

A Matter of Plain Reason

Why Christians Must Believe in Joseph Smith

Ronald Kimmons



“Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments; ... That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers.” –Doctrine and Covenants 1:17, 23

For Christ.

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1 – A BOY AT THE PLOW

At a time when it was only given to an elite class of clergy to read the actual text of the Bible, William Tyndale defied the religious and political authorities by illegally translating that holy record into the English vernacular. Responding to criticism from a priest, he said:

I defy the Pope and all his laws. If God spare my life, ere many years,
I will cause the boy who drives the plow to know more of the
scriptures than you!¹

Tyndale was burned at the stake for his defiance. However, his translation lived on to become the base text for the King James translation of the Bible, embodying roughly 80% of that record, which has served as the principal Bible translation for the English-speaking world for centuries.

In 1820, a 14-year-old boy in a poor farming family in rural New York went to that holy text with a question. He believed in Christ, but he was confused and disconcerted in his search for truth. Which church was Christ's? If they were all Christ's, why did they disagree? Which should he join?

Amid this boy's search for answers, the words of Paul illuminated his mind like a fiery beacon over the rocks:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men
liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.²

According to Joseph Smith, this verse penetrated his soul and affected him more deeply than any verse of scripture had ever affected any man. In that moment, he understood the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a deeper degree than Tyndale, Calvin, Luther, St. Francis, and all of the other clergy, scholars, and reformers that had arisen in the intervening years since the time of the Apostles. While these men had often seen the problems clearly, they had not adequately seen the solution to those problems: Ask God! Rather than getting caught up in the web of sophistry, vain argumentation, and secular philosophies that has long characterized the world of sectarian religion, Joseph Smith went to the source of all truth.

In a grove of trees near his home, young Joseph knelt down and offered a simple prayer to God, asking which church he should join – and knowing that he would receive an answer. In response, God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him and told him to join none of those churches created by men. In the following years, Joseph Smith received the necessary priesthood authority to restore Christ's Church to the world, translate ancient scripture into English from forgotten languages, write new scripture, correct translation and transcription errors in the Bible, and serve as God's chosen representative in the mortal world.

In response to Joseph's earthshaking claims, the sectarian world has continually sought to ignore, defame, vilify, disprove, and destroy him, his image, and his message. But, while the enemies of God did successfully bring an end to his life, they could not bring an end to the work he had set in motion.

With his life and with his death, Joseph Smith has testified to all nations that the heavens are open, that Christ's Church has been restored to the world, and that God still speaks to us.

2 – I GLORY IN PLAINNESS

Standing before the Imperial Diet to answer for the heretical ideas he had cultivated against a church to which he had once given his soul's allegiance, Martin Luther was told that he must recant his claims that Catholicism had strayed from Christ's teachings. In response, he uttered these timeless words:

Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.³

In this statement, Luther revealed three glaring truths about the religious climate of his day:

1. Men who claimed authority from God contradicted scripture.
2. Men who claimed authority from God contradicted each other.
3. Only God could help him.

Today, these trends continue: Men claiming divine authority contradict scripture and each other, and only by the power of God can we see past the confusion resulting from such false claims of authority and come to see the truth.

As Luther said, whenever any of us stand at spiritual crossroads, our guidance should come from the Word of God and from reason plain enough for a child to understand. In light of that standard, when I say that Joseph Smith saw and conversed with God the Father and Jesus Christ in 1820, I do so only because plain reason, the writings of ancient prophets, and the whisperings of the Holy Spirit constrain me to do so. Many works of tabloid scholarship, stuffy argumentation, and intellectual obscurity have been published on the matter, but I have no use for such distractions. God's truth is conducive to plainness, and it only becomes complicated when we view it through filthy and prejudiced lenses. As an ancient prophet wrote:

I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell.⁴

In citing the Word of God and plain reason as our twin sources for truth, though, Martin Luther failed to understand one fundamental issue: He, like many other Christians, believed that the Word of God is limited to what we have in the Bible. Luther did not understand that the works compiled in the Bible by secular scholars were never meant to represent the full extent of God's communication with mortals. If God speaks to you, that is the Word of God, and that is scripture. Likewise, if God whispers to another man's heart and tells him to offer you or others counsel in His name, that is scripture as well. Sectarian society has drawn a false dichotomy between scripture, God's Word, authoritative revelation, and personal revelation. Sectarian Christianity contradicts itself by striving to establish a relationship between Man and God while simultaneously denying that God still communicates with Man as He once did. No relationship can exist without two-way communication, and communication with God is, by definition, revelation. Anyone who claims that divine revelation has ceased does not have a relationship with God and cannot establish a relationship with God unless he changes his opinion on the matter.

I am no scriptorian. In a Bible-quoting contest, I am sure that most career clergymen of the sectarian world would readily defeat me. But I have not undertaken the task of writing this book for the purpose of flaunting my theological prowess. Rather, I have done so because I have a testimony of three inescapably important truths:

1. We are literally the spiritual children of the Most High God, created in His divine image.
2. Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God in the flesh, is mankind's only Savior.
3. After apostasy caused Christ's Church to be lost from the world, Joseph Smith restored it by divine authority.

These three fundamental truths have become so intertwined in me that anyone who would ask me to forsake one strand might as well ask me to unravel the whole cord. This is because my testimony of Jesus Christ initially came to me while I was reading the Book of Mormon as a boy. Regardless of how magnificent a man supposes his understanding of the Bible to be, he cannot convince me that the voice that whispered to me that Jesus was my Savior was anything other than the Holy Spirit – the same Holy Spirit that testifies of the Savior when people read the Bible. Thus knowing that the Book of Mormon is the Word of God, I must therefore acknowledge the prophetic calling of the man who served as the Lord's instrument in making that record available to us.

By establishing God's unwavering pattern of sending prophets to lead us and declare true doctrine, the Bible stands as evidence that we can and should expect modern prophets and continuing revelation in our time. The Book of Mormon stands as evidence that this prophetic and revelatory authority has come to us through Joseph Smith. As a kneejerk response, sectarians tend to reject this idea, but I will show you that they do not have a single valid reason for doing so.

3 – THAT OLD TIME RELIGION

What makes a prophet? And if the Bible merely establishes prophets as the spiritual leaders of God's people, why do the ministers, pastors, bishops, priests, evangelists and cardinals of the contemporary ecumenical hegemony shy away from the title of prophet?

When one reads the Bible, it becomes apparent that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob made it His standard procedure to call upon and empower prophets to declare His will and lead His people. Prophetic leadership is something that has always been part of the Abrahamic traditions. And yet, of the billions of Christians, Jews, and Muslims across the world today, virtually none can give a satisfactory answer to this one simple question:

Why aren't there any prophets in our time?

Serving as a missionary in Taiwan, I once spoke to an enthusiastic Protestant woman who related to me her experience of becoming a believer in Christ. I thanked her for her inspiring story and asked her how she felt about the fact that so many different Christian sects taught so many different things. She agreed with me that the present condition of the Christian world is deplorable and contrary to Christ's intentions for His followers. In response, I related to her my belief that Joseph Smith was chosen by God to stand as a heavenly representative and unite Christ's believers in both doctrine and organization. She dismissed the idea without a second thought. "I follow God," she said, "not a man."

What that woman in Taiwan did not realize was that following God often means following a mortal person sent by God to represent Him. Protestants in the United States have a song that goes like this:

Give me that old time religion -
It's good enough for me.
It was good for Hebrew children,
And it's good enough for me.

I cannot hear this song without wondering whether or not those who sing it realize that the religion of the Hebrews was reliant upon the leadership of a prophet of God. If these people who claim to be faithful believers had been slogging around in slavery among the Hebrew children, would they have heeded the words of a scraggly old shepherd from the Sinai wilderness who said that God had sent him to act as their deliverer? Would they have followed that crazy man through the Red Sea? Perhaps they would have. Or perhaps they would have sat upon the ground and said, "I follow God, not a man." Having thus rejected the Lord's chosen messenger, would they have been saved from Egyptian swords?

What that dear woman in Taiwan did not realize was that God expects her to follow various mortal leaders – but only those who have the divine authority to represent Him. Her mistake lay in assuming that God for some reason cannot or will not appoint such leaders in our time.

"That old time religion" was a religion dependent upon prophetic leadership and continuing revelation. When there is no leader possessing authority from God, everything descends into conjecture and debate. When there is such a leader, any debate is over before it begins, because God has spoken. Why do we suppose that we can return to that "old time" doctrinal purity while rejecting the very thing that made it possible in the first place? As John Taylor once said:

I do not wonder that so many men treat religion with contempt, and regard it as something not worth the attention of intelligent beings, for without revelation, religion is a mockery and a farce.⁵

Since the world is full of so many bickering and opportunistic counterfeits, it makes sense that people like the woman I met in Taiwan would be skeptical of those who claim to be God's representatives. However, the existence of a counterfeit can never disprove the existence of the real deal. It actually tends to do the opposite. No one would print fake dollars if the dollar were not both existent and valuable.

Contemporary sectarian leaders present themselves as God's servants and messengers, but for the most part, they do not dare to say that they receive divine guidance in the way that Moses, Jeremiah, Elijah, and Peter did. They have not seen any burning bushes or caught any fiery mantles. Instead, they point to various other sources of authority:

- Divinity degrees. If a person dedicates himself or herself to a study of the Bible at the collegiate level and comes away with a degree similar to what a lawyer, engineer, or psychologist would need, that is a commendable achievement. Unfortunately for such people, though, secular institutions do not have the power to make men prophets. A divinity degree cannot convey the power or authority of Divinity any more than *Monopoly* money can buy you a sandwich. Assumptions to the contrary turn otherwise faithful disciples into Pharisees.
- Scriptural knowledge. Some people study the Bible on their own, becoming even more knowledgeable about its contents than many who hold divinity degrees. However, even if one can quote every verse of the Bible from memory, such knowledge cannot make one God's representative. Without God-given authority, an increased knowledge of the Bible only magnifies an individual's ability to misinterpret and misrepresent the Gospel – and thereby mislead God's children. Remember that the Devil knows scripture very well.
- Spiritual experiences. Many sectarian leaders tell of how they felt "called to the ministry." When they relate these experiences, though, they usually do not share stories similar to what an apostle or prophet would share. Rather, they tell of their journey of faith in coming to believe in Christ. They do well in assuming that real conversion necessitates proselyting, but they are mistaken if they think that belief and authority are the same. Accepting Christ as one's savior does not authorize one to stand as God's spokesman in the way that Moses and Peter did. Believing in Christ does not make one an authority in doctrinal matters. Authority requires faith, but faith does not imply authority.

If the authority of a priest, minister, pastor, or evangelist did not come from God as the Apostles' authority did – and if that authority does not entitle him to receive any revelation – he has no authority to speak of. Thus, he cannot stand as an official representative of God in word or deed.

Sectarian leaders contend that we simply do not have prophetic authority in these times, for whatever reason, and that we must do the best we can with what we have. But is that the case, or is the sectarian world simply unwilling to connect with God except on its own terms?

Sectarian leaders cannot give any rational reason for why God would be silent in our time after having spoken to so many prophets over such a long period. In his speech "Profile of a Prophet," the modern apostle Hugh B. Brown addressed various reasons people could give to explain why there

might be a lack of prophets in the world today. I will paraphrase the three reasons that Elder Brown set forth and add to them a fourth reason that I have often heard:

1. **“God lacks the power.** At one time, He may have given men the ability to heal the sick, raise the dead, part seas, walk on water, and receive direct and authoritative revelation to dispel false doctrines, but something has happened to end that. He cannot do so anymore, even if He wanted to.”
2. **“God does not love us anymore.** He can send prophets to guide us, cast down the idols of false religion and false doctrine, and unite His people, but He just does not care anymore. Perhaps He is a little less godlike than He once was.”
3. **“We do not need God anymore.** With our many astounding developments in philosophy, theology, and science, we have become mighty beings who no longer require direct guidance. No, we can manage well enough on our own. We do not need prophets to interpret or add to the scriptural canon because we understand it perfectly and we have all that we will ever need.”
4. **“No one in our time is righteous enough to be a prophet.** This is the most wicked of all ages, and not one person in this world is upright enough to serve as an authentic representative of God.”

The first suggestion, of course, is pure blasphemy. Belief in the Bible necessitates belief in an omnipotent God. If God has lost the power to speak to us, He has probably lost the power to save us as well, and all religion is thus for naught.

The second reason is also blasphemous, as it contradicts one of the basic messages of the Bible – the New Testament in particular. As the most widely quoted verse of scripture in modern times states:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.⁶

And as another verse from the Bible states:

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.⁷

The love of God exceeds human understanding. Why, then, should we assume that He has callously left us in the dark to fend for ourselves? He would not do such a thing – and He has not.

The third reason is probably the most blasphemous of all. Sectarian Christians often criticize secular thinkers for the audacity they exhibit in assuming that they can solve the problems of the world without any assistance from God. And yet, sectarians continue to press forward with the same audacity by assuming that they can say what scripture “really” means without having received a single scrap of divine guidance. One might argue that the meaning of the scriptures should be plain enough to true believers. And yet, millions of people with comparable levels of piety and faith continue to interpret the same scriptures in fundamentally different ways. It is time for the Christian world to realize that, rather than the Bible, the ultimate source of Christian doctrine is God. The Bible’s ability to give guidance in specific circumstances will always be limited, especially since its primary audience was people living many centuries ago who faced challenges very

different from what we face today. God's ability to give guidance, however, transcends all circumstances and pierces all barriers.

