

Podcast 111: Nature, Part 1

This is the first part of a multi-part series on nature where Denver discusses some of the many ways that things in nature point to Christ.

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DENVER: So, it did not surprise me at all when Joseph went out to pray in the grove, and as he began that search, he got attacked by the adversary. And then, calling upon God with all his strength, he got delivered. It did not surprise me when I got attacked by a malevolent source before I encountered an angel. And it didn't put me off the trail. In fact, I was, again, stupid enough to say, "Oh! This is kinda like what happened when Joseph was trying to approach God. He encountered opposition." ☞

So, to me, the opposition suggested the presence of God and God's reality and God's bona fide existence and work—because if the enemy is there, there has to be the opposite of the enemy, also. It was sometime later that I encountered an angel. And I haven't talked much about the miraculous things that have gone on because I don't think that it's particularly helpful to put a lot of details out about any of that stuff. But, I want you to know that it does happen. And it happens as much today in people of faith as it happens in the course of the Scriptures.

I do **not** believe for one moment that God carefully limits and cautiously apportions the things that come from Him to a select few. I think that God's abundance is meant for everyone. And the regulator, the inhibitor, the limiter isn't up there. It's within us. ☞

I think that, you know, the farther up you look, the more vast— At a glance, if you look up into heaven, you can see distances that are so great that they are measured in the distance light will travel in a year. In fact, you can see, if you look upward, distances that take billions of years for light to cross them. Those are the distant stars you're seeing up there. Heaven is vast and filled. It's us that limits that. The farther out you go, the more you see up there, the more you should realize that the vastness of God is beyond anything that we can contain. So, let a little of that in. Every one of you has **some direct linkage** to God. It's called a *gift*. Every one of you has some unique gift as a way that God talks to you. Let it in. Be sensitive to it.

I was mentioning at dinner last night— Monarch butterflies migrate. Do you see a monarch butterfly up here? Oh, look, right there. They migrate. That butterfly has probably flown from here to somewhere in Central America, okay? They cover thousands of miles, and they do it annually—those little things—okay? ☞

The last time we had a snowstorm (and it was a lot of snow down where we live in Sandy), my wife and I went hiking the next day. It was cold the day before. Lots of snow came down, and when we went out hiking, a lot of it had melted off because it was so warm the

next day. And on that hike, the next day, I saw a monarch butterfly flying along the trail. (A monarch butterfly will be killed by snowfall.) When I saw the monarch butterfly on that hike, I told my wife, “It’s not going to snow again. That was the last snow of the season; it’s over with,” —because the monarch butterfly has a life that is dependent upon arriving when it’s safe to arrive.

God talks to us through all kinds of things. When you see the geese moving, flying south, their lives depend upon knowing when to go. There’s so many things in nature if you’ll just observe it, if you’ll just let it in. God is speaking to all of us **more or less** all of the time. And we determine how much of that we’re willing to let in.

So, the dispensation of the meridian of time when the Lord is going to come begins right here in this spot. That ought to tell us something, too, about the terrible significance of tying into everything that the Lord does—the temple. So, here we are, standing on this side of the veil with the dispensation launched, with an angel who has emerged, not from just the figurative or symbolic but from the literal presence of the Lord. And we’re going to have to, as part of this dispensation at some point, pass through that veil and enter into the Holy of Holies.

When Moses passed through the veil, the presence of the Lord was shielded by a covering of a thick cloud. The cloud operated as a veil to the onlookers of Israel, but Moses was allowed to pass through or enter through the cloud into the very presence of God. We have an account of that in Exodus chapter 24, in verses 15-18.

And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount. And the glory of the Lord abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and [on] the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights. (Exodus 24:15-18; see also Exodus 13:26 RE)

See, just like in the mountain of the Lord’s house, you have the pinnacle, the spot at the top of the mountain at which, when one stands there, they are no longer of the earth, but they have become a part of the sky. It’s one of the reasons why the mountain of the Lord’s house is the symbol that gets used in Scripture to describe the phenomenon—because it is no longer connecting you to the earth. The only thing that touches is the soles of your feet. You have become part of the heavens. Moses ascends up, and the ascension that’s being talked about here (in the cloud at the top of the mountain of the Lord’s house), inside there is where we find the presence of the Lord.

