: "And in the mouth of three witnesses shall these things be established; and the testimony of three, and this work, in the which shall be shown forth the power of God and also his word...". So, you'll notice, this chapter 5 was Moroni writing to Joseph. We talked about this last year. You could label it: dear Joseph, love, Moroni. It's a personal letter to Joseph from Moroni, in Ether chapter 5, and he's giving him some instructions here.

And to me, my favorite part of this entire chapter 5 is after Moroni informs Joseph that you're going to have three witnesses who are going to know of a surety, but then Moroni gives his own three witnesses. I love this. Who are Moroni's three witnesses? "...of which the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost bear record -- and all this shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day" (Ether 5:4). So, here's Moroni saying to Joseph Smith, you're going to have three witnesses that get to see the plates and know of a surety. But I've got my three witnesses, and we combine those. "...in the mouth of [two or] three [heavenly and earthly] witnesses", and brothers and sisters, that's a powerful combination (Ether 5:4).

And now David, and Martin, and Oliver have been hounding Joseph. They've been asking him repeatedly, over and over, can I be one of the witnesses? Can I be one of the witnesses? And finally, Joseph goes to the Lord with the question, what shall we do about this? And the answer comes in the Urim and Thummim, section 17, verifying and validating the fact that these three are indeed foreordained to be those three witnesses that were discussed in the Book of Mormon.

Notice the things that they're promised that they're going to be able to see. "... [you're going to] have a view of the plates, and also of the [breastplates], the sword of Laban, [and] the Urim and Thummim, [those two stones,] which were given to the brother of Jared upon the mount, when he talked with the Lord face to face," back in Ether chapter 3, "...and the miraculous directors which were given to Lehi...", the directors being called the liahona (Doctrine and Covenants 17:1). We get the name liahona in Alma 37. Notice verse 2: "...it is by your faith that you shall obtain a view of them, even by that faith which was had by the prophets of old."

Now, brothers and sisters, this is beautiful because God's telling them, you're going to get to see these things listed in verse 1, but you're going to see them by your faith, and it's not just for your own curiosity. It's not just so you can walk away going, oh I wondered, now I know, whew, that's great. No, you now have a responsibility. Where much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). Look at verse 3: "And after that you have obtained faith, and have seen them with your eyes, you shall testify of them, by the power of God;". You're not going to just write a simple testimony that you know these things are true of your own power; you're going to write a testimony by the power of God. Once again, God isn't telling them, go and do this work. He's saying, walk with

me. I'm going to help you; I'm going to be with you. You're going to assist me in doing this work.

Verse 4: "And this you shall do that my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., may not be destroyed, that I may bring about my righteous purposes unto the children of men in this work. And ye shall testify that you have seen them, even as my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., has seen them..." (Doctrine and Covenants 17:5). By the way, I love how often the Savior -- we're talking about the Lord Jesus Christ here -- I love how so often he repeats that phrase, "my servant Joseph Smith, Jun." (Doctrine and Covenants 17:5). You'll notice the possessive pronoun, "my". I picked him, he's my servant. I'm guiding him, I'm directing him. I love that. I love the Lord for his willingness to claim us, and to take us as his own, and say, I'm going to guide you, and I'm going to direct you. And you don't have to be the prophet of the Restoration like Joseph Smith to be owned in this beautiful, covenantal context by the Lord Jesus Christ.

You can, as Taylor mentioned earlier, you can insert your own name in your own sphere of gospel influence, and in the plan of salvation in your own existence, to picture the Lord referring to you as "my servant", insert your own name. There's something powerful there, that as we look at the various duties and responsibilities that each of us have, that we recognize that we're not alone because the Savior has chosen us, and now it's our turn to choose him as we move forward in the work.

Notice verse 6: "And he has translated the book, even that part which I have commanded him, and as your Lord and your God liveth it is true." I love that! That the Savior is now, he's talking to people who are going to be witnesses of the book, but before they even see all of the things that He promises, here's Jesus bearing testimony of the truthfulness of the book. All of those artifacts they're going to see, they're great. They could be put in a museum someday, the celestial museum. But they won't bring salvation, but the gospel message that comes through all of those means, the plates, the liahona, the Urim and Thummim, all those things, it's that message that sinks deep into our hearts that changes us, that helps us know how to repent, to know how to come unto Christ. Those are the things that really matter. So, I love the fact that here the Savior is bearing testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

Look at verse 7: "Wherefore, you have received the same power, and the same faith, and the same gift like unto him; And if you do these last commandments of mine, which I have given you, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; for my grace is sufficient for you, and you shall be lifted up at the last day" (Doctrine and Covenants 17:7-8). Brothers and sisters, those three witnesses go with Joseph out into the woods near the Whitmer home, and they kneel down, and they pray, each in turn. Nothing happens. They pray again, each in turn, and nothing happened, at which point Martin Harris stood up. And he said, it's because of me that you're not getting an answer. He felt that need to repent. He withdrew from the group and went further into the woods, at which point Joseph, and Oliver, and David commenced praying again, and an angel of the Lord appeared, holding the plates. And he turned the plates over so they could see

the engravings and the characters on each of the plates. And then, to his side appeared a table, and on the table, you get all of these artifacts that were promised for them to see, and they hear the voice of God bearing witness that what they are seeing is true.

