

Janiece Johnson: Joseph Smith began his Bible translation project by June of 1830. Rather than a new translation from an ancient language, he made the biblical text more easily understood for his followers. This project helps us to think about translation more broadly. The Joseph Smith Papers described what we called the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible or the JST as an inspired process of revising, clarifying, and augmenting the text of the Bible. Joseph began with the Old Testament and then moved to the New Testament when prompted by the Lord in a March 1831 revelation, the one we know as section 45. Though never prepared for publication, Joseph changed more than 3000 verses of the biblical text. During the month of March 1832, Joseph worked on the translation. As they neared the end of the New Testament with the Book of Revelation. Though Joseph later said that the Book of Revelation is one of the plainest books God ever caused to be written he still had questions, like many 19th century Christians and many of the Saints.

My name is Janiece Johnson. I'm a Willes Center research associate at the Maxwell Institute. And I, along with Joseph Stuart, the public communications specialist at the Institute, will be discussing each week's block of reading from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' *Come, Follow Me* curriculum. We aren't here to present a lesson, but rather hit on a few key things, from the scripture block, that we believe will help fulfill the Maxwell Institute's mission to inspire and fortify Latter-day Saints in their testimonies of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and to engage the world with religious ideas.

I want to start with, "questions are good." If we want to learn anything from Joseph in section 77, questions are good.

Joseph Stuart: Something I think is crucial to understand is that many of us have been taught that there are bad questions, or we have heard the cliché that "there are no bad questions." I would submit that there are no bad questions asked in good faith. Now, what this means is that you are actually expecting an answer that you are willing to engage what the person says in their answer. Whether that person is your neighbor, a member of your family, a member of your ward, or the Lord when you ask for help. As Moroni put it in chapter 10 of Moroni in the Book of Mormon, we need a "real intent." We have to be willing to follow through with the answers that we receive. We need to be sure that we are asking questions with a purpose of doing something about it or benefitting from it, not only to ask for the sake of asking.

We should take the responsibility to ask questions seriously. We can think of asking questions as part of the process of building a culture, where people feel comfortable seeking new information or being vulnerable. Sometimes we ask questions because we know others might ask those questions.

I remember being in my first semester of graduate school and not knowing what the word "ethnography" meant. After googling the word, I still had no idea what it meant. But, thankfully, one of my classmates saw that I was furiously googling this word, and asked the professor to explain what ethnography meant. This was something that I think, first of all, was really great of my classmate to pick up on my need on my search for information. But to be willing to ask the question that I felt too shy or embarrassed to ask. While we cannot read other people's minds, sometimes we can read context clues to know when it might be helpful to ask a question that can help someone else.

Johnson: I also think that perhaps this section cautions a little bit about what we get wrapped up in. The Book of Revelation, for the Saints in the 19th century as well as for Christians historically, had been a consistent enigma. People had tried to explain what this apocalyptic scripture described. And Joseph, though he's got questions that he goes to the Lord and wants to find answers by way of revelation, also later will say, "I've seldom spoken from the revelations of John. It's not very essential for the elders to have knowledge in relation to the meaning of beasts, and heads, and horns, and other figures spoken of in the revelations. Declare the first principles and let the mysteries alone, lest ye be overthrown. Elder Brown, when you go to Palmyra, say nothing about the four beasts, but preach those things the Lord has told you. To preach about: repentance and baptism for the remission of sins." In this context, Joseph uses mysteries in a negative sense—that sometimes when we are focused on mysteries, they can distract us from what is most important. Revelation, the book of Revelation, is one of the things that we don't want to get caught up in and forget about those things that are most important.

Stuart: I worry sometimes that either myself or those around me get bored with the basic gospel principles. I know that a lot of the folks get tired of having the answers be pray, go to church, read your scriptures, serve others, faith, hope, and charity—these sorts of things that we can repeat over and over again—when we would much rather discuss the location of Kolob. Or other

things that we could think about, but in the same way distract us from thinking about helping our Heavenly Parents to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of their children.

Johnson: Let's move on to section 78. I think section 78 gives us a little tutorial in how helpful the new edition, the 2013 edition of the English scriptures, can be for us. If you are old-school and reading scriptures from paper and you have an edition that was published prior to 2013, I would encourage you to read the introductions from a digital source or from a new copy of the scriptures. Because as the Joseph Smith Papers had work to provide us with the best and most up-to-date information regarding these sections, there's some sections where the introduction has changed. And section 78 is one of those introductions. Verse 3 now reads, "an organization of my people." The extant manuscript versions more specifically speak of an organization of the literary and mercantile establishments of "my church." Originally, this revelation specifically focuses on the United Firm: a group of men the Lord tasked with managing the production of scripture and the financial interest of the church. As it reads now, it changes our focus and enables us to think about those continuing elements of the Law of Consecration, which the Lord would build over time.