The fourth reason does not make any sense if one has paid close enough attention to the stories of the prophets in the Bible. This argument, like many leveled against the idea of Joseph Smith's prophetic calling, is based upon unrealistically idealized notions of what a prophet is. No prophet was ever perfect. Remember that Paul received his divine calling while on the way to work violent persecution against the Lord's Church, and remember that Isaiah doubted his own ability to meet the Lord's expectations due to his "unclean lips."⁸ The fact that some vice can be attributed to a man does not necessarily mean he could never be a prophet. Furthermore, the fact that a society has become wicked does not mean there will be no prophets there. Quite the opposite, actually: Jonah's ministry in Nineveh and Jeremiah's ministry in Jerusalem came exactly when those cities were on the brink of destruction due to wickedness. Note that one of these cities was destroyed, while the other was spared. The people's willingness to accept a prophet's words was the differentiating factor. We should remember this fact before categorically dismissing the possibility that prophets might be walking through the streets of Houston and Philadelphia and doing the same thing.

According to the Biblical record, if a society is beyond the help of prophets, God will destroy it. Apparently, we are not yet beyond the help of prophets. And even if we were, one of the main causes for that would be the people's absolute refusal to follow anyone who calls himself a prophet. For this reason, those Christians who reject the possibility of modern-day prophets, presumably out of allegiance to God, are actually playing right into Satan's hand.

The fact that so many thousands of recognizable Christian sects exist throughout the world – while so many millions of individual Christians essentially belong to their own personal sects – shows what happens when men believe that they do not need an authoritative representative of God to interpret and apply scripture. Both the confused and bickering state of the Christian world and the depravity and insanity of the world in general make it painfully evident that no era of human history ever needed prophetic leadership more than ours does. Sectarian scholars may raise their arguments against Joseph Smith, but they cannot articulate any sort of intelligible answer to that troublesome question:

Why aren't there any prophets in our time?

I testify to you that there are prophets in our time.

When we read scripture, we see two trends that stretch back to the days of Adam:

1. God sends prophets to lead His people, teach them correct doctrines, and call them to repentance when necessary.
2. The people often reject those prophets – sometimes even twisting the words of dead prophets and turning them against the living ones.

It should come as no surprise to see that both of these trends continue today, since humanity hardly ever changes and God changes not at all.

4 – BETTER THAN HUMAN

Answering the question of whether or not there are prophets today – and whether or not Joseph Smith can lay claim to that title – is impossible without first understanding what the prophetic calling actually is. Some might refer to people like Fyodor Dostoevsky, Buddy Holly, Mother Theresa, or Martin Luther King, Jr. as prophets, but they do so only because they recognize these people as excellent individuals who achieved impressive feats to the benefit of humanity. However, simply being intelligent, talented, righteous, successful, beautiful, or even inspired does not make someone a prophet, and a prophet is meant to bring much more to the world than general goodness. Rather, the prophetic calling comes with very specific purposes and requirements, and only by understanding these purposes and requirements can we come to a true understanding of the channels through which God imparts His will upon the people of this world. Put simply, a prophet has two interlocking purposes, which are to:

1. Receive and deliver revelation.
2. Unify and lead the Lord's people.

Revelation is the imbuement of the will and wisdom of God into the mortal mind. Unlike inspiration, which has the same source, revelation does not mix with conjecture or prejudice. While inspiration is an anonymous gift that simply settles upon us as we unwittingly brush against divine things in our everyday lives, revelation is something that pierces the heart and demands something of us, never content to leave us ignorant of its origin. Inspiration comes as a natural effect of having the love of God surrounding us always, while revelation is the bold articulation of that love. Inspiration reminds us that we are better than beasts, but revelation seeks to make us better than human. Fyodor Dostoevsky, Buddy Holly, Mother Theresa, and Martin Luther King, Jr. may have accomplished many beneficial, brave, or beautiful things through inspiration, but none ever received revelation for the Lord's people as Moses did on Sinai or as Elisha did in the face of an army of enemy chariots⁹ – and none claimed to.

Although the first purpose of a prophet is to receive revelation, this does not imply that only a select few people can communicate with God. Indeed, revelation is at the very core of true religion – on the individual level as well as on the organizational level. For instance, regardless of any historical, archaeological, or philological evidence that may exist, one cannot know whether or not the Bible is truly what it claims to be except by receiving personal revelation from God attesting to that fact. The same litmus test applies to all texts that purport to be scripture and all people who claim to be God's chosen representatives. As an ancient prophet once wrote:

And now, he imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also. Now this is not all; little children do have words given unto them many times, which confound the wise and the learned.¹⁰

Again, as John Taylor said, religion without revelation is a mockery and a farce. Just as a man must be a prophet receiving revelation in order to lead the people of God, the people of God need personal revelation in order to know who really is or is not a prophet. The difference is that, while every individual is entitled to personal revelation regarding the decisions he or she must make in life, only someone with the proper authority can receive revelation on behalf of others, write scripture for others, or stand as the final authority regarding the correct interpretation of scripture.

Some, however, take the principle of personal revelation too far. They do so because they misinterpret the following scripture:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:¹¹

Those who misinterpret this scripture assume that it is a prophecy that refers specifically to our time. Unlike those who claim that this era is too wicked for there to be any prophets, these people believe that ours is actually a special era, in which God reveals His will directly to every believer rather than through a prophetic intermediary. However, we should remember that this quotation from the Acts of the Apostles is itself a quotation from the writings of the prophet Joel.¹² Since this passage originated from the Old Testament, it would have been very easy for the detractors of Christ and the Apostles to use that very scripture to argue that there was no more prophetic revelation in that time either. In truth, as I showed previously and as this scripture shows, God always speaks to the hearts of His people – and this does not necessitate or suggest a lack of prophetic guidance. In the time of Joel, in the time of the Apostles, and in our time, God speaks to both the average believers and to the prophets who lead them.

One glaring falsehood that has become a rampant problem in Protestantism is the idea that Christians can somehow divine the will and doctrine of God by getting together and voting on it. This was never the model of revelation as described in the Bible, and it does not make any sense anyway. As Alcuin of York once so adequately put it:

[T]hose people should not be listened to who keep saying the voice of the people is the voice of God, since the riotousness of the crowd is always very close to madness.¹³

Democratic process can be a fine thing for secular governments, but it is intrinsically contrary to the idea that religion should be based on revealed truth. If we want to know what God thinks, we should ask Him instead of citing our numbers or our scholarly authority as grounds to tell Him what He thinks.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that God has chosen to make a prophet of everyone who believes in Christ, instituting a structure that is more egalitarian than what we find in the Bible – one in which no one has any more authority than anyone else. If that is the case, though, God appears to have become inconstant and confused, as He is apparently saying completely different things to all of His prophets – even those within the bounds of “mainstream Christianity.” This inconstancy and confusion is evident in the fact that these “prophets” cannot even agree on something as fundamental and crucial as how one is saved.

It is clear that God’s model for revelation is not one in which He tells different things to everyone. The House of the Lord is a house of order and unity. As Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, taking upon Himself the sins and suffering of the universe, He expressed His deepest desires to the Father:

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.¹⁴

At that moment of greatest import, in which He was preparing to be bowed down under the greatest suffering and torment that any being could ever experience, Christ's thoughts went to His disciples and the challenges they would face in His physical absence. In the face of death and boundless suffering, His greatest desire was that His followers would become and remain united.

Are the various Christian sects of the world united, either in doctrine or in organization? No. They remain separate because countless people claiming to be followers – and representatives – of Christ continue to interpret scripture in completely different ways, and the only way by which they can manage to erect any semblance of unity is by pretending that the points on which they disagree are “not important anyway.” But how can sectarians venerate the Bible as a heavenly gift and the quintessential guide for human life while simultaneously dismissing various passages of it as being unimportant – simply because they cannot agree on the meaning or application of those passages? Ridiculous and unnecessary controversy certainly exists, but often, controversy is a sign of importance rather than unimportance. The Bible cannot be both perfect and flawed, and it cannot be both essential and irrelevant. We are foolish and lazy if we judge the importance of Biblical passages according to our ability to understand them and reach an agreement on their meaning.

As for the confusion and disagreement that characterize sectarian Christianity today, in recounting his own search for truth, Joseph Smith described it best:

[T]he teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible.¹⁵

One of my very religious friends once troubled me by saying: “It all just comes down to interpretation.” In other words, the Christian religion is largely a flexible one, having relative truths that just depend on what you think the Bible means instead of what God intended it to mean. This idea of scriptural relativism contradicts both plain reason and the Bible itself:

[N]o prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.¹⁶

The Gospel is meant to be clear and simple. If it does not appear so, the problem lies not in the Gospel, but in us. We cannot hope to fix the issue of sectarian strife by ignoring the controversial aspects of the Gospel any more than we can hope to heal the cancer in us by amputating our surgeon's arm to keep ourselves from being cut. By choosing to ignore the controversial aspects of the Gospel and deeming them unimportant, we deprive the Gospel of its power to change us in the ways in which we need to be changed. The Gospel is what it is. If we choose to ignore specific aspects of it for the sake of avoiding confrontation, we might as well reject it altogether.

When Christ ordained His Apostles to lead His Church, proclaim His Gospel, and work miracles in His name, He did so with the intention that His people would remain a people united in effort, doctrine, and love. He even said:

Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:¹⁷

Having warned against division in such a way, how could Christ have been the guiding force behind the situation we see in the sectarian world today? He could not have been. Modern Christianity's confusion is the work of mortals, with a little help from the Devil. This is clearly the case, because "God is not the author of confusion."¹⁸ If we suppose that Christianity can be divided into countless sects and still somehow collectively be the House and Kingdom of Christ, we must do so under the assumption that Christ ignores His own admonitions.

Knowing that Christ always intended His people to be united, many seek to bring about such unification, but some of them do so under the assumption that they do not need direct intervention from God to facilitate that end. However, while it is true that such unification can certainly be accomplished without the help of God, history has shown that any attempt to do so will only lead to one of two possible outcomes:

1. Tyranny and corruption, in which self-serving leaders dictate doctrine according to their own prejudices and private interests, keeping the masses in a state of subservient ignorance to maintain their position.
2. Doctrinal ambiguity, in which, for the sake of appeasement, the message becomes so watered down with private interpretations and diplomatic concessions that it loses all value and power.

While the Christian sects of the world who are divided in doctrine can be reunited without any prophetic guidance, they cannot achieve this unification while remaining true to Christ's teachings. Such was the case for the early Roman Catholic Church – whose name, meaning "universal," is evidence that it arose as a result of such unification efforts – and such is the case for various unification efforts in the ecumenical world today.

Realizing that the far-flung Christian denominations of the world cannot all be part of the House of Christ, a faithful Christian must then ask a very important question:

Why can't God do something about this?

Why do we continue in this disunity and confusion when God can send us a Jeremiah, a Jonah, a Noah, or a John to dispel the false doctrines and unite the Lord's faithful? Again, is He not capable? Does He not love us? Do we not need His guidance through a prophet?

God is capable of sending us a modern Moses, and He has done so. He has sent a man to bring about the unification of the Lord's faithful – and that man was Joseph Smith. That news may be inconvenient or unwelcome to some, but it is, nevertheless, the truth.

5 – THAT WHICH WAS LOST

In his 1842 letter to John Wentworth, editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, Joseph Smith articulated the history, status, and beliefs of the Latter-day Saints. In one part of that letter, the prophet penned these words:

[T]he standard of truth has been erected: no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing, persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.¹⁹

It was Joseph Smith's mission to restore Christ's Church and Gospel to the world in doctrinal purity. One means by which he set this work into motion was by miraculously bringing forth the Book of Mormon. In its pages, the Book of Mormon states one of its principle purposes:

Wherefore, the [people of the New World] shall write [the Book of Mormon]; and the [people of the Old World] shall write [the Bible]; and that which shall be written by the [people of the New World], and also that which shall be written by the [people of the Old World] shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace...and bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord.²⁰

By bringing forth the Book of Mormon, as well as by performing various other prophetic acts, Joseph Smith set this work in motion – a work that seeks to confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, establish peace, preach truth, and unify the Lord's people. The Lord sent Joseph Smith to do what only a prophet of the Lord could do.

Many men and women, seeing the problems of post-apostolic Christianity, have tried to return the faith to a state of doctrinal purity. However, until the time of Joseph Smith, no one did so successfully. Some have claimed to be able to restore doctrinal purity without the aid of divine authority or prophetic guidance, while others have claimed to possess such authority and guidance when they, in fact, were charlatans. Seeing that the philosophies of men have resulted in impure Christian doctrine, they have tried to use the philosophies of men to deal with those impurities. Essentially, then, they mop the floor with dirty water.