Similarly, as Christ asked, “Ought not these things to have happened?” one of the things that had happened was: In the dispensation of the meridian of time, Christ also passed through the cloud and entered into the presence of the Father. There were three disciples who were able to see Moses, Elias, but they were not permitted to see the Father, though they heard

His voice. They heard the voice speaking from inside the cloud. Only Christ passed into the Father's presence. That's recorded in Matthew chapter 17, verses 1-8.

The relevant part:

After six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, ...bringeth them...into an high mountain apart, was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, ...his raiment was white as the light. And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, [it's] good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make [thee] three tabernacles; one for thee, ...one for Moses, ...one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him, and when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. [It's intimidating.] ...Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, ...be not afraid. ...when they...lifted...their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. (Matthew 17:1-8; see also Matthew 9:4 RE)

See, Christ tells these disciples to *tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man shall be risen again from the dead* (Matthew 17:9; see also Matthew 9:5 RE). Well, on the road to Emmaus, He was risen again from the dead. There is no reason now to withhold the information about the Lord having passed through the veil on the Mount of Transfiguration into the presence of God the Father. So, this would have been available subject fodder for the discussion on the road as well.

Isaiah described a coming age of peace when righteousness and truth have their opportunity to bear fruit. He spoke of Christ and of the power in Christ's teachings to transform the world itself. That same world that Enoch heard lamenting, pained by the violence on her face, **will** find rest. Isaiah foretells what will happen **just prior** to the Lord's return:

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth: with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and [the] little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of [an] asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice'[s] den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover

the sea. And in that day, there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. (Isaiah 11:1-10; see also Isaiah 5:4 RE)

How will Christ smite the earth with the rod of His mouth? By teaching peace to people who are willing to obey and live at peace. What will it take to see the wolf dwell with the lamb? Why does the wolf kill the lamb today? The wolf kills because it's hungry. If the same shepherd who feeds the lamb also fed the wolf, then the wolf would not need to kill.

Wolves can be domesticated. I once owned a mixed Wolf Malamute we named Cicely after the fictitious town in Alaska that was the setting for the TV show *Northern Exposure*. Cicely looked **entirely** like a wolf, and her behavior was lupine. She was **very** gentle with her clan—our immediate family and friends. My children were still young then, and our neighborhood had other young children who came over. Cicely recognized **them** and accepted them as belonging. However, an adult man trying to read an electrical meter once entered our backyard, and Cicely regarded this as a threat to her clan. The man scarcely escaped through the gate. Wolves are intelligent animals and inside their clans are capable of treating young children with gentle, protective care. They are also capable defenders against threats.

Under the peaceful guidance of a kindly shepherd, the wolf and the lamb could learn to lie down together. Lions have been domesticated, as have bears. When Adam was given dominion over the earth, all the animals that came to him for naming dwelt together peacefully. Why do we assume that nature is violent? Why regard it as *red of tooth and claw*?

The Scriptures speak of an idyllic time in the beginning when man and nature were entirely at peace with one another. The Scriptures also foretell of a **coming** idyllic age when that peace is restored again. ☒

Why do we accept these bookends as true without ever considering the role of man in destroying the original peace? Why do we assume we have no obligation imposed upon us to **reform** creation back to the original? The prophecy of Isaiah is not magic imposed by God on a reluctant creation. It will require shepherds to **care** for creation.

Who are *they* in this passage? **They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain** (Isaiah 11:9; see also Isaiah 5:4 RE). And why is the passage, **They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain** followed by the statement: *for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea* (ibid, vs. 9; ibid, vs. 4 RE)? These are connected thoughts. It should be obvious to you that this can only be fulfilled by a different civilization than the one in which **we** live. **Ours** can **never** produce such results.

