

Q&A with Denver
Arizona Regional Fellowship Meeting
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Denver Snuffer: If I can talk for just a minute, I take for granted that we've got the same time in Arizona as we've got in Utah. And I know that that's only true when we drop that Daylight Savings thing, which won't happen until November. And I believe that the email alerted me to the time; I just didn't pick up on that. We have (Steph and I have) an obligation that... We planned to have 90 minutes with you, and it's now rather, more like 30 minutes—and I don't want to talk about anything that isn't relevant or useful to whatever you would like to hear about. And so I'm wondering if there are some things I can respond to, if you can lay out what, or ask questions, and then I can respond directly to a question, as opposed to just talking about something that may not be of value or interest to you.

So does anyone have a question? And I can't hear unless someone's up at the microphone.

(Oh, that mic is muted. I can't hear anything.)

Moderator: I unmuted it. Sorry.

DS: Yes?

Question 1: Okay, great. I have a question, several ones to talk about, changes being in the Covenant of Christ, specifically Alma 42 (now Alma 19), basically the first verse. And Alma is talking about Adam and Eve [indecipherable], and he said because [indecipherable]... *Because if Adam and Eve had immediately reached out and eaten from the tree of life, they would have lived forever, according to God's word, having no time for repentance* (Alma 19:12). Can you elaborate on that?

DS: At the same time that we're working on getting the Covenant of Christ text finalized, I've been working for years with the Hebrew translation of the Book of Mormon, and we had a discussion about THIS two weeks ago (maybe it was three weeks ago) with the translation group.

The idea of judgment and of displeasing God and of it reaping consequences is a prominent theme in Judaism, and the idea that offending God causes results is a concept that gets repeated both in the Creation account and in the language of later prophets. And one of the things that the translators needed to understand, and it required me to explain to them that you need to go back into Moroni and Mormon, where the effect of the judgment/the feeling of being judged and being condemned is a description of what's going on inside the person, as opposed to a description of God doing something; and that in the big picture, God ordains laws, and the effect of the law is essentially automatic. He sets the boundary, and if the boundary gets violated, the consequence that follows is whatever had been ordained beforehand. The structure of the story in the Creation about putting a Tree of Life (that would allow you to partake and live forever) and a Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (the consequence of which would be death) were incompatible outcomes. You can't partake of the Tree of Life and live forever while, at the same time, partaking of a tree the

consequences of which are death. They're incompatible. And so when the choice gets made to partake of what the judgment ordained was death, then it necessitates the removal of the option to live forever—because to have the ability to live forever would defy the condition that had been set and violated for the first. And the purpose of the story in Scripture, as I understand it, is to demonstrate that the decrees and the outcomes are irrevocable and that we can't pursue a course that results in the rejection, condemnation, and exclusion of us from blessings and benefits that are ordained exclusively to be yielded by obedience. And therefore, the story of Adam and Eve and the Fall and the two trees and the choice that was made—and then the consequent barring of access to the tree that would have allowed life to continue indefinitely—is to remind us and to have us soberly accept the validity and the enforcement of God's commands and God's will for us. We don't get to defy that and yet be blessed. We don't get to set the condition aside and disobey the condition but then still reap a reward as if we've been obedient.

And if that doesn't cover the concern, then go ahead and clarify what else you want me to address. But I (as I understood the question), that's how I understand the setup that is being described in those words of Alma.

Question 2: So someone in our fellowship asked, What would you recommend for those that attend both the local fellowship vote [indecipherable]?

DS: If they're gonna attend, I wouldn't... I would defer voting until the conference (if they're gonna attend the conference) and just vote one time and in person. Anyone that plans to attend the conference can make it clear that they're going to the conference to vote and that, therefore, it's unnecessary for them to participate in the fellowship vote.

Question 3: There was a common question among us about the delineation between the 2017 Covenant ([pause] yeah, the 2017 Covenant) and the Covenant of Christ as a covenant. Are they separate covenants or are they the same [indecipherable]?

DS: The Covenant of Christ, in order to be accepted and to be of use, needs to be sustained using the same language that got used in the 2017 Covenant. But after (and on the assumption that it will get sustained—which I think is up to the vote, not up to us to impose; it's up to the people, by their vote, to choose), the effect would be to change the section 158, verse 3, which is the second question—after a sustaining vote, if that happens: *Do you have faith in these things and receive the scriptures approved by the Lord as a standard to govern you in your daily walk in life, ...accept the obligations established by the Book of Mormon [and the Covenant of Christ] as a covenant, and to use the scriptures to correct yourselves and to guide your words, thoughts, and deeds?* It would add "Book of Mormon AND Covenant of Christ" into that second question that's in T&C [158], because we're not to forbid using the Book of Mormon, even if we accept this. And so they both would become part of the same "accepting as a standard to guide our life."

