

Mormon Book Reviews

“Where an Evangelical Encounters the Restoration”

Interview between Steven Pynnaker and Denver Snuffer

July 8, 2022

Steven Pynnaker: Welcome to Mormon Book Reviews: “Where an Evangelical Encounters the Restoration.” I’m your host, Steven Pynnaker, and I’m very excited to have this guest on. I tell you, folks, I was, uhh... You know, I’ve relayed the story to people how/when I was having lunch with John Dehlin, I... He had already invited me onto the program, and I said, you know, “The Lord showed me that I was gonna be on your program, John.” And John Dehlin goes to me, and he says, “Well if Heavenly Father said you’re comin’ on my program, you’re definitely comin’ on my program!” Well, I’ll tell you, folks, the Lord also showed me that Denver Snuffer was gonna be on my program, so I am very excited about having Denver.

Denver, welcome to the program.

Denver Snuffer: Well, thanks. Good to be here.

SP: Thank you, sir.

DS: Well, I’m not sure it’s “good” to be here. It’s tolerable to be here.

SP: That works for me.

DS: I don’t like to do interviews. Yeah.

SP: I know, and I appreciate you coming on—because it is a real privilege for you to come on.

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So Denver, “Where an Evangelical Encounters the Restoration” is my tagline, and of course, you have an evangelical background (if you consider Baptist “evangelical,” which I do). And I thought we would start with “Before you encounter the Restoration.” I want you to tell a little bit about your childhood and your engagement being raised in a Baptist church. And just talk a little bit about that, and I’ll ask you some questions about that, as well.

DS: Yeah, my mother was fairly devout as a Baptist, invited the minister over for Sunday dinners, and you know, took us to church every Sunday. It was rare that we weren’t in church every Sunday. She had this box of New Testament verses called “Our Daily Bread,” and every morning at breakfast, she would pull out the front card and read us a verse from the New Testament and then put it in the back so that you circulated through the box of

New Testament quotes over the course of a year. And I never was offended at that. I was intrigued by it. I kind of enjoyed it. There was a... You know, the Billy Graham revivals that were on the TV, we watched. There was a revival, as I recollect (I was pretty young), but there was a revival somewhere near the place I was growing up at the time. And we attended one of those. There was always this... I think it's referred to as the "altar call"...

SP: Yup.

DS: ...where you can come up and make some confession and be baptized. When I was nine years old, we were living in Germany; my father was in the military. And I remember, at age nine, wanting to actually respond to that altar call. And the minister did not think I was old enough yet to be baptized (which is kind of ironic because, in the LDS tradition, people are baptized at age eight). Well, being turned down at age nine, thereafter I had a conviction about the authenticity of the New Testament/the legitimacy of Christ as a Savior, but I had a DECREASING confidence that the Baptists had it right. My father was a believer in God and an active Mason, but he did not go to church with us on Sunday (except maybe Easter, maybe Christmas). But he had a belief in God, and he was aloof from denominationalism. And it may be that some of my skepticism about the Baptists having it right was due to my father's neglect of attending church. But the ministers came over, ate dinner; they were welcome. My dad was always cordial with them. And he was someone that did read the Bible. But I never did join a church or get baptized until...when I was 19, and I joined the LDS Church.

SP: So I'm just really curious, did you ever recite the Sinner's Prayer within the context of becoming a Born-again Christian as a child?

DS: Yes. That was done on more than one occasion. And, you know, the Billy Graham revivals asked not that you **recited**, but that you essentially **agree** with the content. And you know, to myself—listening and watching and observing—internally, I was "Christian" in the sense of having a conviction about the legitimacy of Christ as Savior. It just was not enough to provoke me to join in some institutional confession or public institutional confession.

When I was a teenager, some of my buddies went up and answered the altar call. But, you know, I was acquainted with how they lived their lives. And so it didn't persuade me that that had the desired effect of transforming my teenage buddies from what they were BEFORE answering the altar call to what they were after, because I could detect no discernible difference in behavior. And that, too, probably added to my doubts about the utility or value of the institutional commitment.

SP: Okay! Now, this is the '70s, and this is, of course, at the height of the Jesus Movement, the born-again stuff. I mean, even back then, people didn't even know what a Born-again Christian was until, like, Jimmy Carter became President. Then people started talking about it. But you had this born-again movement that was a lot of revivals taking place. My father was involved with the Full Gospel Business Men's Association, which basically took Pentecostalism into the mainstream of all the Protestant denominations, including Catholicism. So it was really an exciting time to be a Christian at this time. It sounds to me

like you primarily got Baptist stuff; were you also influenced by any of the charismatic and Pentecostal stuff that was going on during this time, as well?

DS: Well, yeah, there were... It was hard not to encounter that sort of stuff because you're right: Culturally, the excesses of the 1960s led to a kind of Christian reactionary-ism in the 1970s. And then as...

I was in the military, myself. I... My father was in the Army, and then later in the Army Air Corps, and then later in the Air Force (when they separated it). And I became a member of the Air Force, as well. The Air Force had educational opportunities on base—and I got residency, matriculated into a college while I was on active duty, and I satisfied everything that I needed (except for one semester of credit) while I was still there in Texas at a private Methodist college. And the Methodist college required that you have both an Old Testament and a New Testament course as part of their undergraduate general education requirements.

Well, I'd left Texas before I had finished the religion training, and I went to Provo, where I was hoping to go to law school at the new J. Reuben Clark Law School at Brigham Young University. And I finished that last semester at BYU and mailed the transcript back to McMurry University in Texas. I asked them if I could take an Old Testament and a New Testament class from Brigham Young University to satisfy the religion requirement. And they said not "No," but "Hell no" (although I don't think they used the word "hell"). But they made it abundantly clear that whatever theological nonsense they were teaching as New and Old Testament curriculum at Brigham Young University, it would certainly not pass muster at a Methodist school. So I had to take their Old and New Testament courses, but I did it by correspondence. So I had the material, and I had to go through the material, and I had to pass it off and complete it.

And I... It was surprising to me, particularly the Old Testament material, where they essentially bought into... I wouldn't have known how to describe it at the time, but now I do understand: They had bought into the German School of Textual Criticism. They described the convergence over time in the Jewish community of the J source, the P source, the E source, the D source—and how there were all these competing sources of material that got amalgamated into a single text, but that by careful study, you could parse it apart. You could find the Jehovistic [Yahwist] source. You could find the Elohistic source. You could find the Priestly source and the Deuteronomist sources and tie them all together. You know, I understand ~~the~~ this German school, the Higher Criticism approach, but the more I reflect on that as a scholarly method for parsing apart the Bible, the more unreasonable it seems to me because... I understand the possibility of losing parts of the text. But a wholesale adaptation or change or alteration, I don't think would be possible.

Back before there was widespread competency and literacy, the way that people preserved a tradition was orally. And we think that oral preservation of biblical texts would be well nigh impossible. But right now, today, I would guess that if I played for you the entire library of Beatles' songs, that you could sing along, word for word, with dozens (perhaps hundreds) of their lyrics. And whoever your band was when you were growing up—you know, Led Zeppelin or Creedence Clearwater or Jefferson Airplane (or Jefferson Starship,

later still)—if their song comes on, you have at your command a vast library of lyrics. And all that is, is just your recreational time, usually driving around in a car listening to music. Well, their television/their movies/their entertainment was based upon these texts that they would recite. To be able to come along and introduce into memorized texts a whole new verse in “Here Comes the Sun” or a whole new set of lyrics for “Come Together” would be glaring; it would just stand out. You would know that someone was altering what Lennon and McCartney or what George Harrison wrote. And those are things we don't take particularly seriously. They're simply recreational.