Unlike the scholars and reformers before him, Joseph Smith received divine authority from God in the way that the Apostles of old did: by the laying on of hands. However, the way in which Joseph Smith received his priesthood authority by the laying on of hands was very different from the way in which John Coke received authority from John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. As Wesley's brother Charles wrote:

How easily are bishops made
By man or woman's whim:

Wesley his hands on Coke hath laid,
But who laid hands on him?²¹

John Coke may have thought that he had received priesthood authority from John Wesley through the laying on of hands, but John Wesley had not received any such authority himself. Neither has any Protestant minister who lays hands on any other prospective Protestant minister. A man without divine authority cannot give divine authority to someone else. When Joseph Smith received the Holy Priesthood of Jesus Christ, he received it (in two parts) first from John the Baptist and then from the apostles Peter, James, and John. Had he received his authority from a Protestant clergyman, he would have been receiving no authority at all, as none of these sects can trace their line of authority back to Christ.

Mainstream Protestants must admit that their leaders do not have authority as the apostles and prophets of old did, as their leaders do not even make any claims to the contrary. Catholics are different, however, in that they do claim an unbroken chain of authority all the way back to Peter – though many glaring problems exist with this claim. These problems are seen most clearly in the structure of the Roman Catholic Church. The leader of the Church, the Pope, is regarded as the Bishop of Rome. (Note that he does not bear the title of apostle or prophet.) However, even if God truly has made him a bishop, being a bishop does not make one the highest leader of Christ's Church. Anyone who studies the New Testament can clearly see a distinction between the office of apostle and the office of bishop. The apostles officiated over the entire body of Saints (Christians) in the world, composing epistles of instruction and reproof and traveling from place to place to make sure that the proper doctrines were being taught and that the local authorities were fulfilling their responsibilities. The bishops of New Testament times, on the other hand, were local authorities who received instruction and admonition from the apostles. They did not officiate over the entire Church, and they did not receive revelation in the way that a prophet or apostle does. Rather, they oversaw the followers of Christ in their respective areas, primarily focusing on making sure that those Saints' temporal needs were met.

When the apostles were killed – due to both insurrection within the Church and persecution from without – the local bishops were left without apostolic guidance and without the authority to lead the Church as an apostle would. They were left to fend for themselves without any overarching structure to unify them with the other congregations throughout the world, and they had no authority to whom they could turn when questions arose regarding the application of doctrine in specific circumstances. When they did try to authoritatively interpret scripture and doctrine to meet current dilemmas, no one was there to deal with disagreements that arose between the bishops. This and other problems resulted in the Great Apostasy – the gradual disappearance of the doctrines and authority structure instituted by Christ. The apostolic priesthood authority was lost suddenly due to the murder of the apostles, and what authority the bishops maintained was lost gradually as, due to a lack of higher priesthood leadership, they each led their congregations as they saw fit. As time passed, their teachings and practices drifted away from those instituted by Christ. At some point, even the priesthood authority once held by these bishops was lost because of their false teachings and false claims of having the higher apostolic authority.

Centuries after the deaths of the Apostles, the “bishop” of Rome decided that someone needed to be in charge. Since Rome was the capital of the world's great empire at that time, he assumed that whoever was bishop of Rome thus became the de facto leader of Christianity. Such reasoning may sound logical for a secular organization, but not for an organization that claims God as its author.

The fact that the Roman Catholic Church is Roman stands as clear evidence that it is not a continuation of the Church of the New Testament, which had virtually nothing to do with Rome. The reasoning that led to the adoption of Rome as the center for the Christian world also led to the acceptance of Latin as the holy language of the Christian world rather than a more scripturally and historically valid language such as Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic.

While Catholics claim that both the doctrines and the structure of the Church remained intact from the time of Christ until now, plain reason dictates otherwise. To see that this organization emerged only after a general apostasy had occurred, we merely need to look at its name. The word “catholic,” which means “universal,” was used by the religious leaders under Constantine because they were drawing together many separate Christian groups with different doctrines and teachings and establishing a single institution of authority over them. The founders of the Roman church felt the need to call themselves “catholic” as a means of showing that they had gathered into one all of the disparate Christian groups with disparate Christian teachings – and had successfully pressed dissenters into submission. Thus, in its attempt to legitimize itself through its name, the Roman Catholic Church actually reveals its own lack of legitimacy: Christ’s Church of the New Testament was certainly not Roman, and it had no need to identify itself as “catholic” or “universal” because that was already understood. It was only after a state of apostasy and disunity that such an appellation became necessary for anyone who sought to stand as the sole leader of the Christian world.

Imagine a beautiful statue of divine workmanship. Now imagine that someone has shattered that statue and strewn its pieces all across the world. After everyone who saw that statue in its former glory has died, someone with no memory of its original design steps forward and vows to put it back together again. He gathers pieces from across the world, but some of the pieces he gathers were never part of the statue to begin with, and he cannot find all of the original pieces. He then does his best to fit this mess of fragments back together into an intelligible design – a design that he never knew and can only piece together through conjecture. What he ends up with is a monstrosity with rearranged parts, missing parts, and parts that were never intended to be there. Seeing gaps between various pieces, he fashions new pieces of his own making to fill the void. While this work contains many of the same pieces as the original, it is not the original: it has become a completely new work. This is the Roman Catholic Church.

Now imagine that someone does not like this statue, realizing that such a monstrosity cannot be the original work. Also having no memory of the original work and lacking the same pieces that the previous assembler lacked, he copies various pieces from the newly assembled work and rejects others, some of which were in the original and some of which were not. He then introduces new pieces of his own making to help fit this work together in a somewhat intelligible manner. This is Protestantism.

Another obvious problem with the Catholic claim to authority is the admitted absence of revelatory power in the Catholic Church. The Pope claims to be infallible in doctrine, but Catholic doctrine stipulates that revelation does not continue as it did in Biblical times. Is this not a contradiction? No man can be infallible in doctrine without receiving revelation from God regarding doctrine. Revelation and divine authority go hand-in-hand: one cannot exist without the other. The Pope and the organization over which he presides cannot claim divine authority while denying the revelatory guidance by which that authority is defined and manifested. If the heavens are closed and revelation has ceased, the Will of God cannot be known, regardless of the office one may claim to

hold. Even with the existence of scripture, without continuing revelation, we are left to our own devices for the interpretation of that scripture. Since Catholicism teaches that the heavens are closed and revelation has ceased, Catholics must admit that the Catechism was composed entirely without the guidance of God. Likewise, the Pope cannot possibly be infallible in doctrine when he admits that God does not speak to him about doctrine. Any scriptural interpretations he may deliver, as well-meaning as they may be, are his own.

The Great Apostasy of which the Latter-day Saints often speak largely coincides with what secular historians refer to as the Dark Ages. This was a time in which Christ's Church was lost from the world, and all Christian scholarship was smothered beneath a tyrannical theocracy that, like the pharisaic authority structure of Christ's time, frequently dictated the will of God without consulting with Him first. Seeing the problems that had occurred as a result of this loss of divine authority, various bold reformers stepped forward and challenged the pharisaic authority structure. The efforts of these men did dispel many of the evils that had developed in the Catholic Church during the darkest days of the Dark Ages, allowing some parts of the world to live under more liberal Protestant authority and causing Catholic authority itself to become more liberal and accommodating in response.

While the Protestant Reformation occurred largely due to a reasonable and righteous desire to address problems that lay in Catholicism, like the Roman Catholic Church, the intrinsic flaw of that movement can be seen in its very name: all of the protest and reform in the world cannot accomplish a feat that invariably requires revelation. While the reformers were right about many things, so were the Catholic leaders, and all lacked the revelatory vision and divine authority necessary for the reestablishment of truth. "Where there is no vision, the people perish."²² The reformers' limitations are evident in the fact that, while they shared many common complaints, they still issued contradictory solutions. Blindly piecing together their various new doctrinal structures, none of them were any more qualified than the others to serve as God's instruments in restoring that which had been lost.

After the initial wave of iconoclasts, another reformer by the name of Roger Williams stepped forward and pointed out various ways in which the Protestant sects were falling into the same mistakes as the Roman Catholic Church. Williams eventually became a leader in the Baptist faith, founding the first Baptist congregation in the New World. However, he soon left that faith behind. Realizing that neither he nor anyone else in the world had the authority to stand as the official representative of Jesus Christ, Williams thought it better to affiliate with no church at all and wait for the Lord to do what only the Lord could do. As he said:

There is no regularly constituted church of Christ on earth, nor any person qualified to administer any church ordinances; nor can there be until new apostles are sent by the Great Head of the Church for whose coming I am seeking.²³

Sadly, Roger Williams died in 1683 – 147 years before the Lord's Church was restored to the world through such an apostle. Had Williams lived to hear Joseph Smith speak, it is quite possible that he would have accepted his message and entered into Christ's Church with the sound of rejoicing.

6 – IN THE WOODS

In 1836, probably unaware of the climactic events that had transpired in 1820 and 1830, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote his seminal essay *Nature*. In that text, Emerson penned these famous words: “In the woods, we return to reason and faith.” This statement was particularly true for Joseph Smith, who so audaciously assumed that the God who created everything we know, led the Israelites across the Red Sea on dry ground, and walked on water could and would answer a simple all-important question. By venturing into the woods with a question in the spring of 1820, Joseph Smith had become a paragon of both reason and faith.

Addressing the Harvard Divinity School in 1838, Emerson shocked his audience by focusing on a topic that was (and still is) largely marginalized by those erudites in their study of Divinity: continuing revelation. In that address, he stated the following:

Men have come to speak of the revelation as somewhat long ago given and done, as if God were dead.

...

The office [of minister] is the first in the world. It is of that reality, that it cannot suffer the deduction of any falsehood. And it is my duty to say to you, that the need was never greater of new revelation than now.

...

Where shall I hear words such as in elder ages drew men to leave all and follow, — father and mother, house and land, wife and child? Where shall I hear these august laws of moral being so pronounced, as to fill my ear, and I feel ennobled by the offer of my uttermost action and passion? The test of the true faith, certainly, should be its power to charm and command the soul, as the laws of nature control the activity of the hands, — so commanding that we find pleasure and honor in obeying.

...

I look for the hour when that supreme Beauty, which ravished the souls of those eastern men, and chiefly of those Hebrews, and through their lips spoke oracles to all time, shall speak in the West also.²⁴

It is a strange thing to think that the God of the entire universe, a being of immeasurable power, wisdom, and love, would commune only with prophets in a very small part of the world. It is also a strange thing to think that He would make a common practice of this communication for millennia — only to stop very suddenly and without warning.

Those who say that the heavens have been closed are faced with a difficult question: When and why did this happen? As for the “why,” I have addressed that previously. (God would not do it, so there is no “why.”) As for the “when,” several options exist for those who make this argument:

“Revelation ended with Christ.”

Many people say this, but the argument fails to explain the revelations received by Peter, Paul, John, Agabus, and other New Testament figures long after Christ’s resurrection and ascension. Indeed, John the Beloved – John the Revelator – even penned an entire book called *Revelation* long after Christ and many of the original Apostles were gone.

“Revelation ended with the Apostles.”

There are various problems with this argument. First, the appointment of Matthias²⁵ as an apostle shows that the apostolic office was clearly not meant to end with the original Twelve, and it would make no sense for Matthias and later apostles to be deaf to heavenly guidance when they held the same authority and office as the others. Second, the New Testament clearly identifies individuals other than the original Apostles who received or will receive revelation even after Christ’s ascension. The Bible clearly identifies Agabus as a prophet²⁶ and then gives an example of a prophecy²⁷ that he made. John sees a vision of two prophets²⁸ to come forth near the end of times. There is no argument to be made here: revelation did not end with the deaths of the original Twelve Apostles.

“Revelation ended with the publication of the Bible.”

This argument is based on the idea that, with the existence of the Bible, we no longer need prophets to guide us, as anything of value that a prophet could possibly have to say is already in the Bible. However, those who make this argument are being somewhat naïve about the origin of the Bible. The Bible we know did not even exist as a single text until several centuries after Christ. If revelation continued from the time of Christ until that point of publication, why does the Bible not contain an account of any of those revelations? Could it be that we lack any such record simply because the people had rejected prophets, and not because God was no longer sending them? On top of that, even after the scholars of that time decided on which Christian texts to canonize in the Bible and which to abandon, they did not take that text and run to the presses to print ten million copies: the Bible remained a rare and precious commodity for many centuries, even forcibly kept from the masses for some time, as the story of William Tyndale shows. The Bible did not become readily available to most believers as it is today until well into the 1900s. Did revelation and prophetic leadership continue until that point and then finally stop? Certainly not.

“Revelation ended with the writing of The Book of Revelation.”

First, Revelation was not even the last book of the Bible to be written. It was simply placed at the end because it deals so heavily with the end of the world. Second, as mentioned previously, John speaks of prophets yet to come in that very book. The Lord’s charge in the end of Revelation regarding adding to and subtracting from “these things” refers to the Book of Revelation alone, and not to the Bible (which did not yet exist) or to revelation in general. John made this warning because he correctly expected his work to be copied and circulated by many people, and he knew such copying often led to changes and omissions, intentional or not.

Some will say that the age of revelation and prophecy has indeed ended – it just did not end at any of these specific times, but at some other undisclosed point. However, it makes no sense to assume that God would suddenly put a stop to such an important aspect of true religion without a word of warning and without any ties to any other important events.

