

Pre-First Vision

(February 6, 2007)

Last week we had a call from Alan, who gave us a challenge:

Said he:

“Ah, about change in scripture, ah, I believe if it is wrong for the Mormons, it is wrong for the Bible prophets. There is one in Jeremiah, chapter 36 the last verse, where the punchline, the last verse, is changed, he adds to it . . . I’ll let you look that up.”

And so I did. Let’s look at the thinking and attitude of our caller Alan here.

First, he called the last verse of Jeremiah 36 “the punchline.”

Second, he claims that if Bible prophets can change or alter scripture the Mormons should be able to.

Let’s see what he is talking about.

Chapter 36 gives an account of an King Jehoiakim's burning the roll of Jeremiah's prophecies and the consequence of it.

The order to write this roll, the time when it was written, the contents and use of it, are in [Jer 36:1](#).

Baruch, who recorded it from the prophet Jeremiah, read it to the people [Jer 36:4](#).

He also read it to the princes of the King.

the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll, who then read it to the king, [Jer 36:16](#).

After hearing part of it, he burnt it, notwithstanding the intercession of some of his princes to not [36:22](#).

He then ordered Jeremiah and Baruch to be taken captive but they could not be found [Jer 36:26](#).

Then the LORD ordered a new roll to be written, [Jer 36:27](#).

Which was done with some additions to it.

These additions were all with respect to the destruction of the land, and the people in it, by the Chaldeans; and particularly the death of the king, and his want of a burial, [Jer 36:29](#).

This is the so-called change/addition Alan is trying to make relative to LDS changes in their scripture.

Can you detect the enormous differences here?

(Explain)

Read it aloud to people.
Kindly burned it.
Rewrote it as it was, but added the King's destruction.

LDS wrote it.
Could not reduplicate it.
Changed it.
Called the originals wrong.
Didn't reveal the changes were added.

Now, while it is apparent that Alan made a really poor comparison here, what is most revealing is Alan's attitude – which is a common attitude many LDS have toward the Bible –

Smug (called it a "punchline")
Demeaning toward it (if it's wrong for the Mormons to change scripture it should be wrong for the Bible prophets).

Wrong for the Bible prophets!

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| | <p>Listen. Don't demean the Bible. Just don't. Don't take your rewritten history and secretly altered doctrines and try and pull the Bible into the same pit of deception.</p> |
| <p>We've talked about his grandparents.</p> <p>We've discussed his parents.</p> <p>Tonight we are going to analyze some common and not so common stories from the early life of Joseph Smith, Jr. in an effort to paint a more detailed picture of the boy-prophet before his claims of seeing God.</p> <p>These stories include an operation he experienced on an infected leg, early life suffering and trauma inflicted upon him by a cruel series of events, and his early dabbling in magic.</p> <p>First, let's talk about a story that is often repeated in the LDS Sunday Schools about Joseph when he was only around six years old.</p> <p>Typhoid fever had slipped through the family, and though most became quite ill, no life was lost.</p> <p>The fever left Joseph Juniors body but two weeks later a sore developed under his arm pit which drained large quantities of purulent matter.</p> | |

The infection healed but the boy began to complain of a pain between his ankle and knee.

A doctor was called and an incision made, which helped, but when it healed over, the pain returned, they incised again, to the bone.

The infection continued and a series of expert doctors from Dartmouth College came in a suggested amputation.

Lucy and Joseph Junior rejected this idea, and Lucy states in her autobiography that she suggested to the doctors that they remove parts of the infected bone.

They agreed to this suggestion.

Now here is the part that reveals much about the Smith home.

Here is this six year old boy in extreme suffering.

And he is offered wine and brandy as a means to deaden the pain.

But he refuses.

This is portrayed heroically in LDS Sunday Schools the world over – the boy who would be prophet who would not touch alcohol.

But we need to look a little deeper.