So, I do think that there was more integrity and continuity and difficulty in making the kind of approach that Higher Criticism suggests was “the manner in which the text got assembled” than what Higher Criticism would urge as their scholarly endeavor. I think it's useful to try and detect where some traditions derive from. But I think the traditions **follow**; they didn't lead. I think the parsing apart was done because people have certain preferences. I mean, their... Evangelicals love the text in the letter to the Romans by Paul because it was that text that allowed Martin Luther to see—you know, clearance to allow him to depart from—the priestly control and to obtain salvation by the confession of faith, divorced from a magisterium of priestly authority, and doing something by grace that you're saved. And so Evangelicals seize upon that.

But you know, much of what I have come to understand about religion generally (and Christianity specifically) has been a moving target/a motion picture in which, over time, things look different. Today's Evangelical community, for example, would not even be regarded as Christian for the first 950 years of Christianity. And if you go back to the first century of Christianity, it was a cacophony of Matthean Christians and Johannine Christians and Petrine Christians who disagreed. And then you've got your Gnostics that came along and urged something that was later regarded as heretical.

As Christians, if we're being candid, if we're being honest with one another, the reason why Christianity took on a stable form in the era of Constantine was because the Roman emperor had the ability by force of arms to stabilize both the canon of Scripture and the form that Christianity would take. And it's not because an argument got won; it's because by force of arms and by burning texts that differed from the official canon...

SP: Right.

DS: ...much like the criticism that Christians today level at Islam and the way in which the Koran became a singular text, as opposed to having multiple versions by burning and by killing. Christianity shares that same kind of tortured history—which is one of the reasons why, in my view, Christians should study Mormon history.

SP: Yes.

DS: Mormon history is—in real-time—undergoing those same schismatic, breaking-apart, conflicts, accusations. And in much of what the largest denomination of Mormonism (which is the one that I joined—the LDS version), it was established, in part, by violence—the same kind of violence we see in the early Christian/in the early Islam era—by Brigham Young while they were in isolation in the territory of Deseret (which became the territory of Utah,

which became later still the state of Utah) in which the Home Missionary Program and the questions that they asked were designed to ferret out heresy and to determine who was a candidate for blood atonement (or killing) to “save their souls!” And it was another attempt to—by force of arms—establish an orthodoxy. So, the study of Christianity, the study of Evangelical movement, the study of Catholicism, and the study of Mormonism, it's a fascinating endeavor. And nothing is ever as simple as this is right; this is wrong; this is truly what happened. Because there are a lot more moving parts to the whole of this than...

SP: ...than people realize. Yes.

DS: Yeah.

SP: And I agree with that. As a matter of fact, when I was on Mormon Stories, I made a similar parallel that the early... You can almost parallel, just have a parallel between early Christian history and early Mormon history. I say the first decade of Mormonism is like the first century and vice... You know, so from 1820 to 1830, and then 18... You know, you can almost divvy it up. But a decade... The first decade is like the first century and henceforth.

I want to get back a little bit to your time as engaging Evangelicalism in Christianity in the '70s. And that is, there were a couple of things that were happening in the 1970s. First of all, the all-time selling book during the 1970s was Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*—sold more books than any other book in the '70s. And there were two groups that were making claims that in 1975 the world was gonna come to an end: the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Worldwide Church of God. So, at this time in the 1970s, it was also a very apocalyptic end-time things. As a matter of fact, I remember seeing my mom/my parents had food storage, like, you know, like ready to go, you know, from the '70s, because they thought the end was coming. I just want you to maybe comment on that period, the apocalyptic period that was the '70s, how it was felt like, “These are the end days!” and a lot of major groups thought this, and most evangelical Christians were just buying a TON of *The Late Great Planet Earth* (and as a matter of fact, there were a lot of non-Christians that were buying that book).

DS: Right, right. That was the predecessor really to the *Left Behind* series. I mean, *Left Behind* was an expansion on *Late Great Planet Earth*. And yeah, I did read that. And...

Apocalypticism is useful because it motivates—and nothing gets people to donate more, attend church more, clean their act up more, and take seriously the choices that they make in life more than Apocalypticism. **However**, one of the things that I notice is that when that becomes the overwhelming concern, there is a tendency to sell short your preparation for the future, your education, your career, your buying a home, your saving. If it's all gonna go up in ashes here within the next year or two, then why do you need anything more than a travel trailer and a pickup truck—because you're gonna have to move to get away from the firestorm anyway.

You know, the Apocalypticism **affected** me. It... You know, I read the book! I considered that a peril! And clearly, if you accept the statements that Christ makes in the 24th chapter of Matthew and much of the Book of Revelation's imagery, you know, there is going to come a time of some considerable distress. But that time of considerable distress appears to be

broken up into a single generation and (even further still) into periods of three-and-a-half and three-and-a-half years (or a total of seven). And when that clock starts counting and when that generation is born is dependent upon the accomplishment of a number of signs that **God is in charge of**. And I think we are better off living our lives as if we're going to die in an old folk's home somewhere at the end of a fully well-lived life, rather than relying upon the Lord to come and interrupt everything to give us the chance to get out of here and escape before life reaches its full measure.

Understand, too, that in the '70s, we still had the threat of East/West thermonuclear war, the threats from the Pentagon and from Russia (and the Kremlin). The Vietnam War had just wrapped up. There were tensions in the Middle East; we had the Yom Kippur War. We had tensions in Israel (and of course, many of the prophecies talk about how the “valley of decision” is located right there), and with the tensions building up and with the division of interest between the East and the West (the East favoring the Muslim/Arab communities; the West supporting Israel more fully back then), it looked like a conflagration was imminent. And into that, you know, *The Late Great Planet Earth* comes and tells its tale. And it got all of us concerned! It got ME concerned—but I noted the reaction of people in their lives to that. And I was still intent on finishing an undergraduate degree, finishing a law degree, preparing for life; I was still intent on trying to prepare for life. And so, the emotional enthusiasm that those kinds of focuses drained from you, in my view at the time, didn't have a positive effect.

I think it's useful to prepare to die. I think it's useful to prepare to face the Maker. But I don't think it's useful to give up your life in exchange for a hurried preparation for God to come wipe the slate clean and, you know, catch you up into the clouds of glory and then wipe the Earth clean and come plant you in a place of peace for a thousand years. I think those kinds of thoughts and imagery: you know, useful to be hopeful about someday but very inhibiting in terms of living and preparing and going about your daily life. It doesn't help your **children** prepare for life; it doesn't help you be a better father. It doesn't help you be a better husband to look forward to God destroying everything next week—because sometimes you need to undertake a home repair job that'll take more than the next week. And you're better off living your life that way. But yeah, it influenced me.