Those sectarian leaders who claim that the heavens have closed and that revelation has ended do so because they cannot accept the notion that God would speak to Joseph Smith and not to them. Such persons must face up to the fact that revelation is a necessity of true religion. Rest assured that

anyone who would tell you otherwise is selling you a religion created by someone other than God, however similar to God's religion it may be.

Which of all the sects is true?²⁹ That was the question that Joseph Smith took with him into that place of reason and faith in 1820. The Father and the Son appeared to the 14-year-old Joseph, and they answered him. As Joseph later related:

I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof."³⁰

After receiving this piece of revelation, though, Joseph Smith received far more than what he had bargained for. He had merely sought a simple answer to a simple question, but now God would employ him as His instrument in bringing the Church back to a world that was finally ready to receive it again.

Standing as leader of the Lord's Church on Earth, Joseph Smith received revelation upon revelation to help him correctly teach and guide the Saints. As he later stated:

It is my meditation all the day...to know how I shall make the saints of God to comprehend the visions that roll like an overflowing surge before my mind.³¹

Joseph Smith saw and conversed with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and various heavenly messengers, including prophets of old. He peered into Heaven. He saw and accurately predicted future events. He received visions of civilizations that had disappeared many centuries before. He gained an acute and luminous understanding of the blessings that lie in store for those who valiantly take upon themselves the name of Christ.

Revelation is available both in the words of God's select representatives and in the words that the Holy Spirit whispers to each individual's heart. Some would say that one of these two types of revelation continues while other does not, but since neither the needs of Man nor the nature of God have changed since the time of John the Revelator, such arguments arise only as an excuse for the blind to continue making a career out of leading the blind. The words of Stephen Crane adequately illustrate the unavoidable result of the institution of sectarian leadership:

A learned man came to me once.
He said, "I know the way, — come."
And I was overjoyed at this.
Together we hastened.
Soon, too soon, were we
Where my eyes were useless,
And I knew not the ways of my feet.
I clung to the hand of my friend;
But at last he cried, "I am lost."

When it comes to matters of eternal purpose, the nature of God, and salvation, no amount of scholarship or learning can compensate for a lack of divine guidance – because no one can know of such things except by bowing before the wisdom of God. We either follow prophets, or we wander on strange roads and become lost. Whether or not we are following someone just as blind as we are is a matter of little consequence, regardless of his supposed credentials. The same sympathy seen in Joseph Smith’s rejection of the stuffy argumentation and blind scholarship of his day is reflected in Walt Whitman’s famous poem “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer”:

When I heard the learned astronomer;
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me;
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and
measure them;
When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where he lectured with much
applause in the lecture-room,
How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;
Till rising and gliding out, I wander’d off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look’d up in perfect silence at the stars.

When voices all around were telling Joseph Smith to rely upon their explanations of the Divine, requiring him to sequester himself within a prison of what-if and I-think, he simply departed into the woods, and under the spring sky, he looked God in the eyes and asked his wonderful, humbly rebellious question.

I see no stronger evidence of God’s undying love for the human family than the fact that edifying, soul-searing, life-changing, world-defying revelation is and always has been available to those willing to pay the price. And what is the price? Among other things, it is the willingness to accept whatever God may say, even if it means letting go of our favorite imperfections, prejudices, and preconceptions.

When we do receive such revelatory promptings, if we ignore or reject them, that light withdraws from us, and we are left in a truly dismal state, in which the soul is not merely devoid of divine guidance, but numb to it. May we all have the humility to hear, feel, see, and respond to the Word of God, whether it comes by means of written scripture, introspection, fasting, prayer, prophetic vision, spoken word, angelic encounter, or that gentle touch of the Holy Spirit that pervades and legitimizes all such methods of sacred communion.

7 – A GOD OF MIRACLES

While Emerson insisted that God still communicates with mortals, his faith in God's power and beneficence faltered when it came to the working of miracles. He even expressed doubt that Jesus Christ ever performed His miracles as related in the New Testament. Despite Emerson's opinion, though, miracles are just as much a part of God's standard procedure as revelation and prophecy are. With the power of God, mortals truly can heal the sick, raise the dead, walk on water, and command the elements.

While Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians are generally closed to the idea of continuing revelation, most of them are open to the idea of continuing miracles, and I am glad of that. However, for too many, this belief is limited to miracles that are actually not so miraculous, such as the following:

- **Divine apparitions in baked goods.**
God is not trite. Neither does He have such a shortage of power that He has gone from burning bushes and vivid visions to meaningless pictures in tortillas and dinner rolls.
- **The ability to speak Gibberish.**
Some think that having the Gift of Tongues means that you sound like an extraterrestrial with a stuttering problem. This stems from a gross misunderstanding of what happened on the Day of Pentecost. Anyone can spout nonsensical sounds that seem to be kind of like a language. What happened on the Day of Pentecost was something far more miraculous than that. A number of faithful from different lands, having no common language, gathered together, and when one stood and spoke, all understood. That is the Gift of Tongues as described in the Bible: the ability to communicate across language boundaries for the purpose of doing the Lord's work. Senseless yammering is not communication, and the ability to babble nonsense is no more miraculous than the ability to simultaneously pat one's head and rub one's stomach.
- **The ability to touch someone's forehead and make him fall.**
I completely believe that one filled with the power of God can cause other people's bodies to lose all strength and collapse – if the situation calls for it.³² However, this is something limited to a few very extreme circumstances: it is not the Lord's standard procedure. The presence of the Holy Spirit does not typically have this effect on people, and televangelists' use of such spectacles in their snake oil carnivals is an affront to God and a mockery of the Holy Spirit's actual power. It has become prevalent in various "ministries" because it is so easily faked, because it is so visually engaging, and because those entertainers that engage in such practices know so little about the true purpose and effect of the Holy Spirit.

Such base and undignified "miracles" as we see among the holy rollers, snake handlers, and other cheap religious performers, rather than filling people with the Spirit of the Lord, actually tend to do the opposite, conveying feelings of confusion and dread more similar to what one would experience when looking upon someone who is demon-possessed. As Joseph Smith once said:

The "French Prophets" were possessed of a spirit that deceived; they existed in Vivaris and Dauphany, in great numbers in the year 1688; there were many boys and girls from seven to twenty-five; they had strange fits, as in tremblings and faintings, which made them stretch out their legs and arms, as in a swoon; they remained a while in

trances, and coming out of them, uttered all that came in their mouths.

Now God never had any prophets that acted in this way; there was nothing indecorous in the proceeding of the Lord's prophets in any age; neither had the apostles nor prophets in the apostles' day anything of this kind.³³

There is nothing miraculous about falling down, frothing at the mouth, muttering nonsense, or simply acting crazy. There is nothing divine about confusion or madness. Those who truly work miracles by the power of God do so in a dignified manner, and they do not charge admission. The miracles of God also tend to come for a specific reason, such as to feed the hungry, heal the afflicted, or rescue the captive. God is not a mere entertainer, and He does not deal in mass-media parlor tricks. Whenever the miracles of God become manifest, they do so as a result of both faith and necessity.

Some will say that miracles still occur because they surround us every day. They say that things like love, trees, sunsets, babies, and art are all miracles. I do not contest this: in a sense, all of these things truly are miracles, because they could not have come into being if not for God, and because they are strong pieces of evidence attesting to God's love for humanity. However, belief in the Bible necessitates belief in an entirely different kind of miracle on top of these "everyday" miracles: it requires us to believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, turned water into wine, walked on water, commanded the elements, healed the sick and afflicted by touching them, took the sins and suffering of the world upon Himself, and arose from the dead after having been crucified. Those who believe in God but assume that such miracles as mentioned in the Bible are meant to be only figurative must ask themselves whether it is easier to turn water into wine or create an entire universe.

Just as Jesus Christ performed miracles seemingly on a daily basis, the prophets and apostles of the Old and New Testaments frequently performed similar miracles. It is thus quite clear that real miracles are just as much a part of the Lord's standard procedure as is continuing revelation. Indeed, there is no strict dichotomy between the two: the ability to see beyond the boundaries of time or space and to know the will of God is intrinsically a miraculous thing, and every miracle comes as a means of communication between God and mortals.

Just like those who doubt continuing revelation, those who doubt continuing miracles must ask themselves whether it is a lack of love or ability on God's part or a lack of need on our part that has caused such things to cease.

God has not ceased to be God, and these things have not ceased. As the prophet Moroni wrote:

And who shall say that Jesus Christ did not do many mighty miracles?
And there were many mighty miracles wrought by the hands of the apostles.

And if there were miracles wrought then, why has God ceased to be a God of miracles and yet be an unchangeable Being? And behold, I say unto you he changeth not; if so he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is a God of miracles.

And the reason why he ceaseth to do miracles among the children of men is because that they dwindle in unbelief, and depart from the right way, and know not the God in whom they should trust.

Behold, I say unto you that whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father in the name of Christ it shall be granted him; and this promise is unto all, even unto the ends of the earth.³⁴

And again:

...it is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men; wherefore, if these things have ceased wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain.

For no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name; wherefore, if these things have ceased, then has faith ceased also; and awful is the state of man, for they are as though there had been no redemption made.³⁵

No rational man, believing in the God of the Bible, can dispute the truthfulness of these passages from the Book of Mormon. And yet, many who claim to believe in the Bible irrationally do just that, claiming that the Book of Mormon errs in this respect. For them, I cite a New Testament passage that echoes the words of Moroni:

Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not... if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.³⁶

When I was a missionary in Taiwan, I encountered a Jehovah's Witness who assured me that miracles have ceased. She told me that such things were necessary during the time of Jesus to prove His authenticity, but that their necessity has passed. She called upon me to ignore the miracles I had already seen in my life, ignore the revelations opened to my mind by a God who is still quite alive, ignore the promises of Christ, and base my understanding of God, Heaven, life, human nature, and Final Judgment upon the wisdom of her group's scholars – people who did not even claim to have one whit of God-given authority and who admittedly did not receive their innovative interpretation of scripture from God through any sort of direct revelation, but through study, conjecture, and debate. She also failed to understand that, if miracles were at one time necessary to prove the divinity of Christ, they would still be equally as necessary for that purpose now as they were before, because neither you nor I witnessed those miracles.

According to Christ, if we truly believe and pray for something, we will receive it. That much Christ made very clear in the aforementioned passage. And what do people pray for, if not miracles? Christ's promise stands as an unequivocal testimony that Heaven is only as far away as we make it. Some doubters say that miracles can no longer occur because people do not believe in miracles.

However, they are only right in so far as they make themselves right, and they should not assume that their own disbelief will keep God from fulfilling His promises to those who do believe.

Those Christians who deny that God continues to work miracles must remember that, of all the miracles of God, none is greater than the salvation and exaltation of the human soul. For a Deity who can heal the soul, healing the body is a simple task. For a God who can replace a man's stony heart with a heart of flesh,³⁷ giving that man the ability to command the elements can come as an afterthought. Thus, if we believe that miracles have ceased, we must believe that salvation, the greatest miracle, has also ceased –and if that is the case, all religion is therefore useless. On the other hand, if we believe that Christ still saves, it should not take any extra measure of faith to believe that He would send another Moses or Elijah to work great miracles by His power, as no miracle of Moses or Elijah rivals the Atonement.

With all of this talk about miracles, one critical of the Restored Gospel would probably think: So why didn't Joseph Smith work any miracles?

In an attempt to vilify Joseph Smith, many sectarian Christians compare him to Muhammad, whose life was similar to Joseph's in many ways. I typically shrug at this comparison, as I do not regard Muhammad with the same disdain as many Christians do. In fact, I accord to him a similar level of regard as that which I accord to Martin Luther, Francis of Assisi, and John Wesley. Despite my lack of disdain for the man, though, I must point out that some key differences do exist between him and Joseph Smith. One very important difference is the fact that, although Muslims regard Muhammad as a prophet akin to Moses, they admit that he worked no miracles. Joseph Smith, on the other hand, worked a number of miracles through the priesthood authority that he received from Heavenly messengers, and a multitude of witnesses have attested to the fact.

Perhaps the foremost of Joseph Smith's miracles was his translation of the Book of Mormon. Critics will certainly shake their heads and disregard that feat, saying that there is nothing miraculous about it. I refer such critics to an address made by Hugh B. Brown at Brigham Young University in 1955:

Some people will not agree, but I submit to you that the Prophet Joseph Smith, in translating the Book of Mormon, did a superhuman work. I ask you students to undertake to write a story on the ancient inhabitants of America, to write as he did without any source material. Include in your story 54 chapters dealing with wars, 21 historical chapters, and 55 chapters on visions and prophecies. And, remember, when you begin to write on visions and prophecies, you must have your record agree meticulously with the Bible. You must write 71 chapters on doctrine and exhortation, and here, too, you must check every statement with the scriptures or you will be proven to be a fraud. You must write 21 chapters on the ministry of Christ, and everything you claim He said and did and every testimony you write in your book about Him must agree absolutely with the New Testament.

I ask you, would you like to undertake such a task? I would suggest to you too that you must employ figures of speech, similes,

metaphors, narrations, exposition, description, oratory, epic, lyric, logic, and parable. Undertake that, will you?