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| <p>So why would this suffering six year old so courageously refuse to drink even in the face of such pain?</p> <p>The answer lies in how the child perceived drinking in the first place.</p> <p>I suggest that in light of the fact that alcohol was available in the home, and that his father consumed it to the displeasure of his wife Lucy, that at this very early age Joseph was taking a stand against the fathers ways.</p> | <p>First of all, where did the wine and brandy come from? Did the Darmouth doctors carry it with them to the Smith home?</p> <p>That is doubtful. So this would indicate that alcohol was not something the Smith family was foreign to.</p> <p>Next, what would cause a six year old boy to reject taking alcohol?</p> <p>Some believe it was a tremendous spirit of virtue residing in the about-to-be prophet. But this doesn't account for the fact that the Prophet drank alcohol as an adult!</p> <p>Josiah Stowell, who associated with Joseph in 1825 through 1827 said the prophet would "take a glass but not get drunk" and Martin Harris was brought before a high council court in 1834 for stating that Joseph drank while before translating the Book of Mormon.</p> <p>Accounting books from Lemuel Durfee's farm show large quantities of "liquor cider" delivered to the Smith family during the spring and summer of 1827.</p> <p>(see Vogels Early Mormon Documents for more accounts of Joseph's drinking.)</p> |
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He viewed alcohol and its effects negatively because of what he saw in his own father as a result of the damage it did to their family.

This is never discussed in the LDS Church.

Extreme physical labor.

Joseph Junior himself said, as a result of their poverty, that all the children who “were able to render any assistance were obliged to labor hard.”

Lucy Mack Smith notes that in the first year of being in Palmyra, when Joseph was only around 12 or 13, that the Smith’s – father, Alvin, Hyrum, and Joseph Junior - cleared 30 acres of land for cultivation. “A Herculean effort,” according to LDS author Bushman.

Other factors that played heavily on the make-up of the boy Joseph was his exposure to a variety of extremely painful, odd, and difficult early life circumstances.

These included:

The extreme physical pain he experienced as a young man, as described in the story of his un-anesthetized operation.

The extreme metaphysical make-up of his parents (by way of their early visions and dreams).

Extreme religious factionalism in the communities (which we’ll discuss in future shows).

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| <p>Extreme uprootedness or fear of being uprooted.</p> | <p>Extreme social condemnation for the family's poor social status.</p> <p>Joseph's mother Lucy was very sensitive to the remarks about their low social status. Speaking of the log home they inhabited, Lucy wrote:</p> <p>"I have tis true suffered many disagreeable disappointments in life with regard to property."</p> <p>Joseph's father had a long history of difficulties with creditors, to the point the Smith family seemed to constantly be at the point of either about to lose their home – or in fact lost their home and shelter – due to collectors honest and not calling them on their debts.</p> <p>Daniel Hendrix, a Palmyra resident from 1822-1830 said that he frequently saw Joseph Junior's "in torn and patched trousers, held to his form by a pair of suspenders made out of sheeting, with his calico shirt as dirty and black as earth . . with shoes so worn he must have suffered in the snow and slush."</p> <p>When Joseph Senior appeared before Judge Neely in March of 1826 a resident of Bainbridge commented that he was so "poorly clad," that he looked "like a wandering vagabond."</p> <p>I mention this not to poke fun at the poverty of the Smith's nor to try and tie their appearance to their unworthiness before God.</p> <p>I am not one to place a lot of emphasis on attire.</p> <p>I mention it to paint a picture of the hardship in Joseph's early life, to cast a true light on their family circumstances in light of the present-day pictures presented of them in LDS meetinghouses, and to help you see the reality of the boys upbringing.</p> <p>Ironically, I doubt that either Jesus or Joseph would be warmly accepted in the present church today, based on their appearance alone.</p> |
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Says Bushman:

“Following their parents pattern, Joseph and Lucy circulated among villages in the Upper Connecticut Valley before migrating to Palmyra and Manchester, New York.”