SP: That's very interesting. And this is where I kind of want to get to maybe ~~your~~ some of the spiritual stuff that you've engaged in. And it's really interesting, 'cuz you were baptized in the fall of 1973, and a few months later, in 1974, you had your first encounter with an angel. You describe that you were caught up and came to a transparent walled room, from which you could see the blue curvature of the Earth below. And you met a man who was old, as tall as you ~~were~~ are, with a beard, a full head of hair that was long but not quite to his shoulders, and who spoke to you non-vocally. After receiving a brief message about the timing of your upcoming ministry, you asked nothing further and were compelled to depart, and you left the scene (see “BFHG, Part 3,” www.denversnuffer.com, August 22, 2012). You tell this to downplay your own preparedness and show how foolish you were to not asking a follow-up question. But why did you get the privilege of entertaining an angel not even one year from your baptism, while the recent converts and most longtime members are, by and large, limited to receiving barely discernible promptings from the Holy Spirit? In other

words, what made you so unique that, I mean, to be a recent convert and have this encounter? I mean, does it...? Just tell me what do you feel ~~was~~ prepared you? I mean, in one sense, you had this divine encounter. What... How did this happen?

DS: You know, the Mormon missionaries brought that pamphlet, the Joseph Smith story. (I think they still print that.) It's by and large the Joseph Smith History portion of the Pearl of Great Price that the LDS Church publishes. The story that the missionaries told me was about Joseph Smith going out and praying and encountering the Father and the Son in a vision. And then some years later, after he felt that he didn't know what his standing and state was before God, he prayed, and then an angel comes and visits him. (And then the gold plates and all the rest of what happens proceeds from there.) That introduction suggested to me that if Joseph Smith was encountering God and if the missionaries were coming and bearing their testimony that this stuff was true, that it was the—I **thought**—it was the common experience of people who accepted God moving anew and visiting with and calling a prophet and giving us new Scripture, that if you were Mormon, one of the things that Mormonism represented was this opening of the heavens. And I assumed—**wrongly**, as it turns out—but I assumed that if you were Mormon, that you ought to expect...

SP: Okay.

DS: ...angels. And so, to me, the encounter with an angel... It wasn't surprising; it was ratifying. It wasn't unexpected; it was confirmatory that, in fact, God is now moving and that these things have and do and **will** take place. I...

In the Scriptures, there are passages where, in describing the event, it says that "I was caught up to an exceedingly high mountain." That language is actually a euphemism, because the encounter that I had, if I were going to describe that original encounter, the words I would use is, "I was caught up to an exceedingly high mountain," not because I was on a mountain (because it was somewhere a bit higher than that), but because that is the recitation/the scriptural descriptor that gets used in order to talk about how such an encounter takes place. And to be caught up and to be in the presence of, you know, a man dressed in white who had a **very specific message**... I mean, I can quote it still! It was not audible, but it was clearly communicated and in language I understand. "On the first day of the third month in nine years, your ministry will begin. And so you must prepare." That seemed like... I mean, this person was as somber and as serious and grave a personage as you would ever encounter on the Federal Bench. It was a person who was clearly entrusted to deliver a message, and the message was spoken with some considerable sobriety and clarity. And you know, I don't think that I felt intimidated. But what I did feel was a sense of the legitimacy of this person and the inadequacy of myself, the bonafides of this personage and the ill-preparedness of myself. And it puzzled me at the moment, but it puzzled me a great deal more as I thought about it. I mean, that just sounded like something that was not to be questioned but to be accepted. So I accepted it. But the whole of the incident to me at the time seemed like, "That's normal!" I mean, if you're Mormon, that's the way that this religion... This is how the New Testament began. This is what was encountered when Zachariah went into the temple, and he prayed on behalf of Israel, and Gabriel emerges from the veil on the right side of the altar, and announces that he's *Gabriel, who stand in the*

presence of God (Luke 1:4 RE). It was a source of truth and light and unquestionable authority. And so, I accepted it.

SP: Wow!

DS: But the more time went on them, the more questions it raised.

SP: Sure! It was a very peculiar thing, and you would soon realize it because it wasn't something that was normal.

Just a few things: Would you describe it as a dream? An out-of-body experience? When you say "caught up," where were you before and after it happened? And if, like, somebody was with you... You said "Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell," if somebody was with you (like a roommate or someone next to you), would they see you get caught up?

DS: I doubt it. It was extraordinarily physical, tangible. But I doubt that they would have observed anything had they been there. I was...

SP: So it was physical, but you would... Could you say it was kind of an out-of-body experience?

DS: I... Yes, I can say that if I had to guess, it was likely that I was out of the body, but it did not at all seem so. I had the same tangibility: The thing on which I stood was as solid as a tile floor in a military barracks; the walls (although they were transparent) were as physical as a sheetrock wall. Everything about it was tangible and physical in that sense, but whether in the body or out of the body, I'm... I absolutely could not tell. But I **believe** it was out of the body. And when the incident ended and I was dismissed, I returned.

SP: Wow.

DS: I recall a return. And then I was still awake and still as tangible as I had been before, but I didn't feel any, like, transition out of the body I occupy and transition back into the body I occupy. It felt exactly the same throughout. And afterwards... I was in a military barracks at the time that this occurred. I was still in the military barracks when it ended. And I was left, you know, puzzling over it and assuming that this was normal.

SP: So were you praying at the time? Were you looking for this? Were you expecting it? Or did it just all of a sudden happen?

DS: It happened without me trying to provoke it. It happened as if it were on someone else's scheduled timetable and not on my own. But I have to admit, I had been... When I joined the LDS Church and I got baptized, I had been very serious about the religion. I got the conviction that what the missionaries were telling me was true and that I ought to respond to it, but I was somewhat skeptical of my capacity to be a good Mormon. I did go ahead, I did get baptized, and I did get an outpouring of the Spirit that occurred subsequent to the baptism—and I did find within myself a spiritual strength that I didn't feel like I had before entering the waters of baptism and accepting and [indecipherable]...

SP: I'm just curious: Did you speak in tongues, by chance?

DS: I was able to prophesy...

SP: Okay.

DS: ...but I don't... No, not tongues, but I was... I did prophesy.

SP: Okay. Okay, interesting.

DS: So yeah, it was a whole different life from the one I'd had before. It was as if someone had turned a light switch on. And now I understood things that I couldn't have... And the Scriptures, which had been relatively boring before then, came alive. There were things in the biblical texts that I found understandable for the first time—and fascinating, wonderful, encouraging. And before that, the Scriptures had been, you know, Our Daily Bread—if you can get through one verse and think about it, you've done a good thing. Now I was reading multiple chapters and enjoying them.

SP: Okay, so you started feasting on the word; you started devouring it and loving it and getting better understanding. That's really interesting to me, and that... Those kind of things resonate with me. You know, I come from a charismatic background. And I... There's a... One of the things I find interesting about you and your movement (you know, I know it's "loosely based") is that you speak a lot of the same language that a Born-again Christian charismatic would resonate with. And so I feel like when I talk to people from your group, I feel like I'm...that we speak the same language.

DS: Yeah.

SP: And I guess... I wanna be respectful of your time. So, I kind of want us... First of all, I wanted to kind of establish the early days of you/your ministry/your experiences with Evangelicals; it's very fascinating to me. I kind of... I just want...

So, of course, you go to law school, you have your law practice, and you're basically living a conventional LDS life—you would probably say, right? Okay. And then around the 2000s, you start publishing stuff—and it's really some interesting books that you start publishing—and then you start with lectures. Maybe just talk about what caused you to start engaging the Restoration differently than you had before and really, really starting to put stuff out and put yourself out there.

DS: Umm, the... There's a backdrop that you probably need to understand...

SP: Sure.