Stuart: It's important to remember that when we come to these texts, these scriptural revelations that the Lord has given to us, that we read the scriptures with the eyes that we have. Texts do not interpret themselves. Just because something says something plain as day to you, does not mean that it means the exact same thing to somebody else in the same situation. Even if you had an identical twin, it would not mean that you are going to believe the same thing about the same set of scripture. We always bring our own experiences, biases, hopes, and assumptions to a text when we are reading. Now, for this revelation in particular, I've been in Sunday school lessons where we discuss equality and distribution and it skews to either side of the American political spectrum.

I think it's important to remember that equality is viewed as ideal, but that does not mean that we can stop at calling it "an ideal." I don't envision the Lord saying, "the poor you will always have with you," and shrugging His shoulders. I see Him as saying, "We need to work together to find ways to benefit the lives of our Heavenly parents' children." We must envision a present and future where Zion can be established and there are no poor among us in any sense. Whether spiritually, emotionally, or in terms of temporal needs.

Johnson: I think that sometimes we avoid the word "equality" because of overt political baggage that the word may carry. However, it is the language of the Lord. I believe it's important that we use it. As the Lord talked about the bishop's responsibilities in Zion, the Lord defined equality, "every man, [and woman], every person equal, according to their circumstances, their wants and needs." That's in section 51. The goal of equality is creating a place in which everyone is able to thrive. Now, here in section 78 the Lord reminds us this kind of equality doesn't just happen. Verses in 5 and 6 read, "That you may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things. For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things." If we aren't focused on equality and creating a space where everyone can thrive here in mortality, we can't assume that it will just happen once we obtain heavenly things.

Stuart: We have to act with faith, hope, and charity in creating the kind of the world that we want to live in and in which everyone has the same opportunities to thrive and to become the type of people that they want to be and that God wants them to be. Recognizing inequality is not the same thing as working towards eradicating inequality. I'm reminded of what President Nelson said when he announced the church's partnership with the NAACP, in talking about how the church must lead out while rooting out racism. That we have to work proactively to make the world a better place for us. We cannot fight every battle on every front. We cannot despair and burn ourselves out in trying to do everything for everyone, everywhere, but we can do something for someone, somewhere. It's important to remember that when Jesus said, "poor you will have always with you." He also encouraged his followers to "feed the hungry," "clothe the naked," "visit the lonely" and so forth.

Johnson: "Remember the poor" is the most consistent refrain in the Doctrine & Covenants. Let's return to section 76 description of those who inherit celestial glory for the moment. Verses 94 and 95 read, "They who dwell in his presence are the church of the Firstborn; and they see as they are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fullness and of his grace; And he makes them equal in power, in might, and in dominion." I wonder if only when each child of God is valued for the infinite soul they possess, can we really all be equal. But if equality reigns in the celestial kingdom, shouldn't it be important to those of us who covenant to consecrate our lives to the Lord? I love the way these revelations build "line upon line, precept upon precept." Section 78 ends, "And he that is faithful and wise steward shall inherit all things." Think about that word "steward." Implicit within the act of consecrating our lives, dedicating our lives to

God, making them sacred, is acknowledging that all we have is from the Lord. In fact, we don't own anything, lest it be our own will. If we are faithful and wise, we will inherit all things.

Stuart: What does "all things" mean to you, Janiece?

Johnson: I think that "all" is so all encompassing that it is difficult for our finite mortal minds to grasp. But, I believe that when the Lord says all, the Lord means all. That it even includes, perhaps, the fulfillment of those things that we are left with absence and wanting in mortality. But, when the Lord says "all", I trust that the Lord means all.

Stuart: In moving to sections 79 and 80, I love all sections where the Lord is calling missionaries to serve and to speak to others about the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. While these instructions are given to individuals, there are verses and instructions that we can take to ourselves. Something that I took away from these two sections in particular is thinking about a quote from President J. Reuben Clark. Now, President Clark had been the first counselor in the first presidency for many years and when President George Albert Smith passed away and David O. McKay became president of the church, he asked President Clark to serve as his second counselor rather than his first. This is something that many Latter-day Saints thought that President McKay had insulted J. Reuben Clark, that he had asked him to step down, that he was thumbing his nose at him. And I loved that President Clark took the opportunity in his first general conference afterward to say, "In the service of the Lord it is not where you serve, but how. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one takes the place to which one is duly called, which place one neither seeks nor declines." It made me think about different times in my life when others have been able to serve me. In thinking about my experiences in church growing up, I think of service in two kinds of ways. The first is a crisis. That's when the people with the big official titles come in. A bishop, or an elder's quorum's president, or a relief society president, who is able to help me to get through the crisis that I was in. But, what I find interesting is that those with the longest lasting experiences I have had and the ways that help me to think about myself as a disciple are those who show up week-to-week and do things that may not make their way into a ward history or into a journal. I think about primary choristers. I think about girls camp counselors. I think about those who organize the father's and son's camp out. I think about those who do what they can behind the scenes, without fanfare and without expectation, that help the ward to run and to help individuals live their best lives.