I ask you to remember that the man who translated the Book of Mormon was a young man who hadn't had the opportunity of schooling that you have had, and yet he dictated that book in just a little over two months and made very few, if any, corrections. For over one hundred years, some of the best students and scholars of the world have been trying to prove from the Bible that the Book of Mormon is false, but not one of them has been able to prove that anything he wrote was not in strict harmony with the scriptures—with the Bible and with the word of God.

The Book of Mormon not only declares on the title page that its purpose is to convince Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, but this truth is the burden of its message. In 3 Nephi it is recorded that multitudes of people testified, "We saw Him. We felt of His hands and His side. We know He is the Christ."³⁸

Aside from overcoming his poverty and lack of education to bring the Book of Mormon out of obscurity and make it available to the modern world, Joseph Smith performed a number of other miraculous works, which have been recorded in a multitude of eye-witness accounts. The following is a list of many miracles that Joseph Smith performed:

- He cast the devil out of Newel Knight.³⁹ (1830)
- He healed the lame arm of John Johnson's wife.⁴⁰ (1831)
- He prophesied of the location of the first battle of the Civil War years before the fact. He also prophesied of the South's supplication to Britain for aid.⁴¹ (1832)
- He publicly stated that "Forty days shall not pass, and the stars shall fall from heaven." Thirty-nine nights later, the world witnessed what seems to have been the most amazing – and frightening – meteor shower of recorded history. (1833)
- He cured his father and others of cholera.⁴² (1835)
- He cured Angeline Works of cholera.⁴³ (1835)
- He healed Brigham Young, Elijah Fordham, Joseph B. Noble, and a whole company of feverish saints, who, though being on the brink of death, immediately arose to their feet.⁴⁴ (1839)
- He oversaw the healing of over sixty people who had been too sick to sit up.⁴⁵ (1839)
- He cured the daughter of J. and Margaret Shamp of deafness.⁴⁶ (1840)
- He called down a storm upon a mob that had assembled to murder the Saints at Fishing River in Missouri. The mob fled.⁴⁷ (1834)
- He prophesied to Stephen A. Douglas, while having dinner with him, that Douglas would aspire to the Presidency, but that if he turned his back on the suffering of the Saints in the way that President Van Buren had done, he would "feel the weight of the hand of the almighty God" upon him.⁴⁸ This prophecy was first published in 1856. In 1857, Douglas openly slandered the Church and published lies about its members and leadership because it suited his political agenda. In arguably the greatest and most famous political upset in U.S. history, he ran for President in 1860, initially favored to win, and lost to Abraham Lincoln.

While Douglas received a respectable number of popular votes, in electoral votes, Douglas only carried his home state of Missouri.

- He prophesied that the day would come in which musket balls would fly around Willard Richards like hailstones, and that his friends would drop around him, but that he would emerge unscathed. This proved true on the day of the prophet's death.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it suffices to illustrate that Joseph Smith did, in fact, say and do many miraculous things.

Some critics do not doubt that Joseph Smith could heal the lame and diseased and cast out devils – but they claim that he did so by the power of Satan rather than by the power of God. Ironically, not having paid adequate attention to the Bible, they reproduce a classic exchange between Christ and His detractors in the New Testament:

And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.

And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan?

And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.⁴⁹

As Christ said, Satan does not cast out devils. Neither does he heal the sick – though he may pretend to. Those who say otherwise mimic the arguments of the Pharisees.

For the prophet's detractors, the next step after accusing Joseph Smith of working miracles by the power of the Devil is to accuse Joseph Smith of being a false prophet. Ignoring his prophecies that have come to pass, those who do so cite much of his language regarding the Second Coming of Christ, which he said was soon to occur. The prophet's detractors suggest that, since he said that the Second Coming would occur soon, it should have happened by now. However, if such detractors claim to believe in the Bible, they ought to remember that Christ Himself said that the Second Coming would occur "quickly,"⁵⁰ and that "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."⁵¹ Christ's prophecies of the Second Coming occurred much longer ago than Joseph Smith's. It would be a double standard to make excuses for Christ in this regard and not Joseph Smith, as their words were nearly identical.

Joseph Smith performed the works of a prophet, spoke the words of a prophet, lived the life of a prophet, and died the death of a prophet. His work was miraculous, his works were miraculous, his words were miraculous, and miracles will follow those who follow his message, as his message is the message of Christ.

8 – A PERFECT BIBLE

In Joseph Smith's letter to John Wentworth, he listed the Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Number Eight reads:

We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.⁵²

Many sectarian Christians read this passage and quickly respond: "The Bible is perfect!" The idea that Joseph Smith allowed for any possibility of imperfection in the Bible rankles many of them. These critics go on to say that, because Mormons "do not believe that God can give us a perfect Bible," Mormons do not believe in the all-powerful Christian God. However, many of these same critics do not believe that God can give us a perfect Church or a prophet to lead it. Additionally, supposing that the Bible is perfect, one must then ask: Which Bible is perfect? All Bibles? All translations? All versions? All editions? Two versions or editions of the same thing cannot both be perfect.

It is important to note that those who assert that the Bible is perfect often specifically denounce the validity of certain translations. For instance, a Baptist with his New International Version and a Jehovah's Witness with her New World Translation will each assert that the other's Bible is not accurate. Thus, Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses both "believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly," just like Latter-day Saints do.

Many Protestants will admit that the New World Translation and other "fringe" editions and translations of the Bible are illegitimate – including the Catholic publications of the Bible, with their "apocryphal" texts – but maintain that the "normal" translations of the Bible such as the New International Version and the King James Version are all perfect. However, such claims fail to account for the direct contradictions that exist between those translations. One such contradiction is evident in Philippians 2:5-6:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:
Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal
with God... (KJV)

...

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God
something to be grasped... (NIV)

The King James Version tells us that we, like Jesus Christ, were created in the form of God, and should therefore strive to be equal with God. The New International Version tells us that we, like Jesus Christ, should realize that equality with God is impossible. Both translations cannot be correct, as they are contradictory and mutually exclusive. Therefore, one cannot say that both the King James Version and the New International Version are perfect. Some will say that, while imperfections exist, the message is still perfect. However, the differences between these verses are not the product of mere grammatical ambiguity or clerical mistakes. Rather, the disparity here reveals a clear example of scripture being interpreted in two completely contradictory ways,

resulting in diametrically opposed representations of our nature, God's nature, and our relationship with God. One cannot claim that two voices saying fundamentally contradictory things together form a perfect message. The Protestant who owns both the King James Version and the New International Version, studying both for the sake of getting a broader grasp of Biblical doctrine, admits with his actions that he does not believe that a perfect Bible exists in the English language. If he did believe, he would read only the perfect translation and not waste time with any imperfect translations.

While most sectarians do not believe that God can give us a perfect Bible, Latter-day Saints believe that He has already done so. One of the tasks that the Lord gave Joseph Smith was to issue a corrected version of the Bible's text, which has come to be called the Inspired Version of the Bible, or the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Sectarian critics are angered at the idea that Joseph Smith would have the audacity to engage in such a work, saying that no one can correct the Bible. However, such individuals fail to see that the creators of the New International Version and other translations of the Bible have been doing just that for many years – admittedly without having been called by God to do so. (Those who assume that such scholars have actually been called by God to do so must explain how it is that various efforts all commissioned by God for this purpose manage to produce openly contradictory results.) Sectarians are so insulted by Joseph Smith's effort to correct the Bible's text but not by the efforts of the KJV and NIV translators because Joseph Smith claimed prophetic authority to correct scripture rather than scholarly prowess. However, this makes no sense at all, as a prophet naturally has the authority to correct the mistakes that uninspired scholars have placed into the Bible's text, while uninspired scholars who are not under the direction of a prophet only have the power to replace old mistakes with new mistakes and translate the Bible according to their own biases instead of someone else's. Therefore, instead of asserting that Joseph Smith must not have been a prophet because he had the audacity to correct the Bible, Christians should realize that correcting the Bible would be the natural thing for a prophet to do in Joseph Smith's position, as someone must fix the problems caused by scholars and translators, as well-meaning as those scholars and translators have been. The question, then, is not whether or not Joseph Smith had the audacity to correct the Bible, but whether or not he was truly a prophet.

A criticism that some level against the Joseph Smith Translation is that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not directly reference or study it: in English, we generally use the King James Version. However, we do this not because we lack trust or respect for the Joseph Smith Translation, but because we want to maintain dialog with others who believe in the Bible's testimony and because the majority of the King James Version is still sound. In the Bible editions that the Church publishes, corrections made by Joseph Smith may be found in footnotes and appendices.

For the sake of uniting the Christian world through divine authority and doctrinal purity, Joseph Smith produced inspired corrections of existing scripture. He also produced new scripture and inspired interpretation of scripture. Taken together, these products of his prophetic calling silence the pedants and fools, lead the lost, and heal the wounds inflicted by the ramblings of sophists.

As God's representative, Joseph Smith was responsible for denouncing all of the false doctrines that had arisen during the 1260-year period⁵³ in which the Church of Jesus Christ had not been present in this world. True to his calling, Joseph Smith immediately set about correcting that which had been altered, purifying that which had been corrupted, and restoring that which had been lost.

9 – DOCTRINAL PURITY

As God's select and chosen representative in the world, Joseph Smith had the responsibility to cast down the parapets of false doctrine and erect in their place a temple of truth. Some of the doctrines he clarified are as follows.

GOD'S NATURE

The first sectarian doctrine that Joseph Smith learned to be false was the idea, stemming from the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds, that God is an unintelligible, indefinable, immaterial being that is everything and nothing, everywhere and nowhere, loving all while having no feelings, and praying to himself quite passionately in the Garden of Gethsemane while being constantly all-aware. It says a lot that the word "trinity" does not appear anywhere in the Bible. This idea arose as a way of reconciling Christianity with the pantheism of the Greek and Roman philosophers, and those who act as if it has been the common belief of all Christians since the time of Christ fail to recognize the extensive evidence of fierce doctrinal debate leading up to – and causing – the composition of these two quite uninspired creeds.

It has been my experience that, while most Protestants and Catholics are brought up in an environment in which they are taught to worship the Holy Trinity, and though they are comfortable with using the term, the average lay members do not actually believe in Trinitarianism, whether they realize it or not. They believe that God the Father is one individual, Jesus Christ is another individual, and the Holy Spirit is yet another. They read Christ's heart-felt supplication to the Father in John 17, and they do not believe that it illustrates any kind of nonsensical schizophrenic self-worship. Neither do they see it as a mere symbolic narrative that never actually occurred. Rather, they see the plain evidence of an afflicted son speaking to a beloved father, and they know that scriptural statements regarding the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit⁵⁴ are meant to be figurative in the way that the ideal unity of believers that Christ mentions in His prayer is figurative:

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.⁵⁵

The purpose of true religion is to explain Divinity, piercing the veil that has been drawn between Heaven and Earth and laying bare the truths of eternity so that they may imbue and edify the human soul. Those religionists who insist that the Divine is absolutely incomprehensible and unapproachable rob religion of its fundamental efficacy, and they do so only to cover the fact that they do not understand the Divine. This inability to understand stems from an attempt to fit reality into a system of beliefs formed outside of reality. The religious philosophers of the world go into the cloister of their own preconceptions and prejudices to craft some great work of theology, and when God does not fit into the space they have made for Him, they tell us that God is incomprehensible so

that His characteristics can be bent and twisted to fit into whatever jagged hole their suppositions and contradictions have managed to leave open. All Christians should know that Trinitarianism is untrue because, with its ambiguity and advocacy of mystical ignorance, it lacks both the power and the substance that are characteristic of truth. It is unbecoming of a religious leader to claim to be privy to some hidden truth and then simply find some roundabout way of saying that the truth will always remain hidden. Charlatans hate specificity, and so they avoid it by dealing in obscure platitudes.

Even after the drafting of the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds and before the time of Joseph Smith, many Christians rejected the notions of Trinitarianism. One of the most notable of these nonconformists was John Milton, author of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Christian Doctrine*. The Jesus Christ of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* is quite overtly a being separate from the Father, and God the Father as described in *Christian Doctrine* is not an incomprehensible blob with a multiple personality disorder, but a real, recognizable being with thoughts and feelings.

While John Milton was a sagacious man, his opinion was still just that: an opinion. Even in light of the scriptural evidence that exists, the true nature of God is something that people can debate all day. Without an authoritative voice on the matter, the debate would rage on until Judgment Day. However, of all the issues of debate in the Christian world, none is more important than the true nature of God. This is not a triviality or an obscure doctrinal point: by saying that eternal life is knowing God,⁵⁶ Christ revealed the nature of God to be the most important of all matters of religious discussion. For this reason, God saw fit to put the issue to rest when he appeared to Joseph Smith for the first time in a grove of trees in 1820:

I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other – This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!⁵⁷

Joseph Smith saw and communed with two distinct beings – God the Father and Jesus Christ. At that moment, the debate over Trinitarianism ended. It is only that many have not yet realized the fact.

ORIGINAL SIN

In his letter to John Wentworth, Joseph Smith directly addressed the concept of original sin:

We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.⁵⁸

This doctrine is reiterated in the Book of Mormon.⁵⁹ It follows the simple logic that, while those born into this world inherit a fallen state brought about by the choices of Adam and Eve, we do not bear the actual guilt of anyone's sins but our own. The suffering that we experience in this world comes in part as a result of the fallen state to which we are subject due to our progenitors, but any suffering we receive in the next life is entirely up to us. Little children lack the understanding necessary to commit sin. A little child who dies without being baptized or hearing the Gospel will not be condemned. Those who say otherwise do not understand the nature of children or of God.