DS: ...in order to see what happened and why. When I became a Latter-day Saint, the top of the Latter-day Saint hierarchy was populated by scriptionists and preachers whose focus was upon parsing Scripture and parsing LDS history—and I mean:

- Boyd Packer had been a seminary instructor before he became a general authority and an apostle;
- Bruce R. McConkie had been a lawyer, but he had also undertaken to write multiple volumes of New Testament commentary, an ambitious book called *Mormon Doctrine*,

multiple volumes preserving his father-in-law's ministerial content (much of which was parsing Scripture);

- Marion G. Romney, who was the scriptionist who rarely gave a sermon that wasn't Scripture-based;
- Mark E. Peterson, who wrote a series of books on the Patriarchal Fathers and explaining them.

DOCTRINE was the substance of general authority talks, general conference talks, books that were coming out. Over time that changed. One of the things that radically... And many people (even Latter-day Saints) wouldn't necessarily understand what I'm about to say, but it's nevertheless the case:

A man got called into the general authority ranks—Gordon B. Hinckley—who started the Public Relations Office of the LDS Church (who eventually rose to become the President of the LDS Church) who implemented a different way of approaching things. He, as a public relations official, had kept up on what businesses had discovered were useful in managing a multi-national corporate entity, including “opinion poll” taking, “focus group” testing, and using the tools of advertising in order to shape the message of what it was that you're going to deliver. And so, Mormonism shifted from being doctrinally-based to being, essentially, sales-based and advertising-based and public relations-based—and the transition necessitated a different kind of leader to be called. And so the ranks that the highest level of the hierarchy in the LDS Church today reflects that different set of priorities. You have ~~business instructors that~~ college business instructors that are members, bankers, car salesmen who are engaged in marketing. You've got... When Gordon B. Hinckley died and Thomas S. Monson took over, at the press conference (when he was being interviewed as the newly-called President of the LDS Church), Thomas Monson made the remark that “You should not expect any big changes; it'll be steady as you go,” which was, in reality, it was his way of saying, “We have an infrastructure. The infrastructure got built by Gordon B. Hinckley. He did it from the 1930s until the year 2000, working in the hierarchy of the LDS Church. And that infrastructure's there, and I'm gonna rely on it, and so it's going to be steady as you go. Don't expect any big changes. I'm gonna continue this process.”

For me, individually, I could not have explained it to you in the way that I just did, but I FELT it. I could sense that the church was drifting.

SP: Okay, and roughly, what year was this?

DS: Late '70s/early '80s and into the '90s.

SP: Okay.

DS: And one of the things that had most appealed to me as a convert to this religious movement (the Restoration, Mormonism, the Latter-day Saint Church) was the... The encounter of Joseph Smith in the grove with a visionary encounter with the Father and the Son is the commencement of the whole of it. And that was based upon some verses that you find in the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John, and it's where Christ, preliminary to going to be crucified... Now, He's telling His apostles about what's going to happen. And the record of that gospel says that the apostles couldn't get their hands around this. He's telling them

things, they're going to record it in their gospel (John, in particular), but they weren't understanding it as Christ is conveying this to them. But he says, "I'm gonna go away, but don't worry. I won't leave you comfortless. I will send the Comforter, AND...." He goes on to say that "...I will come to you." So there's a Comforter (the Holy Ghost) that He's going to send. And then He says that **He**—the Lord—will also come to them (this will be post-crucifixion). And then He goes on to say that when He comes to them, He's going to prepare them so that He—Christ—and the Father **can take up their abode with them**. So John records that. (By the time he records his gospel, he does have his hands around all this, and he is explaining something that is a fundamental part of his gospel and, I think, the message of Christianity.)

But that promise and that message largely lay fallow in the Christian community but was **realized** in the experience of Joseph Smith. And to me, that was bedrock; that was foundational; that was the message of the gospel. And I could **see** that message everywhere in the Book of Mormon where, in the first book, you begin with Nephi in a struggle to try and get his hands around and believe what his father is testifying to after his father had had this heavenly encounter. And then Nephi, similarly, walks that path and has an encounter with the divine, and then he becomes a prophet. And then the next writer in the Book of Mormon, Jacob, does exactly the same thing. And I'm seeing that it is embedded not only into the story of Joseph Smith but into the text of the Book of Mormon itself. And so I believed this stuff, I wanted this stuff, and I **prayed** for this stuff.

But I have to candidly admit that I had been a member of the LDS movement for decades and I had sought for and asked for these things, and while I had had profound spiritual experiences and encounters beyond the veil, I had not encountered the Lord coming to comfort me; I had certainly not encountered the Lord and His Father taking up their abode with me. And as a consequence of that, I knew my journey had not completed; so I asked for that.

You've had people on... I listened to one interview where a fellow was talking about Masonry and Mormonism and some of the similarities, and he talked about some of the list of things that you can find in an LDS temple endowment and what you find in the Masonic tradition. So without elaborating where it would be inappropriate to do so, I took that "true order of prayer" idea, I dressed in the robes, I gave the signs and the tokens, I made the recitation for the true order of prayer, and I prayed (in my house, alone, with a makeshift altar using an ottoman), and literally asked, you know, that I'd be able to converse with the Lord and enter into His presence, just as the temple ceremony suggests, and you know, wrapped that up and waited expectantly. And after some period of tiring on my knees, I got up and put all my temple clothing away and put them back in the closet, went on with life. Puzzled over that for some time and ultimately concluded that, for whatever reason, that just was not in the cards. And so I began to reflect upon all that I HAD received. And I realized that I was really kind of ungrateful. I was one of those people that was wanting more instead of being thankful for what I'd been given.

SP: Okay.

DS: And I HAD been given much. And so my attitude changed from disappointment and frustration to gratitude and acknowledgment that if nothing else ever happened, that I had been given enough and that I had an assurance that the Lord knew who I was and that He had committed to me an opportunity that was phenomenal. I had taught gospel doctrine and priesthood for nearly three decades. I had learned and studied and grown and been faithful. And I just **gave up on that** and instead focused on my gratitude to God for all that had been given. And unexpectedly and without me doing (as far as I could tell)...

SP: So now, this is February 13, 2003?

DS: Yes.

SP: Okay. So do you...

DS: Without doing anything to provoke it...

SP: Well, can I just... I want to ask you, and I want you to talk about it, it says (in the 2006 book you wrote, *The Second Comforter*), you wrote that “when your faith [is] in His ordinances is secure enough that seeing Him will produce no further conviction of His word, no greater confidence in Him and no additional confirmation than what you have already, you are prepared to receive Him” (*The Second Comforter*, Chapter 12: In the Ordinances Thereof, p. 266). And that's... You feel that was what was preparatory to having your face-to-face encounter with Jesus.

DS: Yes, I think that is **exactly** what's required. Because if what you're doing is trying to find the Lord to have faith in Him, I think you've got a struggle ahead of you before you're ever gonna get there. I had within me a conviction of the truthfulness of the whole of this, that the Scriptures coming alive had done something within me; the effort to obey the Lord had done something within me. I had had personal difficulties in life; I'd had tragedies in life—none of them had made me doubt and all of them had made me draw closer to and rely upon the Lord more. And I had the conviction that, without any question, He is real, His work is real, He is actually doing something to prepare the Earth for His return. That isn't limited to a handful of really faithful Mormons. That stirring is going on everywhere in the world, and people are feeling it. It's an awakening that touches many people **AND agitates** many people; the tares and the wheat are separating from one another. And wheat—whether you find them in the Evangelical community or in Catholicism or in Islam—there are wheat growing everywhere, and there are tares everywhere, and the tares are becoming more militant and less caring and less godly. So, I **knew** that God existed, and I **knew** that He had taken note of me, and I did not need to feel the prints in His hands (like Thomas did) in order to say, “Our Lord has risen.”