I'm also reminded of something that, then elder, but now President M. Russell Ballard said. Where he says, "Our challenges today are not more severe than the challenges faced by those who have gone before us. They are just different." The Lord isn't asking us to load up a handcart. He is asking us to fortify to our faith. He isn't asking us to walk across a continent. He's asking us to walk across the street to visit our neighbor. He isn't asking us to give all our worldly possessions to build a temple. He is asking us to give of our means and our time despite the pressures of modern living to continue to build temples and then to attend, regularly, the temples already built. He isn't asking us to die a martyr's death. He's asking us to live a disciple's life." And as an historian speaking here, most disciples' lives are lost in the minutiae of looking for big, exciting, miraculous events. Sometimes we can miss out on the quiet lessons of quiet devotion that takes place in the day-to-day, and week-to-week, and year-to-year service.

Johnson: To conclude our chat today, I would like to return to the few verses at the end of section 78. This is verses 17 through 19. "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." I think we could take this, thinking the Lord is infantilizing all this, but the fact that we are all in the same boat, then perhaps, might get us to think about this a little bit differently. Verse 18, "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." Elder Maxwell would say, "He knows our individual bearing capacities. He will lead us along, not hurt us." And verse 19, "And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more." Just a few weeks later on the evening of March 24th, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon were dragged from their beds, attacked, tarred, and feathered.

Stuart: Now, this is something that is unpleasant for us to think about because tarring and feathering seems barbaric and so far away from our lived experience. But it's important to remember that this has a deep history, not only from the middle ages in Europe, but in American history. Even going back to the American Revolution, Dr. Benjamin Irvin, who's a historian at Indiana University has written about this. He also describes why it was so painful to be tarred and feathered. He says that the tar wasn't always hot, but when it was applied cool, it still made for a painful experience because, once dry, tar clings to your skin and can be removed only with a tremendous amount of scrubbing—possibly with the aid of turpentine or other chemical

solvents that would further irritate the skin. The primary aim of tarrings and featherings was to injure and to shame. To scare someone away from doing something or to not act the way they were asked to do. This Ohio context of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon being tarred and feathered, we can think of these Ohioans, many of whom are disaffected Latter-day Saints, that they are saying, "Joseph Smith, and Sidney Rigdon, and the Latter-day Saints have infringed upon our liberty through their influence in business, their influence in real estate, their influence in religion, and we are going to hurt them because we can."

Johnson: This violent night was certainly a low point in Joseph's early life as a prophet. I wonder if those words from that revelation were received only a few weeks earlier replayed in his mind. "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." "Be of good cheer," doesn't always land well when we are in the middle of affliction. Elder Maxwell said, "Jesus has given that same instruction to others before, when the stressful circumstances in which they found themselves, were anything but cheerful. For instance, he told the original Twelve to be of good cheer when, on the surface, there was nothing to be cheerful about." Therefore, how could Jesus expect the Twelve to be of good cheer? Because the Savior said, "In the world, ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Stuart: I think that's a great place to finish. Let's leave with the words of President Russell M. Nelson as he quotes Doctrine and Covenants section 78 this last April:

"Think back on the past two years. How have you grown? What have you learned? You might initially wish you could go back to 2019 and stay there! But if you look at your life prayerfully, I believe you will see many ways in which the Lord has been guiding you through this time of hardship, helping you to become a more devoted, more converted man—a true man of God.

I know the Lord has great and marvelous plans for us—individually and collectively. With compassion and patience, He says:

"Ye are little children, and ye have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath ... prepared for you;

"And ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along."

Stuart: Thank you for listening to this episode of *Abide*, a Maxwell Institute podcast. Head on over to iTunes or your preferred podcast provider to subscribe, rate, and leave a review, each of which are worth their wait in podcast gold. You can receive show notes, including references to the sermons and articles referenced in this episode by signing up for the Maxwell Institute newsletter at mi.byu.edu. Please also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube for more content from the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship. Thank you and have a blessed week!