PREMORTAL EXISTENCE

We existed before we came into this world. Though few sects teach this piece of truth, I have found that many individual Christians believe in it – because they can feel it to be true. In 1804, William Wordsworth published his “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from My Youth.” This poetic piece is an illustration of his complete belief that he existed, and dwelt with God, before he came into this world.

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

Of course we existed before we were born! Anyone who looks upon a newborn with the least degree of clarity knows that this soul recently came from somewhere.

We were those sons of God who shouted for joy to see the world created.⁶⁰ We took active part in the war in Heaven,⁶¹ in which Lucifer rebelled against God and was cast out with those who followed him.⁶² Those who fell were our friends and kin, and we were devastated to see them go.

Those who face the suffering of this dreary world and doubt the existence or the beneficence of God must understand that they chose to come here and undergo this short, important period of trial. They did not do so out of ignorance or recklessness, but out of an understanding that they would suffer – and have the chance to learn and grow in a new and exciting manner. Having to choose between stasis and progression, we chose progression, and that is why we are here.

MORTALITY'S PURPOSE

I have had a number of Buddhists explain to me that the universe we know is essentially just one big accident trying to fix itself. They say that we came from an origin of unity and innocence, and that the only purpose of this life that we know is to facilitate its own termination – in which everything returns to that state of unity and innocence that existed before.

Largely due to a lack of understanding of the Fall, many Christians hold a similar view. However, Joseph Smith taught something different: This life is not simply an accident trying to fix itself, and this state of temptation and suffering has an actual purpose. Our mission is not merely to return to a previous state of innocence, but to grow and develop into something greater than we ever were before. God did not make a mistake by placing that fateful tree in the Garden of Eden: He had a plan. God intends to make something wonderful out of us, and that required us to undergo a stage of trial and refinement. This mortal life is the venue for that trial and refinement. God is neither vain nor irresponsible, and this state of existence that we know is no accident. God has a very real and decisive work to perform, and neither death nor universal entropy will stand in the way of it. While one of our important goals in life is to return to a state of innocence, we are also intended to strive for spiritual maturity – which required us to pass through this transitional state.

BAPTISM

The Christian world has been subject to centuries of intense debate regarding the doctrine of baptism. This debate has centered around four major aspects of the ordinance: its necessity, the manner by which it should be performed, the requirements one must meet in order to perform it, and the age at which it should be performed.

The argument that baptism is essential for salvation comes from a statement made by Christ: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."⁶³ However, despite the directness of this statement, a disbelief in the necessity of baptism was one of the driving forces behind the Protestant Reformation, as, until very recently, the Roman Catholic Church taught that baptism was absolutely essential for salvation. Even the Baptist faith, despite its name, teaches that baptism is unessential for salvation. The reason behind this dispute is the fact that, in many cases, it does not seem fair to make baptism an absolute requirement for salvation.

The revelations that Joseph Smith received from God show that the classical Catholic view of the absolute necessity of baptism and the view held by many Protestants that it is non-essential are both incorrect. The Restored Gospel contains a very clear doctrine of baptism:

- Everyone must be baptized in order to be saved, except for little children and those who have severe mental disabilities.
- Little children who die without baptism will not be condemned because, having no sin, they do not need baptism for the remission of sins.
- Baptism is intrinsically an ordinance that must be performed by immersion. The Bible shows that to be true in various places. The idea of sprinkling water came about so that priests could safely baptize babies – which they should not have been doing to begin with.
- Only one with the proper priesthood authority may baptize. Baptisms performed without priesthood authority have no efficacy.
- Those who live full lives without ever getting a chance to hear the true Gospel or get baptized may do both while they wait in the Spirit World, which is where the spirits of the deceased – righteous and wicked, believers and non-believers – congregate prior to Judgment Day.

Part of the true doctrine of baptism that Joseph Smith set forth was the doctrine of baptism for the dead. This is the practice of baptizing someone who is alive as a proxy for someone who has died, giving the deceased person the ability to accept (or reject) that ordinance as his or her own. Many think that this idea of baptism for the dead sounds crazy, but it does have Biblical validity,⁶⁴ and it is the only way by which to reconcile the obvious necessity of baptism as expressed in the New Testament with the existence of a just and merciful God. As Joseph Smith once said:

Will [our ancestors] be damned for not obeying the Gospel, when they never heard it? Certainly not. But they will possess the same privilege that we here enjoy, through the medium of the everlasting Priesthood, which not only administers on earth, but also in heaven, and the wise dispensations of the great Jehovah; hence those characters referred to by Isaiah will be visited by the Priesthood, and come out of their prison upon the same principle as those who were disobedient in the days of Noah were visited by our Savior...and had the Gospel preached to them by Him in prison; and in order that they

might fulfill all the requisitions of God, living friends were baptized for their dead friends, and thus fulfilled the requirement of God...⁶⁵

If God requires baptism of all sinners, He requires it of every sinner. If some sinners do not have equal access to that holy ordinance in this life, He will make the necessary provisions. The message Joseph Smith preached was the message of a just, merciful, rational, and resourceful God.

TEMPLES

As with prophecy and revelation, temples embody an essential aspect of biblical Christianity. Some sects today refer to their meetinghouses as “temples,” but as we see in the New Testament, a temple is very different from a synagogue or meetinghouse. While meetinghouses are where people go for weekly gatherings, the temple is a holy place where people go to be especially close to the Lord and perform ordinances that should not be performed elsewhere. While all well-meaning people are welcome in meetinghouses, temples are for those who have made covenants with the Lord.⁶⁶ Christ’s reverence for the temple can be seen in the fact that the only known instance in which He resorted to physical violence against anyone was when He drove the moneychangers out of the temple – twice.⁶⁷

Some argue that the time of temples ended with Christ’s crucifixion, in that the veil of the temple was rent.⁶⁸ However, they misinterpret the significance of this miraculous event. The rending of the veil was to signify the end of blood sacrifice, as the practice of blood sacrifice had been entirely for the purpose of symbolizing the sacrifice that Christ would make. Though that aspect of temple worship was no longer necessary, its discontinuance did not signify an end to temple worship itself in any way. This is evident in the fact that the Apostles continued to visit the temple in Jerusalem on a regular basis,⁶⁹ even after Christ had left.

Other common arguments are that the New Testament assertions that the body is a temple,⁷⁰ that God does not dwell in temples built with hands,⁷¹ and that there will be no temple in the New Jerusalem⁷² show that temples are actually not important, despite the numerous evidences to the contrary in both the Old and New Testaments. The first argument holds no water because the fact that the body is a temple does not mean that there are no other temples. This is evident in the fact that the human body was still a temple even during the Old Testament times in which the Lord commanded His people to build temples. The second argument holds no water because, again, that was actually something that the Lord said during Old Testament times – when He had specifically commanded His people to build temples. No, God does not actually “live” in the temple, as the entire universe is His. But we do not build temples so that God can be close to us: we build temples so that we can be close to God. The third argument ignores the fact that this passage is talking about the end of times, when the righteous shall dwell with God and when the Earth shall be celestialized. The fact that the holy city has no temple is mentioned in Revelation because it is *strange* – because one would normally expect a holy city to have a temple in it. However, since the city described is one that does not sit in a fallen world with a fallen people inhabiting it, it does not need a temple to stand as a bastion of God’s Kingdom there. So long as the Earth has not been turned into a sea of glass,⁷³ God will still require His people to construct embassies of Heaven in this fallen world.

One of the reasons that the sectarians have abandoned temple worship is because, even if they had a temple, they would not know what to do there. This is because most of the aspects of temple worship were lost in the Apostasy. For instance, the Community of Christ has a building in

Independence, Missouri that it says is a “temple,” but the only substantial difference between that building and a normal meetinghouse is size. However, through revelation, Joseph Smith received detailed instructions regarding the ordinances that the Lord’s people are to perform in temples. Such ordinances include sealings and temple marriages to establish eternal families, proxy baptisms to extend the blessings of the Atonement to those who did not hear the Gospel in this life, and endowment ceremonies to extend important doctrines and covenants regarding exaltation to the faithful members of the Church.

MAN’S DIVINE NATURE

Of all the ways in which Joseph Smith upset the status quo, perhaps the most controversial can be seen in his teachings regarding our divine nature and potential. He broke with virtually every other Christian denomination of the day by teaching that men and women can become like God.

Some say that such a teaching can come only from megalomania. However, it is the logical conclusion that we should reach from what God has taught us in scripture – including what we find in the Bible.

God is our Father in Heaven. He created us in His image. Most Christians believe that we are the children of God – that, though the animals of the world have thoughts and feelings, and though they were created by God as well, they are mere creations, while we are His children. They believe this because this is what the Bible teaches. However, as soon as one begins to make the logical conclusions about this assertion of divine parentage, many believers try to back out of that assertion, suggesting that our logical conclusions stemming from it are blasphemous. But if we are not the same species of being as God, in what way are we His children? In what way are we higher than the animals? The fact that God is our father shows that the difference between us and Him is a difference of degree rather than kind. Thus, if we follow His guidance and continue on the correct path of righteousness and growth, being His very offspring fashioned in His very image, the natural thing would be for us to become like Him. Only rebellion on our part or tyranny on God’s part would bar such progression.

Jesus Christ's purpose for coming into the mortal world and atoning for the sins of Man was to accomplish this goal of making us like God. As He said to John:

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.⁷⁴

And again, as He said to the Father:

And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.⁷⁵

Is it blasphemous to assume that we can inherit the Father's glory and wisdom? Is it blasphemous to think that our relationships with each other can ever approach the perfection of the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son? If so, Jesus Christ is guilty of blasphemy.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.⁷⁶

Some say that this verse is meant to be read as a commandment that applies to us in this life rather than the next, and that the perfection of which the Lord speaks is simply the status of being a devout Christian. However, we should not ignore the second part of the verse: "...even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This goes far beyond the commonly understood fundamentals of Christian ethics. I know that I have never met a mortal man who was perfect like God. Though this commandment should definitely influence decisions we must make in this life, it clearly does not apply exclusively to this life, as it is utterly impossible for any man to even come close to fulfilling such expectations while in mortality. If such a commandment were meant to apply to this life alone, it would be utterly ludicrous – and Christ's commandments are never ludicrous, though they are often difficult. Christ told His followers to become like God because He intended for them to do so.

Those who assume that the situation of heavenly glory that Christ intends for us to inherit is nothing more than a cloud-filled lounge scene with a lot of harp-strumming should consider this verse:

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart
of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.⁷⁷

The glory that we are meant to inherit surpasses our understanding. So no, we will not simply be plucking harps and singing hymns forever. God is not trite: He has an actual purpose in mind for us, and it entails an eternity of continuing progression – and the joy that comes with it. As life is characterized by growth, it is only rational to believe that eternal life is characterized by eternal growth, and not by stasis.

Despite these verses, critics continue to take issue with such an audacious view of human purpose and potential on the grounds of various arguments:

**"GOD WOULD NEVER LET US BECOME LIKE HIM BECAUSE THAT WOULD GIVE US THE
POWER TO OVERTHROW HIM."**

We are not talking about the pantheon of Greek classicism here, in which power and virtue are two separate things. In the English language, "virtue" and "power" used to be synonymous – and I contend that they still should be. Drawing near to God makes us increasingly like God, both in greatness and in goodness. As we gain the knowledge and power of God, will we not also gain His virtue? And, gaining His virtue, will we not be filled with the love that embodies it? Being filled with divine love and virtue, why would we ever want to stage a rebellion against our dear Father? By attempting to overthrow God, like Lucifer, we would lose the very virtue that empowers us.

God is not a tyrant. He does not glory in His children's subjugation, but in their exaltation. Since His glory is based on His perfection rather than on our deficiencies, He is not threatened by our continuing progression.

"THE DESIRE TO BECOME LIKE GOD IS WHAT CAUSED LUCIFER TO FALL."

Lucifer's misdeed was not a desire to become like God. Virtually all sin of commission results from a desire for something good coupled with an unwillingness to follow the steps that are allowable and necessary for attaining it. Lucifer's desire to progress was good, but he did not want to follow the

path prescribed by the Father. Instead, he wanted to take an easier path, even though he knew it meant rebellion. Lucifer's sin was a rebellion against God's prescribed methods and a desire to steal God's glory. We, on the other hand, seek to follow the path that God has laid out for us and obtain the blessings that He has promised us. (Such as the ability to sit in His throne, as noted previously.)

“I HAVE NO DESIRE TO BECOME LIKE GOD.”

Then you will not.

“GOD WOULD NOT HAVE CREATED US FOR SUCH A PURPOSE.”

For what purpose did God create us? To say that God does anything without purpose or intent is to suggest that God is imperfect, as carelessness and lack of foresight are both imperfections. So the question remains: Why does a perfect God need to create lower beings? Most Christians say that He created us so that He would be glorified, but again, if He already has all glory, how is it that He gains glory through our existence?