SP: Oh! Okay, so I just have to ask you, so would you describe this as a visitation or a visionary experience? When you say that you didn't HAVE to touch his palms, DID you? Did you... Were you afforded the opportunity to actually touch and feel the Savior like He would have had done in Third Nephi?

DS: Yeah, yes. And the answer is the initial encounter had as its **very specific** purpose... Umm, again, this is probably somewhat at odds with what I was saying before—but it was

apocalyptic. The first encounter was what I would call right squarely in the tradition of Apocalypticism. And its purpose was to orient me for purposes that would later unfold. But it was abundantly clear to me... (And the encounter is now, actually, it's been canonized in a set of Scripture we call the Teachings and Commandments.) It has... That was the first encounter, but there have been others, and the others have been tutorial. The purpose has not been to **reassure** me; the purpose has been to **educate** me.

SP: Okay, so I'm really curious—because it's almost like you have a reverse encounter that people don't normally have with Jesus. In other words, you almost had like an encounter with Jesus of the book of Revelation—right?...

DS: Yes.

SP: ...at the first encounter, and then your further encounters are almost like you're being taught by the Savior, like He would have been doing His earthly ministry.

DS: Right.

SP: And so, you have this opportunity to engage in conversation with Him. Do you... Are there times when He gives you a hug? Do you hug Him? Do you embrace Him? Do you feel Him? Have you had a chance to feel the prints, His handprints? And how tangential of an experience is this?

DS: Okay. I've told this to a few people; I guess there's no reason not to just tell it and have it out there. Well, the answer is, "Yes" to your questions. But let me talk to you about a singular intimate moment, okay?

Almost everything... While the Lord doesn't convey in communication in a way that vibrates the air, it's a higher form of communication that is abundantly more clear. It conveys thought itself, clarity itself, understanding itself, and it's left to **you**... You comprehend it, but it's left to you—if you want to—to convert it into English; it's left to **you** to explain it in words. It is bigger than and more inclusive than the words themselves. And so, it's not necessarily accurate to say, "Okay, He said this **to** me." He conveyed this to me, and I'm telling you what it was that got conveyed. So, understand that. And then second of all, there came this moment where, in a series of what I would call educational encounters—I had been tutored; I had been taught; I had been shown; I had experienced; I had witnessed things that helped me get my hands around things—there came this moment when, in the presence of the Lord, He reached out His hand, and He touched my eyes.

SP: Okay!

DS: And when He touched my eyes... There are phrases in the Scriptures that... For example, Lehi says, "He saw and heard much." In the Pearl of Great Price, book of Moses, Moses encounters the Lord, and he describes it as having seen "the ends of the Earth and all the things that went on from the beginning to the end." And it's just a summary statement. Paul describes it as "seeing and hearing unspeakable things." And so, understand that Scriptures bear testimony of such things being shown. They don't give you, necessarily, an

adequate preparation so that in encountering it, you can say, “Yeah, yeah, that's exactly what happened!”

What happened: He touches my eyes, and **everything** (past, present, future) in a—the only word I can think of is—a cacophony. It's just vast, without beginning and end. It is a vast assortment. And it is not arranged chronologically. It is...

The prophecies of Isaiah, as he's parsing through, he will grab an event that occurred before his time, he will prophesy about things occurring in his time, and he will mix in things that will happen in the future in the same verse/in the same paragraph/in the same thought. And so, what Isaiah did—and Nephi copied the Isaiah prophecy and adopted it as his own—what Isaiah and Nephi did was to organize (what they got their hands around) **thematically**, so that the chronology is not anchored... We live in a linear world; it is unanchored from that. It is past, present, and future amalgamated into a singular statement. And so, the Lord, touching my eyes, this is happening, and to me... I mean, I live the kind of life that every other human lives—it's **linear**. I used to be 9 years old, and then I was 10; and I used to be 30, and then I'm 31; my life happens chronologically. And when I think about my life, I look back upon my life, and it's **always** organized linearly and chronologically—and **this stuff is not**. And I mean, I, literally, I... This sounds so stupid, I literally said to the Lord, “I can't take this in. You have to use words.”

SP: Okay.

DS: I mean, it's like I'm talking to a child: “You have to use your words,” you know? “I can't take it in.” I mean, I'm protesting. “This is too much for a human to try and organize. I cannot take this in. You really have to TALK to me; you have to TELL me. This needs to be, like, the way you've communicated... It needs to go back to that.” And the Lord responded to that. I mean, I'm in the midst of having this all unfold, but He still responded to that. And understand: I'm going to take and put into English words the reaction of the Lord to my protest. And if I were putting them into English words—the nearest I can come to what His response was—was, “Yeah, I get that a lot...”

SP: [laughter]

DS: ...like, “You're not the first one...”

SP: Okay...

DS: “You're not the first one to complain about that!”

SP: This is truly fascinating!

DS: Here is what that led me, then, to understand—and I believe this to be **very, very important**. I believe that when the Lord invests that into someone and exposes them to that, that the person to whom that has been given can either walk away, leave it alone, and say, “That's extraordinary! Someday on the other side of the veil, when I'm not confined to this body of dust, it'll be neat to live in an environment where that is possible.” And that's it. But my read of the Scriptures tells me that there HAVE been those—and among them are

Isaiah, on the one hand, as a clear example; Ezekiel, John the Revelator, Nephi—there are those who have prayerfully gone back to draw upon that and to try to parse it apart and to try to comprehend and to prayerfully take what had been bestowed and to turn it into something other than a cacophony and to turn it into comprehension. And I believe that when Joseph Smith wrote his letter (when he was in exile in that September 1843 time period)...

[responding to noise in the background] That's my...

SP: [indecipherable]

DS: ...ring-necked parrot whistling in the background.

I believe that when Joseph wrote that letter and described the events of the Restoration and all of the visitations that he had received, he was attempting to convey to us his way of parsing it out and trying to dispense it in a way that allowed others to try and get their hands around [indecipherable]...

SP: Well, this is the thing. I mean, you know, these historical figures that have had these encounters with the divine, and in your kind of relaying what their experiences would be... The difference is I had the opportunity to interview somebody who **has** had these experiences. I can't go—and maybe YOU can—but I can't talk to them. And I want to know just a few things about this, 'cuz this is one of the top questions people have had is that they want to know a few things.

Well, first of all, I want to know, is this a visitation? Or is this a visionary experience? If I were in the room with you, would I see Jesus? What does Jesus look like? And, you know, those are some basic questions people have that they really want to know.

DS: We haven't talked about the Gethsemane account...

SP: And that's key. That's key.

DS: Yeah, we haven't talked about that. But let me tell you...

Sometimes I think details are better left out than included because, you know, fools mock, but they'll mourn. So I'm still not gonna give altogether a complete...

SP: And you don't have to, but I think it's important that, you know, you've had this privilege to encounter the Savior.

DS: Sure, sure.