Question 4: It strikes me, considering what's happening right now with this new Scripture, that actions are being taken/the vote, also [indecipherable] is to King Benjamin's time, not to put anybody on the spot [indecipherable] ...your thoughts...?

DS: Can you ask that question again (the speaker was sort of fluctuating), and let me hear the question a little more clearly?

Moderator: Yeah. And Denver, if you mute your end when we're talking, it will help a lot.

Q4: The question goes to the similarities between what's happening right now in the movement as a whole (in the remnant movement) and what was happening in King Benjamin's time. The similarities.

DS: There are probably a lot of parallels that ought to be taken seriously. But ultimately, the only thing that, from my view, that is important is that when the Lord asks that something be done, that we do it, and we do it in the way that He asks. This project, when it was turned over to me, I did not think it would be anything other than a useful supplement/a guide to help us understand/a resource, but not something that would be, ultimately, covenantal. I didn't learn that the purpose was what the Lord intended until after I had begun work on it for a few days and grew increasingly more impressed with guidance and changes that needed to be made.

Let me go back and tell about an earlier thing. During the time that the Scriptures themselves were being put together, I learned that the Lord wanted the Book of John to be rendered again without the overlay of the Orthodox Christian views that had informed the original translation; that someone who was a believer in Joseph Smith, in the Restoration, and in what else has been added to us from the revelations of the Restoration, and that the Book of John should be redone and included in the Teachings and Commandments. And so I went out and tried to recruit people who had, in my view, who had the learning/the skill/the ability/the understanding, to see if I could get someone to step up and undertake that effort. And everyone that I felt was qualified turned me down. So I got my Greek Lexicon, I got the side-by-side Greek/English New Testament, and I plunged in to work on the project, only to (early on) reach a point in which there were so many options; the language that the New Testament was written in had a vocabulary that many words didn't have a two- or three-deep meaning, they had sometimes 20 meanings, and sometimes the meaning of a single word could be modified by the context in which the word got used. And my level of frustration grew so great as I got early into the text that the problem-solving appeared (in my mind) to be far beyond anything I could accomplish (and certainly far beyond anything that could be accomplished within the time frame that the Scripture Project was expected to reach a conclusion). And so despite the fact that it was something that needed to be done, I prayerfully quit: I was apologetic, I let the Lord know I couldn't get anyone to do it, and I let the Lord know it was beyond my capacity to accomplish, and therefore, I couldn't do it—and I certainly couldn't get it done in something less than a decade (and even then, I wouldn't be confident that I had parsed through the language well enough to be able to accomplish anything). So I quit! I mean, I was apologetic, I was humble about it, but I recognized I could not do it. And the night I prayed to resign from the project, I got helped, and the meaning of what I was looking at became clear.

The place I quit was at the beginning of the wedding feast in ~~Canaan~~ [Cana], where Christ attends the wedding feast, and they run out of wine, and He has the servants fill some water pots, and then He turns the water in the pots into wine, and they serve the wine up to, first,

to the host of the wedding, and then the host of the wedding speaks. Well, everything about that, while it was something that happened in the life of Christ and it was a historical event, was only included by John in his narrative in order to set up a little proverb by the host of the wedding. The host of the wedding tastes the wine, and he says, “Normally...” and I’m paraphrasing; I’m not quoting the text. “Normally, you get the good wine first, and then after you’ve drunk enough, then they serve you the bad stuff” (see TSJ 1:16). That was a proverb about Jesus Christ. John is telling us that charlatans and false religious leaders and pretenders and priests and officials—religious officials, generally—they will give you something desirable in order to entice you, and it is only after you have been enticed that you wind up getting the worst from them. It goes downhill. But in the case of Jesus Christ, it only gets better. The farther along one follows the Lord, the greater the blessing and benefit is to those who become disciples of Him. So that incident got included in order to give us a proverb that describes what following Jesus Christ proves to be: It may be difficult; it may require the sacrifice of all earthly things; nevertheless, it only gets better the farther you go down the path of serving Him.