The truth is that, though all glory that exists belongs to God, the total measure of all glory continues to increase as God continues to create and as His creations continue to progress. That eternal progression on our part – that ongoing journey in which we draw closer to Him – glorifies Him much more than our ignorance or subjugation ever could. If we truly stand at the focal point of Creation – as the sacrifice of Jesus Christ suggests – why would our purpose be anything less than to become like God? What lower purpose would be so worthy of God's attention? Some say that this idea is blasphemous, but is it not blasphemous to believe that God is an underachiever and unwilling to live up to His potential? What greater cause could God possibly have than to create beings like Himself? Why would He seek to accomplish anything less than that which is greatest?

“WE WILL NEVER UNDERSTAND GOD'S PURPOSE FOR US UNTIL WE ARE WITH HIM.”

This response just stems from intellectual cowardice. Do not pretend that the answer to a question can never be known when the answer is actually quite obvious and rational. Those who do so in this case are only motivated by a need to cling to prejudices and preconceptions. The very existence of the Bible is proof that God quite earnestly wants us to understand His purpose for us – now.

“BUT IT'S RIDICULOUS!”

“...I don't believe in this idea of all these ascended Mormon 'Gods' and 'Goddesses' ruling over the various worlds of this universe like a bunch of feudal lords and ladies.”

Well, neither do I. Some people read about our belief regarding the divine nature of humanity and get a mental picture of some sort of celestial feudalism, in which the Father is the God of the whole universe and in which we are lesser gods and goddesses who rule over specific planets. (At which point a plot straight from a science fiction novel ensues, in which various power-hungry semi-gods connive and compete for primacy.) There is no doctrinal validity to this image, however, and those who propagate it are being disingenuous and simplistic. The glory that God has in store for us will in no way resemble something written by Frank Herbert. (As much as I like Frank Herbert.)

“WE WILL NEVER BE LIKE GOD BECAUSE WE HAVE SINNED.”

This argument directly contradicts the very core of all Christian belief. Christ washes all sin away as if it never existed; “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”⁷⁸ If you say you believe it, then believe it.

God, being an all-loving Father, wants us to grow and receive all that He has. This fact lies at the very core of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and none can deny it.

Just think about it for a moment. You are dwelling in the very presence of God, under His direct tutelage, and you have all eternity to learn and grow. Will you not become like God at some point? That would be the natural outcome of such a situation. The only way it would produce a different result would be if God were to forcibly hold you back from progression – which would be a very ungodly thing to do.

No, God does not inhibit our edification: He facilitates it. If you inherit anything less than all God has, it will be because you were unwilling to receive His gifts, and not because He was unwilling to give them to you.

To close, if the Bible and plain reason are not enough for you, I give you C. S. Lewis:

[God] said (in the Bible) that we were “gods” and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him – for we can prevent Him, if we choose – He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine.⁷⁹

And again:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible Gods and Goddesses. To remember that the dullest, and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship.⁸⁰

God wants us to be like Him. It is only logical that the entire work of creation was set in motion for that purpose. To attach a lesser purpose to God's highest creation would be to insult and abase God. God wants us to become like Him. Do we want what God wants for us?

UNIFICATION

Disunity and Christianity are irreconcilable, and there is no unity in faith and purpose without unity in doctrine and organization. Armed with the authority to issue the correct interpretation of the Bible, restore doctrines lost in the Apostasy, and bring forth new scripture, Joseph Smith has acted as the Lord's instrument in ending a number of seemingly endless doctrinal debates and bringing Christ's true Gospel back into the world. So long as Christianity is divided and filled with false doctrines, it is weak. Only by uniting under a single banner – that held by a prophet of God – can the Christians of the world ensure the correct observance and continuity of their religion and erect a sufficiently powerful defense against the forces of evil that assail it.

10 – A PROPHET LIKE MOSES

When I was riding a bicycle around on unmarked roads through Taiwanese rice fields, I met a Filipina named Ami who spoke nearly flawless English. This was good because, while I spoke Chinese, I did not speak Tagalog. She was employed in the care of an elderly Taiwanese woman who needed constant attention. Seeing that she did not need a basic explanation of God and Jesus Christ as most of the Buddhists and Daoists of Taiwan did, I reached into my bag and pulled out a picture of Gordon B. Hinckley, who was the man holding the same position as Joseph Smith at that time.

“You see this man?” I asked. “This man is a prophet just like Moses, and he is alive today.”

“Really?” she said, and her eyes got huge. “Like Moses?”

“That’s right,” I responded. “Now, if there’s a prophet alive today like Moses, don’t you think that would be something really important to know?”

“Yes!” she said. “Of course!”

“Ami, are you willing to go pray to God and ask Him if this man is a true prophet?”

“Yes, I’ll ask God,” she said.

A week later, I saw Ami again.

“I prayed about that man you told me about,” she told me. “I know he is a prophet of God. I want to join your church.”

That is the only way by which anyone can truly know whether or not someone is a prophet of God: by asking God. Argumentation and logic can only take you so far. As the Chinese philosophers have said, all human reason, meditation, and conjecture come to a halt before a flaming gate, beyond which only Divinity can lead us. However, all too often, humanity approaches such questions with nothing but a desire to find a reason not to believe. We do this out of a realization of what belief would demand of us. Thus, instead of going to the source of all truth for our answers, we accept the first seemingly viable arguments we come across as absolute truth and tell ourselves that we do not need to ask God about something so obvious.

Sectarian critics point to various aspects of Joseph Smith’s character and life as “incontrovertible proof” that he could not have possibly been a prophet. Some of these claims leveled against the man are absolutely untrue, while others, though true, are either misconstrued or irrelevant. Like the prophets of the Bible, Joseph Smith was great, but not perfect. Sectarians who criticize Joseph Smith are willing to make allowances for the imperfections seen in the prophets of the Bible but completely unwilling to extend the same allowances to Joseph Smith, demanding that he meet the standard of Christ Himself rather than the standard of a prophet.

There is not a single prophet of the Bible who had a stronger claim to that title than Joseph Smith did. When I say that Joseph Smith was a prophet like Moses, it is only because that is the honest truth. Those who are quick to criticize Joseph Smith should take a moment to consider whether or not any arguments they make could be leveled against the prophets of the Bible. For instance, most of the common arguments that people use against Joseph Smith only require minor adjustments to be used against Moses:

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Joseph Smith was a Freemason. Many of the temple rites and other doctrines that came through him are very similar to Masonic rites and beliefs, so he obviously did not receive them through revelation.

Moses was raised in Egypt by Egyptian nobles, so he was obviously subject to Egyptian paganism. Many of the doctrines he advocated were very similar to Egyptian beliefs, so he obviously did not receive them through revelation. (The word "Amen" is proof of this; it originated from the worship of the Egyptian god Amon.)

Joseph Smith claimed to have powers given to him through a set of objects called the Urim and Thummim.

Moses claimed to have powers given to him through a staff.⁸¹ (And Aaron used the Urim and Thummim.⁸²)

Joseph Smith was killed by a mob, so he must have been a fallen prophet.

Moses was not allowed to go into the Promised Land, so he must have been a fallen prophet.

Joseph Smith claimed to have a vision in which he saw God appear to him in a grove of trees, but he must have just had a seizure and hallucinated.

Moses claimed to have a vision in which he saw a burning bush and heard God talking out of it. He must have been hallucinating due to dehydration.

Joseph Smith was a polygamist, so he must not have been a prophet.

Moses was a polygamist,⁸³ so he must not have been a prophet.

Joseph Smith pronounced death and destruction upon his enemies, so he must not have been a prophet.

Moses pronounced death and destruction upon his enemies, so he must not have been a prophet.

Brigham Young said we should look upon Joseph Smith as a God, and that is blasphemous.

Moses said that he would be God to Aaron,⁸⁴ and that is blasphemous.

Many of the eleven witnesses of the Book of Mormon were Joseph Smith's own family. Clearly, he practiced nepotism and could not trust many people outside of his family to help him in his farce.

Of all the people of Israel, Moses appointed his brother and sister to be leaders under him. Clearly, he practiced nepotism and could not trust many people outside of his family to help him in his farce.

Joseph Smith produced a work of scripture (The Book of Mormon) that condemns polygamy – but then he went and practiced polygamy.

Moses gave the Israelites a commandment that they should have no graven images of anything in heaven or even of beasts of the earth⁸⁵ – but then he crafted a brass serpent and told people dying of snakebite that they had to believe in it in order to be saved.⁸⁶

Joseph Smith claimed that God is anthropomorphic, and that he even talked to God face-to-face as one man talks to another.

Moses claimed that God was anthropomorphic, and that he even talked to God face-to-face as one man talks to another.⁸⁷

Joseph Smith claimed that his people were the most righteous in the world. That is arrogant.

Moses claimed that his people were the Lord's chosen people - thus suggesting that others were not. That is arrogant.

Joseph Smith said that the church he established would conquer the world with its "armies."^a

Moses made it clear that the Israelites would conquer Canaan and kill everyone there - and the man he appointed as his successor led them to do just that.

Joseph Smith gave the priesthood to a black man, but he and those who came after him did not give the priesthood to black men in general until 1978.

Moses and those who came after him did not allow anyone to have the priesthood but the Levites, but it is clear that non-Israelites such as Jethro and Baalim held it.

Joseph Smith had the audacity to think that anyone who rejected his message was rejecting God.

Moses had the audacity to think that anyone who rejected his message was rejecting God.

*

Those who believe in the prophetic calling of Moses will read these arguments leveled against him and immediately contest that they are unfair, manipulative, oversimplified, and clearly rooted in bias. And they would be right. However, it puzzles me how often such people quickly accept parallel arguments leveled against Joseph Smith at face value, without giving the matter any second thought. The easy acceptance of Moses' prophetic calling and simultaneous rejection of Joseph Smith's prophetic calling is a matter of preconception and prejudice rather than reason. Or, in the words of Stephen Colbert:

Mormons believe Joseph Smith received golden plates from an angel on a hill when everybody knows that Moses got stone tablets from a burning bush on a mountain.

Technically, there was no burning bush present when Moses received the stone tablets. However, Mr. Colbert is right to point out that nothing about Joseph Smith's ministry was any less believable than the ministry of Moses. The issue here is just that many people can only bring themselves to believe in a prophet after time has obscured his message and diluted his humanity.

^a (He was actually just talking about missionaries, for whom militaristic metaphors are common.)

Like Moses, Joseph Smith received revelation, produced scripture, commanded the elements, and led the people of the Lord with divine authority. Like Moses, Joseph Smith had flaws. Like Moses, Joseph Smith was doubted and ridiculed. Like Moses, Joseph Smith was what he was, regardless of what people think.

11 – ALTERNATIVES

I have already shown that it is ridiculous and blasphemous to think that God is pleased or apathetic about the present state of Christian sectarianism. It makes sense that God would send someone to restore Christ's Church to the world. However, the question remains regarding whether or not Joseph Smith is the instrument of that restoration.

Those Christians who challenge Joseph Smith's claim to prophetic authority cannot stop there. As they cannot give any reason for which God would not send a prophet to do what Joseph Smith claimed to do, they must provide the name of someone else who could have acted as such an instrument of restoration.

We cannot look toward the leadership of "mainstream" Christianity to find such a figure. Since the great personalities of Protestantism did not even claim to be prophets, we can rule out Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Roger Williams, and the like. The Pope also admits that he is no prophet. If we are looking for a Christian prophet in the post-New Testament world, then, this leaves us with an interesting collection of characters to consider.

CANDIDATES

MARGARET MACDONALD (1815-1840)

In 1830, this teenage girl had a dream of the end of days that led to the popularization of the doctrine of the Rapture, which was an innovative interpretation of the Bible at that time. This was essentially the extent of her visionary leadership, however.

BILLY MEIER (1937-)

A Swiss man claiming to be a prophet, Billy Meier has made a number of predictions about future events, some of which have been moderately accurate, while others have turned out to be completely inaccurate. While Meier does not commonly make claims that he has any communication with God, Jesus Christ, or angels, he does claim to have been in direct contact with extraterrestrials a number of times. Meier has said little about Jesus Christ or the unification or purification of Christianity.

HELENA BLAVATSKY (1831-1891)

In 1888, Helena Blavatsky published *The Secret Doctrine, the Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*. This publication became the core text of the Theosophy movement. It discusses the origin, purposes, and lost histories of humanity as revealed to her by beings called "mahatmas." Again, Blavatsky's teachings have little to do with Jesus Christ or the Bible.

VERNON WAYNE HOWELL (1959-1993)

Also known as David Koresh, Howell led a sect called the Branch Davidians, constructing a compound near Waco, Texas and stockpiling weapons in preparation for the end of days. Illegal

activities on the group's part led to a standoff with the FBI, finally resulting in violence, fire, and the death of Howell and a number of others. Howell made various ambiguous statements seeming to suggest that he was Jesus Christ.

SUN MYUNG MOON (1920-2012)

Unlike others on this list, Moon stated it as his direct purpose to unify the Christian sects of the world. This mission can be seen in the name of his multi-million-member organization: the Unification Church. Moon claimed that he embodied the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and that he was here to perform tasks left unfinished by Christ. Moon taught that all people, good and evil, will be saved. As he died in 2012, the Second Coming was apparently much less climactic than most of us would have hoped or expected, and many good and evil people seem to still be in this world, living their lives, completely unaffected by the Second Coming. Should we expect a Third Coming?