SP: And there are so many people out there who love Jesus, and they want to have that encounter with Him. And I just thought this could be an opportunity for it to be an encouraging, edifying word that you give the audience about the Savior. So when I'm asking you questions, it's really genuine because I know a lot of people just want to know. And I know that you have this... If you don't want to just talk about too many details, that's fine. But give us something that the people can kind of, like, "Okay, I get it now!" I... Maybe

something you haven't said before, a descript... Some kind of description that you could share with the audience.

DS: Yeah, let me do that because it's probably useful to hear some of this. There was a morning when I woke up at a usual hour (it was a work day for me because I know that later I went to the office, and I worked), and almost always when I have a workday, my kids had a school day. And so, I got up at the usual hour, and it was odd because no one else in the house was awake. And you know, I have nine kids, and at any given moment, most of them are home. I got up. I took a shower. I was alone, despite the fact that the house was occupied. Everyone was asleep. And after I had taken a shower and I was preparing for the day, I encountered the Lord. Everyone in the house was in a deep sleep that was **unusual**. My belief is that had they been awake, they would have known what was going on.

SP: Okay!

DS: Therefore, they were in a deep sleep. And in that moment, there were things that were unfolded about the Lord and the Lord's sacrifice that literally brought me to tears. I was emotionally drained from the encounter. After it ended and after I had no more presence going on than an empty house with a bunch of people asleep in bed, when it ended, everyone woke up!

SP: Oh!

DS: And everyone went about their daily business. And I could not speak—not because I was deaf or mute; it was because I was so emotional that I had a very hard time saying anything. I was rather thunderstruck by it all. And so while everyone was getting ready and my wife was... I just bid people farewell, and I got in my vehicle and went to the office—and I cried on the way to the office because it had been so troubling. And when I tried to work that day, I didn't... I couldn't get anywhere. Fortunately, it was one of those paperwork days where I could punt, and I came home early. And when I came home, I sat on the fireplace in the far end of this room, and I just wept for a while. And, you know, my wife thought there was something really, really wrong. And when I could compose myself enough, I tried to explain to her some of it. But it was literally DAYS before I could talk about it in a way that was coherent for her, because it was draining, it was troubling, and it allowed me to understand that what the Lord has done in order to redeem us is... The enormity of that sacrifice defies our ability to even articulate it. And the debt of gratitude that we owe to Him for what He has done is something that, you know, we talk about, we celebrate, and we are grateful for, but when it becomes deeply personal and in the way that He can convey, it's a troubling, troubling thing to us.

SP: Interesting.

DS: We don't deserve what He went through...

SP: Okay.

DS: ...to redeem us, and it's practically incomprehensible for us to get there.

Now, I do want to say something that you haven't asked...

SP: Okay.

DS: ...but thematically it fits right within the line of inquiry that you're asking about. And I assume that this would be very useful for the pure in heart.

I do think that every time I talk about something that is spiritual or that is otherworldly, that there are craven individuals out there who are imitative, who are looking to get attention, and all that **they** do with it is invent a better bunch of misrepresentations. But I'm gonna go ahead and risk that because, mostly, they're out for their own gain. I think I've made it clear that I get nothing out of anything I'm doing and that everything I do requires me to sacrifice. I don't get compensated, I pay to attend, I pay to transport, I bear my own way in life, and no one... I never solicit for myself. (I do for other causes that help people.) But for myself, if I can't sacrifice, then I won't do it. I don't get gain.

So, having said that, there was an encounter with the Lord... You can find examples of this in Scripture, too. And these are **real**. You find it with the twelve apostles in the New Testament, you find it with the disciples that Christ called in the Book of Mormon (Third Nephi), where the Lord essentially says (and this is a paraphrase of Scripture to a person who arrives at this specific point in the progress of the Lord's plan of redemption; you arrive at a point where the Lord says, to paraphrase), "Ask of me what you will, and it shall be granted to you." And we have the responses of various apostles.

Now, I got an encounter with the Lord in which that opportunity presented itself, "Ask of me what you will, and it shall be granted to you." And whether this was the best answer or the right answer, it was **truly**, at that moment, **authentically, genuinely MY answer**. I said, "I have not come thus far by doing my own will. I ask **nothing** of you." And I meant it; I felt it. In my heart, that was the most genuine, heartfelt response I'd ever given to any question posed to me at any time.

That was a moment when something **very, very startling** occurred—because I am standing in the presence of the Lord, the Lord is addressing me, and the two of us are in this conversation. And I've just told Him, "I want nothing. I haven't come thus far by doing my own will. I'm content." And I meant it. I was genuinely content.

At that moment, it was as if a veil lifted, and now there were numerous others who were there who apparently had been there all along...

SP: Okay.

DS: ...and who had been listening, watching, eavesdropping, participating. And at that moment, it was as if a veil that had been there disappeared. And now there are a number of others who are present. And the reaction... Again, these are communications that come that I have to convert into English. So I'm gonna use English words, that...

SP: I'm just really curious, was Joseph Smith there?

DS: There were a host of others there.

SP: “A host of others.” Could you identify them?

DS: I could for you if I needed to. But let's stay with what I'm about to say.

SP: Sure, understood.

DS: Because the reaction that came was genuine approval:

- “This is what we've been looking for.”
- “At last.”
- “We can use this.”
- “Now we have found it.”
- “This will do.”
- “We approve.”

If... I did not understand, first of all, why they were there; second of all, why they had any say in this matter; and thirdly, why they were reacting the way they were. But the overall impression that I had, as I reflect upon it, is that the Lord had one view of what **He thought** He could achieve using me—despite all my limitations, despite all my inadequacies, He for some reason had some level of confidence in me—but that there were numerous others who were behind the veil who have a stake in their posterity or maybe in the future (I don't know what their investment was or is), but they were there skeptical, and at that moment, the skepticism was at last resolved.

SP: Okay. And this was like a Heavenly Council, wouldn't you say?

DS: That's exactly what it was.

SP: It was a Heavenly Council, wow.

DS: And the reaction was one of approval or... I mean, “This is what we've been looking for. This will work. We can use this. This...” The overall reaction was like minds just got changed...

SP: Okay.

DS: ...like attitudes just got altered; like whereas before, “not so much,” now it's “this is something with which the work that we need to have accomplished can now move forward...”

SP: Now this sounds SO significant, I need to know, what date did this happen?

DS: Uhh, I... Honestly, I haven't talked about it in public, and I haven't written... I... It's all in my journal; I would have to go back and read and research...

SP: I'm just really curious to see, like, was anything else happening in the world events, signs (maybe) that maybe other people were seeing? Yeah, I'd be curious.

DS: That's a great question! Because there are—as it turns out—there are a lot of correlations between things in the world...

SP: Right.

DS: ...and things that I've encountered. But I haven't gone back and tracked that. And now that you've raised that up, I probably will...

SP: Yeah.

DS: ...and I'm probably gonna regret having talked about it.

SP: Oh, no, this is okay. Hey, I just... One thing I wanted to ask you...

[crosstalk]

DS: The answer to one question leads to ten more, and sometimes... There are many, many things that... People who are sincere and attentive and who are familiar with their Bible—I mean, even if all they're familiar with is the Old Testament—if they're familiar with their Bible, if they're familiar with both the Old and the New Testament, and in particular, if they're attentive to the Restoration Scriptures, much of what is sacred and is holy and is found in Scripture is **delicious** to them, and they **prize** it, and they **value** it. They don't mock it. They don't take, you know, “wheels within wheels” of Ezekiel and turn it into a carnival ride and mock and ridicule. The problem with discussing things that are sacred with those for whom little or nothing is sacred...