But John also had wordplay and subtleties that he was able to weave into the language that he was working with that were not possible to convert over into English. So in that proverb, there also was the master of the feast asking about where the source of the wine was. But the word “source,” when the master of the feast is asking about it, is lowercase because he’s just looking for a point of origin. But the servants (who gathered the pots, and who carried the wine over, and who served it) knew WHO the source was, and so “Source” now becomes capitalized: *source* lowercase, the question by the master of the feast who does not recognize the Lord; *Source* uppercase, capitalized by those who recognize Jesus Christ as something divine. Throughout the entirety of the record, then, you can tell the instant in which someone ceases to have skepticism or doubt about the Lord and becomes a believer and accepts Him as the Messiah. The way that is portrayed in our language—using one of the things that we can use—is to capitalize the personal pronouns when they recognize that it is the Lord, and to leave it lowercase whenever the personal pronouns are spoken by someone who doesn’t believe in Him. The Covenant of Christ presents an opportunity in plain language for us to go back and read the text in a way that strips away confusion, distraction, flowery language that is antiquated and doesn’t point a finger directly at us, and to get the message of the Book of Mormon clearly put to us. It is a threatening book!

I was talking with Steph about how very often the “Old Testament God” is viewed as this stern, kind of unyielding, judgmental God, and how Jesus is viewed in the New Testament as this kindly, permissive, forgiving, gracious God, and that there appears to be this sort of incongruence between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New. The Book of Mormon makes it clear that Jesus Christ is just as firm, just as demanding, just as unyielding, just as willing to destroy when the occasion requires destruction for Him to come out in judgment as the God of the Old Testament. And Jesus Christ is, likewise, just as forgiving and just as kindly and just as willing to serve and elevate as the Jesus of the New Testament. The Book of Mormon blends those two together. But it is an ominous thing for people who view the Martin Luther-esque “by grace you are saved” notion that if you confess Jesus with your lips, that the whole of the challenge is over! The Book of Mormon makes it clear that you’re now on a narrow path, and you’re expected to remain within that

narrow path—and so accepting the Covenant of Christ in clarified language intended to speak to us in our day is rather a King Benjamin moment in which, if we're accepting this new clarified, sharpened language as a covenant we intend to obey, then we have an unmistakable obligation and a clarified course that the Lord expects us to remain on. And so it does become one of those moments where, if we are willing to take this step, it's a dramatic turn of events FOR US and an unmistakable set of warnings TO US that are intended to allow us to elevate who we are and what we're doing in a meaningful way so that we can obey what the Lord has clarified for us.

This nation is in peril. The people on this land are expected to worship and, therefore, obey the god of this land, who is Jesus Christ. And we just had a recent President declare that we are no longer a Christian nation. It's approaching a perilous cliff that prior civilizations have gone over to their destruction—and this is a clarified statement of what's expected of the residents on this land that will be given (if it's accepted as a covenant) for public review by anyone living on the land, and they'll be judged based upon the criteria of the book, whether they read it or not. It's available to them, and we'll do what we can to make it clear that it's an invitation to everyone. But if they refuse to read it, they're still left without excuse. I hope that answers.

Question 5: I've got another question about the title "accuser." It gets used frequently in place of Satan or the devil in the Covenant of Christ book. "Accuser" seems to be just one element of evil, where the name Satan contains all the elements of evil. Any comments on that?

DS: Yeah, I don't think you get to listen to what the accuser is doing, because he's not just an accuser of others; he's an accuser of us. And all along the way listening to him:

- "Why are you trying to be good? You know you're not."
- "Why are you refusing to partake of (whatever sin it is) when you know it is desirable? Why are you refusing to enjoy this life?"
- "Why don't you recognize...?"

I mean, the accusations go to how the role of Satan gets experienced in everyday life. It's not an experience that is simply, "Oh, he's bad." The accuser is trying to get you to accept the notion that what he's asking that you do is not bad; it is instead,

- "delicious to the taste and very desirable, and you're foolish. You don't want to be foolish."
- "You're unpopular. You don't want to be unpopular."
- "You're not fitting in. You don't want to fail to fit in."
- "You have prerogatives that you ought to enjoy. The body is pleasant. Why not exploit its very many pleasantries? Why are you depriving yourself of these things?"