Isaiah also describes what it will be like **after** the Lord's return. After He comes to dwell with those prepared to welcome His return, events will unfold in this way:

For behold, I create [a] new [heaven] and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem and joy in my people, and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. In those days, there shall be no more from there an infant of days, nor an old man that has not [ful]filled his day; for the child shall not die, but shall live to be a hundred years old. But the sinner living to be a hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses and inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit, they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and [mine] elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord. (Isaiah 24:9 RE)

The same words are used to describe the prepared people **before** the return of the Lord and those with whom He will dwell **after** His return. Neither of these *shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord*. What will they be like who do not hurt nor destroy? Can you imagine such a society? Isaiah's description reflects this incident involving Joseph Smith and Zion's Camp:

In pitching my tent we found three massasaugas or prairie rattlesnakes, which the brethren were about to kill, but I said, "Let them alone—don't hurt them! How will the serpent ever lose his venom, while the servants of God possess the same disposition, and continue to make war upon it? Men must become harmless, before the brute creation; and when men lose their vicious disposition and cease to destroy the animal race, the lion and the lamb can dwell together, and the sucking child can play with the serpent in safety." The brethren took the serpents carefully on sticks and carried them across the creek. I exhorted the brethren not to kill a serpent, [a] bird, or an animal of any kind during our journey unless it became necessary in order to preserve ourselves from hunger. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 71)

Last year while my wife and I were hiking the Bonneville Shoreline Trail in Draper, Utah, she was in the lead. We were going at a rapid pace. (She always does that! That's why she's in the lead—because she wants to set the pace.) We were going at a rapid pace, and she passed a rattlesnake so quickly that when it began to rattle its warning, she'd already passed. But I heard it before I reached it, lying only inches off the trail. When I stopped to look... (I grew up in Idaho, and rattlesnakes are very common there.) After watching it for a few moments, I started to talk to it in a calm voice and made no menacing movement towards it. As I took the time to talk calmly without advancing toward it, its nervous rattle began to slow and eventually stopped. Then it uncoiled—which only happens when the snake is not defensive. I suppose the calm of my voice and my nonthreatening demeanor

relieved the little animal's fear. It began to slowly move away, and I encouraged it to stay off the trail because another passing hiker or bicyclist would probably try to kill it.

I thought of Joseph Smith's words when I encountered that snake: "How will the serpent ever lose his venom...? Men must become harmless...men [must] lose their viscious disposition[s] and cease to destroy... (*History of the Church* 2:71-72; see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 71-72)."

I know however well I may treat an animal, another will soon come by and mistreat the same animal. Nature will refuse to be at peace with mankind while mankind continues to slay, abuse, and misuse the animal kingdom.

But the prophecy is about God's *holy mountain*. It raises the question: If there were a place occupied by people who do not hurt or destroy in that holy mountain, could nature reach peace with the people in that place?

Cicely acted to protect the children in my yard from what she regarded as an intruding threat. It was her nature to do so. She wanted her clan to be safe. Toward her clan, she showed affection, played, and gave us all companionship. But to the threat, she was menacing.

In the first Zion, the people were at peace with nature. But **that** place was apparently protected **by** nature. What scripture describes is not magic or fairy dust but a perfectly natural process. This creation has been ordained by God and framed with intelligence to follow certain principles established before the foundation of the world. Any people in any age who follow the same pattern will receive the same result. What is described in this passage about Enoch and his city?

And so great was the faith of Enoch that he led the people of God, and their enemies came to battle against them, and he spoke the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled—even according to his command—and the rivers of water were turned out of their course, and the roar of...lions [were] heard out of the wilderness. And all nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of the language which God had given him. (Genesis 4:13 RE)

Would a lion that had been befriended by Enoch and his people be inclined, by its nature, to protect the people it viewed as part of its clan? Would a bear protect its shepherd and guardian? Would a wolf? Is it possible for a civilization to exist that does not hurt nor destroy in all their land? If they would not hurt nor destroy in all their land, would it be a holy place? We live in a very different civilization from the one described in prophecy. But the one described prophetically will not just one day appear. It will require effort, learning, obedience, and sacrifice to change.