And again, while there, were under the constant threat of losing whatever home they had.

Extreme treatment at the hands of people who were put in trust.

When Joseph was about ten years old, his father decided to move the family to Palmyra New York from Vermont.

Joseph’s father set out alone to find land, leaving Lucy and the family to join him later.

In absolute poverty, because creditors met Lucy before leaving town and stripped her of their traveling funds, they made the trip with the help of an unscrupulous driver named Caleb Howard.

Howard was a cruel and selfish womanizer who would not let 10 year old Joseph, still limping from his surgery, on the sleigh because he wanted a young girl next to him.

Joseph hobbled along in the snow for miles.

Later, after Lucy had had enough of Howard’s shenanigans, she and her family continued on with another family, where one of the sons knocked Joseph off the wagon where he lay in the snow bleeding.

In Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph said:

In addition to some extreme mystical views and magical practices by men he trusted, which we will discuss next week, I will end tonight with Joseph Smith's exposure to extreme sorrow.

When Joseph was just seventeen years old, two months after Joseph had first gone to the hill Cumorah, his older brother Alvin died unexpectedly.

Alvin was the glue that held the family together when Joseph Sr. was "out of the way through wine."

Historical records show that he became a surrogate father in the Smith home, tended to a family store they once operated, used a seer stone to search for buried treasure, was one of the most

"he was left to wallow in my blood until a stranger came along, picked me up, and carried me to the town of Palmyra."

Some may believe these stories support the notion that Joseph was being prepared for the arduous task of being the prophet of the restoration.

This may be in part true.

But it cannot be denied that they could very well contribute to the boy's personal view of life, God, and religion, which in the end, molded and shaped a theology antithetical to the Bible!

There is hardly a biography told of some historical monster who did not suffer in the extreme as a child.

This aspect tends to be ignored in the presentations made in the Church today.

excited about the tale of there being gold plates, and, as recorded in Manuscript History of Joseph Smith, Alvin's presence was required at the hill Cumorah in order to obtain the plates!

All of this was now going to change.

Wrote Joseph of his older brother:

“He was the oldest member of my father’s family. He lived without spot from the time he was a child. From the time of his birth he never knew mirth. He was candid and sober and never knew play. He minded his mother and father in toiling all day. He was one of the soberest men and when he died, and angel of the Lord visited him in his last moments.”

In November of 1823, Alvin became very ill and was given a mercury-based compound called Calomel which lodged in his stomach and took his life in three days.

Knowing death was coming, he called Joseph and the family to his side and told him to:

“be a good boy, and do everything that lies in your power to obtain the record.”

Shortly thereafter, he died.

His death served as a tremendous and life-numbing

blow to the Smith family.

Alvin was the patriarch, the trusted, hard working brother and he was dead.

Unexpected deaths of an immediate family member – especially if death has not been experienced in the family before – are a horrificly painful situation.

In the early morning of late September of 2000, I was sitting in my office at a Bank in Park City when I got a phone call from a family friend . . .

(Tell story of Jeff – how shocking, how painful, how it pushes everything into the now)

Now remember, this family, who just watched their eldest son and brother die –

- Was dirt poor. Was socially outcast.
- Was mystical in their thinking.
- was visionary.
- Were split up by religion – Lucy had joined the Western Presbyterian Church and took half the children with her while Joseph Senior stayed home with Alvin, William and Joseph Jr.
- Believed that gold plates were coming.
- Believed God had appeared to them.

And in the face of all this, this visiting minister came to them and told them that Alvin had gone to hell because he hadn't been baptized!

Next week, we'll continue to investigate early Mormon history as we look into magic practices, and maybe take a step onto the sacred grove where a 14 year old boy claims to have seen God.

Are you beginning to see the elements that came into play in the making of the man, Joseph Smith Junior? And how he reacted to much of what traditional Christianity represented?