SP: Yeah.

DS: ...is that they then mock at their own peril.

SP: Right.

DS: You know, Nephi ended his record by saying, “Look, I'm gonna seal up this record with my testimony, and you're gonna be held to account in the day of judgment for how you respond to what I'm writing here because I do this with God's approval.” So when you do or convey information that has **as its source** God Himself, then the burden shifts from the one who is reporting the news to the one who hears the news, and they become accountable for responding to it.

I know that there are a number of people who are very serious about their evangelical faith and who live good lives who, being warned with a message that is current and modern and being spoken by someone who can say, “I have been in the presence of the Lord,” is off-putting to them. And what arises first is both skepticism and the suspicion that the person is in this and telling this story somehow to aggrandize themselves.

SP: Yeah.

DS: I can tell you that I have never had an encounter with the Lord that did not leave me feeling foolish, feeling inadequate, feeling ill-fitted for the Lord's purposes. I do not think I'm much of anything. In fact, at times I am completely puzzled by why I would be asked to engage in accomplishing anything that is sacred or on the Lord's errand because I am as ordinary... I have said in multiple meetings to multiple audiences that people in the

audience have lived better lives than I had. And I meant it. And if I were guessing right now, I would say to YOU that your life is probably lived ~~in~~ as a better example of the Christian ideal than has my life been lived as an example of the Christian ideal. But I take into account (when I say that), the things that I did before I was baptized, the things that I did before I felt myself “born again,” the things that I did when I was, you know, struggling to just be an onlooker in the Baptist faith, trying to do what my mom taught me that I ought to do. Since being baptized, I've tried to live the Christian ideal. But again, there are people whose lives—if you are looking at them top-to-bottom, day in/day out—you would say, “They live a better life than does Denver.” And I readily admit that. I don't think I'm much of anything. But I do think that the encounters I've had are real...

SP: Okay.

DS: ...the Lord is real, and that your confidence ought to be in **Him**. And even if you think that He makes a bad choice in me, for whatever reason, maybe He does that deliberately because, in His view, we do tend to want more from one another than we're able to give. So look to **Him**, because **He's** the giver of every good gift. We aren't much more than the receiver and abuser and unappreciative recipient of the good gifts that He does give. And so, I hesitate in talking about things that are sacred and holy.

SP: Sure. Well, I wanted to ask you this, because I think maybe... A lot of people have had visionary experiences with the Savior. Many artists, under inspiration, have created paintings and artworks. So the question I have for you is: Is there a particular ~~art~~ piece of artwork or a painting of the Savior that you look at and say, “They got it right!”?

DS: Yes, there is one, but I don't want to go there!

SP: Okay.

DS: But you mentioned a lot of people who get inspiration and who have had wonderful encounters. There's a verse in the Book of Mormon that I want to read. And I... This ought to make Mormons more broad-minded than they are. But unfortunately, Mormons aren't.

For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore, we see that the Lord doth counsel in his wisdom, according to that which is just and true.
(Alma 15:13 RE)

That verse in the Book of Mormon suggests that there are people who are having authentically profound, religiously valid, true encounters across Evangelical/Catholic/Islam/Buddhist/Hindu lines that originate from the Father of Lights, the Giver of good gifts, and they are REAL—and that we should not assume that because we have received some portion of His word that we can chauvinistically say, “Yeah, we own salvation, but others do not.” Everything is going to be brought together in one, at some point. And if you were going to be fair about things, you would say the Western/Christian mind is task-oriented and thing-oriented; and the Eastern/Hindu/Buddhist/Taoist mind is virtue-minded and conceptual, and it's the things of the heart and the spirit and the feeling. And that the coarseness of the West and the spiritualism of the East are really **fragments of ONE**;

they're not whole until you unify them all together in Christ. And that there is a... There **was** a Savior. He **did** come. He did **sacrifice** Himself to fulfill the law that requires **justice**. He allowed Himself in **innocence** to be slain as if He were a sinner. That **offended** the law of justice, and it made possible mercy. And a **merciful God** (who paid a price that is incomprehensibly large to us) is not going to waste that sacrifice by bestowing it in a **stingy** way. It's going to be spread as far and as wide—as **mercifully**—as it is possible for Him to do. And if you get some portion of His word that tells you virtue consists in treating your fellow man as you would like yourself to be treated (which is one of the principles He articulated in the Sermon on the Mount and in the sermon at Bountiful), then you've lived a precept that is high and noble and virtuous.

And one thing that the Apostle Paul mentions in his letter to the Corinthians is being baptized for the dead. And one thing that Joseph Smith taught (and the LDS Church practices in their temples) is being baptized for the dead. If it is true that you live a virtue that reflects Christ's teaching of doing unto others as you would be done by, and you've lived that, and you find that the author of mercy is Jesus Christ and you're willing to accept baptism, then the letter to the Corinthians and the practice of the Mormons allows someone to tie into the baptismal requirement. And so, how broad and how wide and how merciful will a Lord who sacrificed Himself as a lamb without blemish be willing to apply His Atonement in order to save as many as possible? And I think we tend to narrow our focus and to say, "As long as the door to salvation is wide enough for ME to squeeze through, even if it's a tight fit, then I'm perfectly content to squeeze through that door and then shut it behind me and say, 'Let all the Muslims and let all the Hindus and let all the Catholics and let all... You know, those Evangelicals even bother me because I'm Mormon. Let them all stay out and go to hell!'" But the Lord, I think, has a contrary view and that...

SP: Okay.

DS: ...verse in the Book of Mormon suggests to me that God's Spirit out-pouring and His light is extended as far and as wide as He can reach to every nation, and everyone gets SOME of it.

SP: Okay, this is great. Now, I want to be respectful of your time, and I just want to ~~ask~~ cover a couple of things ~~and then~~ people have been asking about. And basically, one of the things is that while you have gone out of your way to emphasize the decentralized nature of your movement ("it's not a church"), you offer three elements that effectively define the church: [one,] authority to perform ordinances; [two,] maintenance and distribution of Scripture; and three, community in which to affiliate with other adherents. Can you concede that although your movement is not a church, it does quack like a church?

DS: Not in the sense of any denomination that exists...

SP: Okay.

DS: ...because every organization has boundaries that require you to acknowledge your status "in" or "out" of, to the exclusion of others.

SP: Okay.

DS: And I have said, if a Catholic priest wants to be baptized by us, I would baptize the Catholic priest, and I would be content to allow him to continue...

[crosstalk]

SP: ...as a Catholic priest—but they would need to be baptized into your movement, though.

DS: Yes, they would need to be baptized in order to accept an ordinance. You can be a Methodist and accept baptism. You can be a Baptist. You can be whatever you want to be in addition to accepting this message. It's not **jealous** in the sense of a church being jealous.

SP: Okay.

DS: It's not structural; there is no hierarchy. The purpose is to lead people to a point of spiritual maturity so that we're not teams divided against one another...

SP: Okay.

DS: ...but we come with open arms, willing to accept any who are willing to acknowledge the Lord and be received by Him.

SP: So this is not an incorporated church. This is not a physical church. This doesn't have the hierarchy. But could you argue that it's **spiritually** a church?

DS: As the Lord defines a church in the revelation of Joseph Smith, it would fit that definition...

SP: Okay.

DS: ...but as the world defines a church, it doesn't work.