The accuser is a better way to put the active manner in which he engages with us, as opposed to the idea of some red-faced mask that looks troubling and is frightening and manifests every kind of evil that might be out there. The accuser is "mild," and he is "persuasive," and he is "generous," and he's "looking out for your best interests, don't you know?" I mean, there's something very desirable about the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of

Good and Evil, and “you don’t even know how to understand the poor people of this generation if you’re unwilling to participate with them in the experiences that have beset them. And you really should have a tattoo! You can have a tattoo that says, you know, ‘I love Jesus.’ You can have a tattoo of a cross or of a eight-pointed star (it’s the star of Melchizedek, after all). There’s no reason why you can’t join in the defacing of your body with symbols representing heavenly things. Why not meet them on their own turf? You see, your failure to do that is really a representation of your own lack of faith if you really want to be good.” I mean, the accuser is insidious, but he’s not a horned, red-faced, scowling, pitchfork-wielding, cloven-hoofed, tailed monster. The accuser is just [simply]: he thinks he’s smarter than you, and he thinks he’s offering you something delicious to the taste and very desirable. So “accuser” is an attempt to convey more than merely an evil source.

Question 6: I’m going through the text of the Covenant of Christ and the Allegory of the Olive Trees. There was one part that was a bit frustrating. In the original translation, for example, in Jacob chapter three, paragraph 24 at the beginning, it says, *And it came to pass that they took from the natural tree which had become wild, and grafted in unto the natural trees which also had become wild*, presumably referring to the branches that had been planted elsewhere in the vineyard. The Covenant of Christ translation makes it confusingly more ambiguous. It says, *So they took branches from the original tree that had become wild and grafted them into the original tree that also had become wild*, both in a singular. And I just wondered if you had any comment on that change.

DS: Yes. In fact, this is something that was looked at very carefully during the process. And if you look at the original tree, and you look at the original tree, and you look at the wild and the wild and the graft, and you look at the purpose of the Restoration and what the ultimate goal is attempting to achieve, it’s to restore the House of Israel.

We had a family at the beginning that started with Adam. Once you get through the generations of Adam down to Noah and the apostasies that were frequent—but you had a single line that remained faithful. You have a recounting of that single genealogical line until you get to Noah, and then at Noah, you have one son of Noah (Shem) who remained faithful, so much so that he became regarded as the King of Peace (the name “Melchizedek” is King of Peace), and he was able to establish a city of righteousness. But he’s apparently bringing together people other than his immediate family; he’s bringing cousins and distant parties back into a city.

But separate and apart from him, you have at least five generations of apostasy that result in Abraham; and Abraham becomes the prototype, the very first to climb out of apostasy and back into the Holy Order and to become, as a consequence of having achieved that, the father of the righteous—which makes Abraham a second Adam in a genealogical sense, because the promise gets made to Abraham that through him all generations that come after him will recognize him as a father. And the Allegory of the Olive Tree is taking what happened to that family... The singular mother tree that is discussed in the allegory can either be Adam and those that descend through him or, more correctly, Abraham and the family that descends from him, a kingdom of priests—a kingdom of people that ultimately, in the third generation, get split into 12 tribes that are referred to throughout Scripture thereafter as “nations” (and you have ten of them that get lost; you have two of them that

remain behind). But you have these nations that have been scattered throughout all of the world that are, nevertheless, connected genealogically, one way or another, back to Abraham and, through him, the tribes of Israel. And the work is to re-collect the scattered out of the diaspora back into a singular and to return it to a singular family, a singular body, a singular tree.

It's one of the reasons why, in the visit that was made by Nephi to Joseph, *He also quoted the next verse differently: And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to the fathers; if it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming* (JSH 3:4). There's another version of that that Joseph Smith made in the Joseph Smith version of Malachi, *And he shall seal the heart of the Fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their Fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse* (Malachi 1:12). In the statement made by Nephi (or excuse me... Yeah, Nephi) to Joseph Smith, *He shall plant in the **hearts** [plural] of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the **hearts** [plural] of the children shall turn to the fathers; if it were not so, the whole earth [shall] be utterly wasted at his coming*. But in the Malachi/Joseph Smith text, *And he shall seal the **heart** [singular] of the Fathers to the children and the **heart** [singular] of the children to their Fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse*. In like manner, the Covenant of Christ changes the plural to the singular because the Restoration is intended to accomplish a singular heart, a singular family, a singular restoration, and a singular binding back to Father Abraham and the family of Israel—and hence, singular.