The earth rejoiced at Enoch's people. The earth **protected** those people. Earthquakes, landslides, and floods stopped the wicked—and the animal kingdom, including predators

like the lion, rose up to protect the city of Enoch. For those who are prepared to receive the people of Enoch and Melchizedek, and those who will welcome the Lord to dwell among them, that can and will happen.

Everybody will have to make changes. The most important changes have been provided in a blueprint revealed in the Answer to Prayer for Covenant including the terms of the Covenant. We are expected to remember and obey these words:

*My will is to have you love one another. As people, you lack the ability to respectfully disagree among one another...Wisdom counsels mankind to align their words with their hearts, but mankind refuses to take counsel from Wisdom...[There've] been sharp disputes between you that should have been avoided. I speak these words to **reprove** you that you may learn, not to **upbraid** you so that you mourn. I want my people to have understanding. (T&C 157:3-5 RE)*

*Satan is a title and means **accuser, opponent** and **adversary**; hence once he fell, Lucifer became, or in other words was called, Satan, because he accuses others and opposes the Father. I rebuked Peter and called him Satan because he was wrong in opposing the Father's will for me, and Peter understood and repented...In the work you have performed there are those who have been Satan, accusing one another, wounding hearts and causing jarring, contention, and strife by their accusations. Rather than loving one another, even among you who desire a good thing, some have dealt unkindly as if they were...opponents, accusers and adversaries. In this they were wrong. (ibid, vs. 8-9 RE)*

For you are like a man who seeks for good fruit from a neglected vineyard—unwatered, undunged, unpruned and unattended. How shall it produce good fruit if you fail to tend it? What reward does the unfaithful husbandman obtain from his neglected vineyard? How can saying you are a faithful husbandman ever produce good fruit in the vineyard without doing the work of the husbandman? For you seek my words to recover them even as you forsake to do them. You have heretofore produced wild fruit, bitter and ill formed, because you neglect to do my words. (ibid, vs. 17 RE)

You have not yet become what you must be to live together in peace. If you will hearken to my words I will make you my people and my words will give you peace. Even a single soul who stirs up the hearts of others to anger can destroy the peace of all my people. Each of you must equally walk truly in my path, not only to profess, but to do as you profess...The Book of Mormon was given as my covenant for this day and contains my gospel, which came forth to allow people to understand my work and [to] obtain my salvation. Yet many of you are like those who reject the Book of Mormon, because you say, but you do not do. As a people you honor with your lips, but your hearts are corrupt, filled with envy and malice, returning evil for good, sparing none—even those with pure hearts among you—from your unjustified accusations and unkind backbiting. You've not obtained the fullness of my salvation because you do not draw near to me. (ibid, vs. 19-20 RE)

Hear therefore my words: Repent and bring forth fruit showing repentance, and I will establish my covenant with you and claim you as mine (ibid, vs. 23 RE).

It's not enough to receive my covenant, but you must also abide it. And all who abide it, whether on this land or any other land, will be mine, and I will watch over them and protect them in the day of harvest, and gather them...as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. I will number you among the remnant of Jacob, no longer outcasts, and you will inherit the promises of Israel. You shall be my people and I will be your God, and the sword will not devour you. And unto those who will receive will more be given, until they know the mysteries of God in full. (ibid, vs. 48 RE)

You pray each time you partake of the sacrament to always have my Spirit to be with you. And what is my Spirit? It is to love one another as I've loved you. Do my works and you will know my doctrine; for you will uncover hidden mysteries by obedience to these things that can be uncovered in no other way. This is the way I will restore knowledge to my people. If you return good for evil, you will cleanse yourself and know the joy of your Master. You call me Lord and do well to regard me so, but to know your Lord is to love one another. Flee from the cares and longings that belong to Babylon, obtain a new heart, for you've all been wounded. In me you will find peace, and through me will come Zion, a place of peace and safety. (ibid, vs. 51RE)

Be of one heart, ...regard one another with charity. Measure your words before giving voice to them (ibid, vs. 53 RE).