SP: Right.

DS: We gather in fellowships that are informal, and people pay tithes into the fellowship. But the money that gets paid in as tithing then gets turned around and distributed to people who are in need, first of all within that fellowship, and then... I know that there was one particular fellowship that didn't have any needs with the group that they were gathering tithes [with], and they had accumulated a lot of money in the fellowship, and they had learned about someone ~~that~~ who was handicapped and had a pretty significant transportation need and an inability to get anywhere; they used the aggregated tithe money to go out and buy a handicap van to relieve this handicapped person of the inability to get transportation from place to place. And the purpose of the tithing isn't to support a ministry. In fact, if you're gonna be a minister, you're gonna have to sacrifice in order to accomplish it. There's a website, I think it's called ~~bornofwater.com~~ or bornofwater.org. ~~In any way~~ In any event, that website allows people, wherever they are in the world, to request baptism, and someone will—on their own nickel—travel wherever they need to travel to perform the ordinance and then to return. And no one needs to compensate them for the cost of the sacrifice.

SP: Well, it sounds to me like you're a New Testament church.

DS: Pretty much! It's pretty much modeled on the New Testament system in the sense that they were really divergent groups that... I mean...

SP: Yeah...

DS: They were...

SP: ...and they were decentralized.

DS: Yes, yes! And not only decentralized, but they were markedly different from congregation to congregation and place to place. And the twelve apostles were sent out in twelve different directions with twelve different messages that were based upon their experience with the Lord, and they created systems of worship that were reflective. And I say, "twelve," because I include Paul within that and not Judas.

SP: Got it.

So I guess I want to... Again, I don't want to take too much more of your time. But I want to talk a little bit about "end times." On the 10th of September, 2011, the Lord told you that *Your name shall be called David* (T&C 162:1). Are you the long-prophesied end-time Davidic servant?

DS: I don't... First of all, I don't know. Second of all, I don't claim that. And thirdly, to me, the name wasn't welcome. I didn't view that as a positive. I viewed that as... I was thinking of King David, the adulterer who killed Uriah. I had taught the Old Testament as a gospel doctrine teacher, and one of my heroes in the Old Testament was Joab. Between Joab (who literally was the only person that scared David; he threatened him if he didn't stop mourning over Absalon, you know, "Clean yourself up! You've got men out there who fought for you and your kingdom. Stop mourning the death of this rebellious son!" Joab, against the orders of David, ran Absalon through with the sword. He was a hero to me, Joab) and then Nathan, the prophet (I named a son of mine "Nathan." Nathan the prophet went into David and told him the story of the poor man with the one ewe lamb and the rich man with his flocks who came and stole his lamb and slew it to make a feast, and David said, "That man shall surely die." And Nathan the prophet says, "Thou art the man. That's you, David." This is a king who has murdered one of the captains of his army being confronted by Nathan the prophet)... David, to me, was the far end of the spectrum. He was not the ideal.

Joab? Gimme that name.

SP: I see.

DS: Nathan? Gimme that name.

David? David, the loathsome, indulgent king who betrayed the trust of his general, who killed to cover his adultery? Not a good name.

So, I have said this, and I mean this, and I think this is the right answer:

Someone is going to accomplish some things on the Lord's errand. The accomplishment of the things that the Lord seeks to have done IS the identifier. Sitting back and claiming that you are something, having accomplished nothing, is not only vain and arrogant and foolish, it's completely unjustified. There's not a person breathing—you and me included—who cannot fail the Lord, who cannot turn in their weakness and in their depravity to doing something that makes them utterly unfit for the work.

I haven't accomplished anything that would justify calling me much more than someone who can testify that the Lord lives, He's gracious, and that He is trustworthy and faithful. If I get some things done someday and it proves to be of value to the Lord and for the salvation of our fellow man, then you can say the Lord used a fool to accomplish some good things.

SP: Okay.

DS: But I haven't done that yet, and someone is going to...

SP: I see.

DS: ...and when they do, it could be anyone. And I will salute whoever gets it done.

SP: So we are... Many people believe we are living in the last days. Within the context of your movement, there is apparently going to possibly, one day, a temple be built. If that happens, does that mean the return of the Savior is imminent?

DS: Assuming that the temple built is populated by men and women of faith, virtue, and cleanliness before the Lord, yes!

SP: Okay. So as an Evangelical, I just want to ask, so should... If that temple gets built, should we be paying close attention to what's happening in the world?

DS: I would say yes. I would say that, all along, there have been some milestones that have been achieved all along the way. And while the Earth has paid very little notice to some of them (and it's clearly not understood, many of them), I've taken note of them, and I've tried to keep a faithful record in a journal. And there have been signs all along the way. Things have corresponded. And yes, I believe if a temple gets built and gets accepted by the Lord (and it has to be accepted by Him in order to be His house), then I would say, "Pay attention to goings-on."

SP: And should we pay attention to the physical, like, location of where it's built?

DS: Probably.

SP: Okay.

DS: Yeah.

SP: I mean, like, would there be significance in the particular place where the Lord would choose, right?

DS: Yeah, I think there's significance to everything the Lord does, yeah, every single thing. I think the exile from the Mississippi river banks out to a barren, salty desert (that is now becoming increasingly more toxic), all of that stuff is deliberate...

SP: Okay.

DS: ...planned, and the Lord speaks... He speaks in **everything**. **All things** bear testimony of Him. If you want, perhaps, the most perfect sermon about Jesus Christ, just look at the life of a monarch butterfly.

SP: Okay.

DS: The whole thing, from beginning to end is an allegory of our Lord.

SP: That's really cool. Monarch butterfly...

DS: The pupa...

SP: The King!

DS: ...the chrysalis, to the monarch, to the migration **across continents**. A butterfly! And I know when it will not snow here when the monarch butterflies return.

SP: Okay, so if you build a temple, do you think you will have an image of a monarch butterfly on the temple?

DS: Boy, I should, shouldn't I?

SP: I think it would be a good idea!

DS: That might be a great idea!

SP: Well, Denver, you know, I had a blast talking with you today. Now, I know you don't normally do interviews, but thank you so much for honoring me and this program for coming on today.

DS: Well, I listened to a few of your interviews and enjoyed them before committing. You talked to a fellow about Mormonism and Masonry. I have a lot I could say about that interview...

SP: Come back on!

DS: ...which I enjoyed, by the way.

SP: What's that?

DS: I thought it was very good. And someday I might just plunge into that area and articulate what it is that I think those similarities might truly mean. But that's another day, another interview...

SP: Yeah!

DS: ...a bigger subject. Anyway, I enjoyed it; relatively painless! But I am gonna go to work now.

SP: All right, sir. Hey, thank you so much again!

Folks, I just want to remind you to: Don't forget to like and subscribe and hit the notification button when a new video comes out. We are available in all the major podcast formats; make sure you give us good ratings there. Mormonbookreviews.com is our merch store. Support us on PayPal and Patreon.

Denver, you have an open invitation to come on the program anytime you want to talk about whatever you want. Thanks for coming on today.

DS: Well, you're welcome. And I do want to point out that I've talked to you about some serious and spiritual things that I have not spoken with some other interviewers about, and that is because of the spirit you bring with you and the propriety and the decorum that you deal with sacred things, which some others are not capable of.

SP: Thank you, Denver. I appreciate that. I appreciate that very much.

Folks, thanks for sharing your time with us today.