We're essentially out of time. If I could get one more question, I'd be happy to respond to it. But we really, we've got other people waiting for us that we promised we'd get there. And I blame myself, and I apologize for that, but we're running out of time on my end.

Question 7: In Revelations, it says... It talks about how there will be three-and-a-half years (or 42 months) and then there will be a second period of time with 42 months, and then the Desolation of Abomination is upon us. And I wondered if the fulfillment of that has been/has taken place for us as a people (in a nation and, ultimately, the world) from the... 'Cuz it's 1260 days—and back on July 27th of 2017, there was a very specific event, and exactly 42 months later is when we lost control of our government on January 6, 2021. And the very next segment of 1260 ~~years~~ [days] was the revelation that we received on June 20th of this year. And I would like to know if that is the fulfillment of Revelations.

DS: I've generally taken the position that if we get a specific time in prophecy, then we do not get a specific description of the event. If we get a specific description of an event, then we don't get a specific time. The reason for that is because if we had the ability to make an exact calculation, the... People could profit from prophecy, and they could benefit themselves, OR they could delay or procrastinate until the moment that time was running out and then suddenly and abruptly and somewhat insincerely take advantage of the opportunity that got presented to them. I think the way to interpret all prophecy is in hindsight, so that when events have happened, then you can look into how it had been foretold, and as a consequence of the prophecy, you can see how this HAS to have been the event because it fits the description and the time period hand-in-glove.

There have been a number of things that have taken place in the last number of years. But whether the events that have taken place fit the time frames that we've got in the prophecy of the book of Revelation or whether they are simply a type and a shadow of something yet to happen that will make it abundantly clear that this is, in fact, the fulfillment of that prophecy is something that I don't ever get involved with—precisely because I think much of what Isaiah prophesies about the Lord is, likewise, a description of what happens to any righteous prophet or any righteous people or any righteous group that is seeking to follow the Lord in an analogous way. In fact, there's a lot of Jewish believers who think that the "suffering servant prophecy" concerning Christ is literally a description of the role the Jews occupy throughout history to be people of sorrow and acquainted with grief and to have people turn their faces from them. And I agree that it is possible to take the suffering servant prophecy—that is most FULLY fulfilled in Jesus Christ—and to say that it likewise sees fulfillment in the role of the Jews, in the history of the Jews, and in the experience of the Jews. WE are going to see multiple occasions on which prophecies by Isaiah fit, prophecies by John in the Book of Revelation fit—but when the final fitting takes place, it will occur in a way that becomes undeniably fulfilled and applicable, and we need not look for yet more to come. Right now my view is that while there are analogous things that have and are occurring, the final fulfillment of the actual event that was in the mind of John at the time that his prophecy was being written is something that I don't recognize as having happened at this point; I think it's yet to occur.

But as long as we're on the Book of Revelation, I would welcome any of you to take a look at the last, oh, say two chapters of the book the Testimony of St. John in the T&C and then the Book of Revelation, and ask yourself if the—as the Testimony of St. John is wrapping up in the T&C—if it doesn't have the look and the feel of what you encounter in the Book of Revelation written by John, and if in the last couple of chapters of the book in the Testimony [of St. John] in the T&C, if it doesn't provide you with some assistance or guidance as you then transition into the Book of Revelation, and whether it doesn't give you some ability to better understand the language that John employs there.

I hope I've been of some use to you. We're gonna have to cut and run, and I apologize for that. I don't know how we could have arranged it otherwise, given our schedule and what's going on. But I commend you for asking questions. I appreciate the serious questions. I like when you refer to language in the allegory and question why something got done. I like, you know, the word ~~adversary~~ [accuser] and why it got chosen. I think these are important things. But let me remind you that the prophecy about the coming of Elijah appears in multiple places in Scripture, and they're different, and there's nothing wrong with that. Nephi's quote of Malachi to Joseph is not the same as the JST nor Jesus Christ's quote of Malachi in Third Nephi to the Nephites—and every one of them is Scripture. And I think that should inform us about how maybe when a prophecy is being made, there is a large context, and whatever language gets used to capture the large context always truncates it, shortens it, and says less than what could be said.

With that, let me end by bearing testimony to you that the Covenant of Christ book is not a work of man or men. A lot of effort went into setting it up, but at the end of the day, the Lord Himself owns the project and vouches for it. It is His words, His Spirit, His power that God

invested into the book, and therefore, I testify to you that it's something that deserves to be recognized as the word of the Lord. And I testify of that in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Thank you!