Once they complete that, Joseph rises and goes to find Martin, kneels down with him, and the angel appears and shows Martin the same things that David and Oliver had seen and witnessed just a few moments before, at which point Martin says, “[it is] enough. [it is] enough. [For] mine eyes have beheld...”. He is thrilled and overjoyed. And then the three of those men, they write their testimony, and what we have at the beginning of the Book of Mormon is the testimony of the Three Witnesses.

You'll notice, brothers and sisters, that it wasn't enough for God to show the plates to just three. He then picked eight additional witnesses. And they have a very different experience. There's no angel; there's no voice from heaven. The other artifacts aren't displayed, but Joseph is allowed to show them the plates. They're able to heft them, hold them, handle them, touch them, tactile experience. You'll notice, in contrast, the three and the eight, that for the three, it's this amazing, spiritual experience, and for the eight it's a very physical, tangible, hands-on experience. They all write their testimonies and agree to these.

Now the fascinating thing is what happens later in life. All three of your witnesses of the Book of Mormon, Martin Harris, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, all three of them find their way out of the Church, to one degree or another. Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery find their way back into the Church within their own life. David Whitmer does not. He spends decades of his life saying some pretty bad things about Joseph Smith and the Church of Jesus Christ. He becomes pretty antagonistic towards the Church and the prophet. It's interesting to me that none of those Three Witnesses, and none of the Eight Witnesses, at any time in their life, ever go back on their testimony of the Book of Mormon, and what they experienced with the plates, and in these things that are listed in their testimony at the beginning of the Book of Mormon.

Again, let's think about this. Here we have eight witnesses, three witnesses. Many of them fall away from the Church. They have every opportunity to deny their witness of the Book of Mormon, and they never did, ever. Even though they denied other things, they denied that Joseph was a prophet, they denied the Church, they said all sorts of things, they never denied their witness of the Book of Mormon. I find that tremendously compelling, that ultimately, the witness that matters the most is the one that each of us, individually, from God, receives in our heart: that the Book of Mormon is true. But I love that God has provided additional support to encourage all of us to take him seriously, to take his work seriously. God has tried to give us lots of reasons to believe. He will also never compromise your agency by forcing your belief with incontrovertible evidence. Because if God proved everything to you in a typical, scientific way, where's the choice in belief? And we're often taught that when we believe, God will teach us. It's not the other way around. It's not after God has shown final and total proof, then you choose to believe.

Now, just out of interest, and this is just one perspective, in the ancient Israelite worldview, and this may not have been for the early Saints in the 19th century, they may not have been aware of this, but I think this is potentially interesting: that some ancient Israelites saw symbolism in different numbers. For example, the number 3 often symbolized a covenant, and the number 8 would symbolize something new. Now, for example, when you are baptized at age 8, it's a new beginning. Well, how many witnesses do we have of the Book of Mormon? We have three official, and another eight official. And let's add somebody else. How about Joseph Smith? He also was a witness, an official witness of the Book of Mormon. And for some ancient Israelites, they understood the number 1 to represent God, or everlasting. Now, what's very interesting about this: all of this, actually, are 12 witnesses, and 12, anciently, would represent authority. I just find it fun that the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the official witnesses that God provides, is the new and everlasting covenant, bound in authority. So, I'll just let you dwell on that for just a moment.

But let's return again to these witnesses. God provided them to encourage you to trust that God will also witness to you, that you can be a witness of one, that God has confirmed to you that the Book of Mormon is true, but more importantly, that the words of truth that have been preserved by ancient prophets for our day are to invite us to believe and trust that Jesus is the Christ, God is the Father, and if we trust them, we can be saved.

So, as we come to the close of today's lesson, what Taylor has talked about here is where we want to end. Of all the witnesses of the Book of Mormon, which one is the most important? I think that it doesn't take a genius to figure out that the reason we have these witnesses is to establish your witness. It's that thirteenth witness that is the most important for you. It's yours. And you have everything you need to move forward in faith. You have Heavenly Parents who love you. You have a Savior who gave his life for you. And he is walking with you. He's helping you rise from the dust, and shake off the dust and the chains with which we're bound, helping us to realign, and re-aim, and refocus our life, and change our mind, change our thoughts, change our hearts, as we move forward in faith along the covenant path. He knows, better than anyone, when you need sympathy, or when you need solutions, or when you need support, or when you need all three. And He provides that as only a God can.

He lives. This book is true. His words in the Doctrine and Covenants ring true to us. They're for these people, but they're also for us today. And we leave that with you in the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Know that you're loved.

Various authors. *Saints: the Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*. Vol. 1, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2018.

Various authors. “History, circa June–October 1839 [Draft 1], Page 6.”, *Page 6*, www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-june-october-1839-draft-1/6.