There remains [a] great work yet to be done. Receive my covenant and abide in it, not as in the former time when jarring, jealousy, contention and backbiting caused anger, broke hearts and hardened the souls of those claiming to be my saints. But receive it in spirit, in meekness and in truth. I have given you a former commandment that I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. And again, I have taught [you] that if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses. How do I act toward mankind? If men intend no offense, I take no offense, but if they are taught and should've obeyed, then I reprove and correct, and forgive and forget. You cannot be at peace with one another if you take offense when none is intended. But again I say, Judge not others except by the rule you want used to weigh yourself. (ibid, vs. 58 RE)

One of the questions that someone asked is why we're admonished to pursue judgment. The answer are those words I just read to you: *I say, Judge not others except by the rule you want used to weigh yourself.* Pursue judgment whenever the opportunity presents itself. Use judgment to evaluate based upon the standard you want applied to yourself and pursue judgment.

The earth groans under the wickedness of mankind upon her face, and she longs for peace to come. She withholds the abundance of her bounty because of the offenses of

men against me, against one another, and against her. But if righteousness returns and my people prove by their actions, words, and thoughts to yield to my Spirit and hearken to my commandments, then will the earth rejoice, for the feet of those who cry peace upon her mountains are beautiful indeed, and I, the Lord, will bring again Zion, and the earth will rejoice...In the world, tares are ripening. And so I ask you, What of the wheat?...Cry peace. Proclaim my words. Invite those who will repent to be baptized and forgiven, and they shall obtain my Spirit to guide them. (ibid, vs. 63-65 RE)

That excerpt contains nearly 2,000 words of instruction. There is no basis to claim ignorance. Is it possible for people to change their civilization and go from strident, quarrelsome, and pugnaciousness to loving one another?

Now, I want to be clear about what I am **not** saying: Nothing in what has been said implies that people must be vegan. In the age of the first patriarchs, we learn this about the second generation: *And Abel listened unto the voice of the Lord. And Abel was a keeper of sheep...And Abel, he also brought [forth] the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering...* (Genesis 3:6-7 RE).

There are animals whose lives are given them for the benefit of mankind. Abel raised sheep for the benefit their lives offered in food, clothing, and even company.

I am **also not** suggesting we attempt to domesticate wild animals. Until there is a community that has tamed the wild hearts of human residents and has a land to occupy, animals will remain justifiably fearful of man. Nature will not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, the hostile and the benign, the people of peace and the people at war with the animal kingdom **until** there is a *holy mountain*. That will be the place made holy by the actions of the people who dwell there. When the earth sees **that** righteousness has returned to **her** face, she will yield her abundance for those whose feet walk in the way that is beautiful.

If we obey the commandments that have been given, we can qualify to inherit a land on which to build a temple. The objective of the covenant was to confer the right to live on the land, surviving the judgments coming upon the wicked. **We** need to live up to our end of the covenant. It is clear the Lord is willing to bear with, guide, give commandments to help prepare, and reprove His people when needed. We should not rely on the Lord's patience but should be eager to obey His guiding instruction. His commandments are not to limit us but to increase light and truth. Some intelligence is only gained by obedience to His commandments.

The foregoing excerpts are taken from:

- Denver's remarks at "A Day of Faith and Connection" youth conference in Utah on June 10, 2017;

- His talk entitled “Christ’s Discourse on the Road to Emmaus” given in Fairview, Utah on April 14, 2007; and
- Denver’s conference talk entitled “Civilization” given in Grand Junction, Colorado on April 21, 2019.