NOSTRADAMUS (1503-1566)

Michel de Nostredame is the world-famous author of various mystical predictions often described as prophecies. He first started publishing these works in 1555, enriching himself on the sale of these texts. Intrinsically mystical and obscure, his writings are often very difficult to understand, and therefore can be easily applied to numerous situations. While his predictions often use Christian themes and images, Nostradamus did not make any identifiable attempt to correct false doctrines or unify the followers of Christ under a single banner. He left no organization or tangible legacy in his wake.

EDGAR CAYCE (1877-1945)

American psychic Edgar Cayce was a lifelong member of the Disciples of Christ. Despite his religious affiliation, he taught a number of doctrines contrary to common interpretations of Biblical doctrine, such as reincarnation – even teaching that Christ has been reincarnated a number of times. Often referred to as a prophet, Cayce published visions that he received while in psychic trances. These visions dealt with issues of past and future, some of them even giving details about the lost continent of Atlantis. Cayce did not attribute any of his clairvoyance to direct communication with God or angels, but to psychic powers and an understanding of the supernatural. Cayce made no known attempt to present himself as one with the authority to represent God as the prophets of the Bible did, and he made no attempt to unify Christianity.

LAFAYETTE RON HUBBARD (1911-1986)

Originally becoming famous as a science fiction writer, Hubbard gradually constructed a religion called Scientology. This religion has no direct relation with God or Jesus Christ. While its doctrines address many of the same non-scientific issues that many other religions address, these doctrines do not come as a result of revelation from Deity, but as a result of “research.” I will not dwell on the “crazy” doctrines of Scientology as many others do, but I will point out that this is a religion that revolves around money. Atheists may say that all religions equally revolve around money, but this is not true. While the Judeo-Christian tradition requires tithes⁸⁸ from the faithful, Scientology is a striated organization that requires flat fees in order to go up to the next level. A faithful Latter-day Saint with zero income pays a tithing of zero (as ten percent of zero is zero) and maintains full access

to all doctrines, teachings, and ordinances of the Church, but a Scientologist cannot gain all that Scientology has to offer without spending a huge sum of money. Thus, the poor cannot benefit from Scientology's teachings. Scientologist proselyting efforts are even set up on a commission model, which is why various countries recognize the Church of Scientology as a profit-seeking entity.

ANN LEE (1736-1784)

Ann Lee founded the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, also known as the Shakers. She did so through claims of various revelations from God. Although she did not claim to be Christ, some Shakers did start to view her as a female Christ later on. In addition to being a strong teacher of gender equality, Lee is memorable for her assertion that dance can be used as a form of Christian worship and that all sexual relations – even between husband and wife – are sin. This celibacy doctrine is one of the factors that has led to a near total disappearance of the faith.

CLIVE STAPLES LEWIS (1898-1963)

C. S. Lewis wrote the beloved children's fantasy series *The Chronicles of Narnia*. These and other writings, such as *The Screwtape Letters*, *Mere Christianity*, *The Great Divorce*, *Till We Have Faces*, and *Surprised by Joy* have had a very heavy influence on the modern Christian world, eliciting copious quotations from the pulpits of virtually every Christian denomination – including my own. While a few of Lewis's philosophies clash with the teachings of the Restored Gospel – particularly his view of the Fall – most of them are quite in line with what Joseph Smith taught. Some may view the ubiquity of Lewis's writings as a sign that he was sent to unify Christianity – and that he has actually accomplished that task to some extent. However, we must remember that Lewis did not even claim to have any sort of divine authority from God: his interpretations of scripture were his interpretations, and they did not aspire to be anything more. If he had seen a burning bush at any point, I am sure he would have mentioned it.

JOEL OSTEEN (1963-)

At the time of the writing of this book, Joel Osteen is a pastor of the Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. His church currently sports the highest weekly attendance of any church in the United States. Osteen fans can see him on television all around the world and read his teachings in a number of books. While he has Baptist roots, he no longer identifies himself as a Baptist. This schism can be seen in his hesitancy to talk about sin and in his heretical opinion that "Mormons" are, in fact, Christians. Osteen's sermons are famously non-confrontational, and he has a strange tendency of not quoting scripture. Some critics accuse him of being a proponent of prosperity theology, but they ought to acknowledge the extent to which he stands personally as supporting evidence for such ideals. While Osteen may advocate a unified Christianity, he has not identified himself as God's chosen instrument for any such unification. Any claim Osteen might make to divine authority would most likely be an ambiguous and diplomatic one, carefully worded such that it in no way marginalizes those who teach fundamentally different doctrines.

MUHAMMAD (570-632)

Muhammad, founder of Islam, arose in a time when the society of Arabia was mostly pagan, with some influences from Jewish and Christian traditions. Presenting himself as a prophet and relating

various experiences involving heavenly beings, Muhammad taught the Arabs that there was only one God and that He expected the people of the world to live pure and righteous lives. Muslims see Islam as something that arose as a continuation and fulfillment of Christianity in the way that Christianity had arisen as a continuation and fulfillment of Judaism centuries before. While Muslims believe that God has sent many prophets to many countries in many ages, they believe that Muhammad was the “seal,” or end, of those prophets. Muhammad often spoke of the miracles worked by other prophets, but he did not claim to be a miracle worker himself. Muhammad taught of Jesus, but the Jesus of Islam was merely a prophet like Abraham or Moses – not the Son of God or a soteriological savior.

BÁB (1819-1850)

Born Siyyid 'Alí Muḥammad Shírází, this religious leader arose claiming to be the Mahdi of Islamic teaching, a prophet-like figure who is supposed to come alongside Jesus near the end of times and rid the world of evil. Báb's efforts led to the founding of Bábism, which effectually broke from Islam and established itself as a separate tradition. The death of Báb and heavy persecution caused the religion to dwindle and nearly disappear, but it eventually led into the formation of the Bahá'í Faith.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH (1817-1892)

Building on Báb's teaching, Bahá'u'lláh was a Persian who claimed to be the fulfillment of Bábism as well as various other faiths. He taught that Buddha, Abraham, Jesus, and Muhammad were all manifestations of God, and that he and Báb were as well. His teachings led to the formation of the Bahá'í Faith, which today has millions of followers. Making arguments similar to arguments that I make in this book, the Bahá'í Faith asserts that humanity needs progressive revelation. However, Bahá'í believers do not expect another manifestation of God to occur and administer such revelation for another millennium. In the interim, they say, no new prophets will arise. Thus, in effect, they have become like the majority of Christians in denying continuing revelation in our time.

LU ZHONGYI (1849-1925)

Lu Zhongyi was a Chinese man who claimed to receive various revelations from God. He founded a religion that has come to be known as Yìguàn Dào (“The True Way”, “The Pervasive Way”). Gaining in popularity in Japanese-occupied China during the World War Two era, this new religion incorporated many teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism with various Christian and Islamic concepts of a single all-powerful God and an impending apocalypse. While the religion was nearly eradicated in mainland China during the post-war era of Communist rule, it continues to thrive in Taiwan and other places throughout the world. There is not currently any clear sense of prophetic or revelatory leadership in the movement.

JAMES WARREN JONES (1931-1978)

Jim Jones was the founder of the Communist, pseudo-Protestant religious group The People's Temple. He claimed to be the reincarnation of Jesus, Akhenaten, Buddha, Vladimir Lenin, and M. J. Divine. (Strangely, Divine was actually still alive when Jones was born.) Driving his movement with powerful rhetoric and “faith healings,” Jones saw significant success in making converts to his sect throughout California. He later relocated his following to Guyana. There, the People's Temple

faithful assassinated U.S. Congressman Leo Ryan when he came to meet with Jones. Jones later ordered his people to commit suicide, resulting in over nine hundred deaths.

CHARLES TAZE RUSSELL (1852-1916)

An incredibly successful publisher of pamphlets, Charles Taze Russell was one of the most widely recognized – and most controversial – religious leaders of his time. One distinct aspect of Russell’s teachings was the idea that the Second Coming had already occurred – in secret – in the year 1874. He also predicted that the Jews of the world would return to their homeland and establish an independent nation there by the year 1910. This turned out to not be very far from the truth, as the Zionist movement that eventually led to the foundation of Israel was up and running by that point. Russell’s teachings heavily influenced the formations of various movements and groups, most notably the Jehovah’s Witnesses. However, Russell once admitted in court that he had never been ordained to any priesthood office.

FRANCIS OF ASSISI (1181-1226)

A truly devout believer in Jesus Christ, Francis of Assisi rejected the gaudy opulence common to the Catholic clergy of his day and adopted an austere and charitable lifestyle. He also founded the Franciscan order of friars who adopted a similar lifestyle. He is remembered for his bold and respectful proselyting in the midst of religious wars and for his love of animals and nature. While he rejected certain aspects of common Catholic practice, he did not seek to fundamentally reform the Roman Catholic Church or found any new organization to replace it. He did not consider himself to be a prophet. It would not have made sense for him to do so, as he looked upon the Pope as a superior.

NO COMPARISON

To be considered as an alternative to Joseph Smith in laying claim to the prophetic mantle, an individual must do the following:

- Claim to receive visions and revelations from Divinity.
- Claim to have received some sort of authority from Divinity.
- Claim to have the power and authority to restore lost truths.
- Preach of Christ as the Son of God.
- NOT claim to be Christ.
- Work miracles – or at least preach that they are still possible.
- Establish a continuing legacy of prophetic leadership and revelation.

Of course, simply meeting all of these requirements does not automatically make one a prophet called of God. For instance, one can certainly lie about one’s claim to divine authority. However, divine authority is a necessity for a prophet, so if someone does not even make that claim, it is clear that he or she is not a prophet. However, despite the limitations of this list of qualifications, it is meaningful to point out that there is not a solitary person who can even be considered as an alternative to Joseph Smith. I challenge anyone to show me another historical or public figure of any recognizable repute since the time of John the Revelator who meets all of these qualifications as Joseph Smith does. I do not believe that such a figure exists.

12 – BIBLICAL PROPHECIES OF THE RESTORATION

Even when Christians understand and appreciate the argument that God would not simply stop sending prophets and that Joseph Smith stands as the strongest candidate to lay claim to that title, this understanding is often not enough. Having had a sense of the importance of the Biblical account inculcated in them, and knowing, for instance, that Moses prophesied of Christ and that John prophesied of two prophets who would go to Jerusalem near the end of times, Christians may look for a sign in the Bible that Joseph Smith's calling as the Lord's instrument in restoring His Church to the world was planned long before he was even born, as we claim. While we do not feel that Joseph Smith's validity as a prophet hinges upon the question of whether or not the Bible speaks of him, we cannot ignore the fact that Biblical evidence of his prophetic calling does, in fact, exist. As many more qualified Latter-day Saints have written extensively about the full measure of such scriptural references, I do not intend to multiply their efforts here. However, I would like to address a particular instance of such evidence that is often overlooked and very meaningful to me.

THE ALLEGORY OF RUTH

As with many accounts given in the Bible, the Book of Ruth is a relation of actual events, but not solely that: the story that we read, while depicting the lives and actions of real people, is also intended to stand as an allegory of even greater things. I submit to the world that the Book of Ruth as written is a prophecy of the Great Apostasy and the Restoration of the Gospel in modern times.

We can see this inner meaning for the story when we connect various images to symbols that are commonly used throughout the Bible. First and foremost, the account begins with the mention of a famine.⁸⁹ This literal famine is a parallel to the words of the prophet Amos:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord:

And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.

In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst.⁹⁰

A less direct reference to this time of spiritual famine and darkness can be seen in the words of Isaiah:

For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.⁹¹

The famine that sent Elimelech and his family into foreign lands in search of sustenance is symbolic of the famine "of hearing the words of the Lord" that we call the Great Apostasy or the Dark Ages: just as Elimelech's family went abroad seeking reprieve but did not find it, many people between the times of the original Twelve Apostles and Joseph Smith searched anxiously for the Word of God, but did not find it. Even for the fortunate few who had the Bible, there was no prophetic leadership

to issue authoritative interpretation, resulting in false doctrines and sectarian schisms, strife, and confusion.

Either because of the famine or because of some other issue, Elimelech, the patriarch of the family, dies – as do his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. This leaves the Jew Naomi and her Gentile daughters-in-law Orpah and Ruth without any male figure in the family, and without any posterity.⁹² To understand the allegorical meaning of this, we must note that the Church – or the Lord’s people – is often depicted as a woman, with the Lord or His prophet depicted as that woman’s husband. The examples of this metaphor in the Bible are extensive. Here is one:

For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee:
and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God
rejoice over thee.⁹³

And again:

Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto
you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will
bring you to Zion:

And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed
you with knowledge and understanding.⁹⁴

And another (even though the infidelity aspect does not apply to the Naomi/Ruth story):

Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have
ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord.⁹⁵

The deaths of Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion are therefore symbolic of the loss of priesthood authority and prophetic leadership among the Lord’s people, seen in the apostasy of the Church coinciding with the deaths of the Apostles. Up until modern times, in most cultures, men were seen as providers and protectors of the family. When a woman’s husband died, she would attach herself to a son, a brother, a brother-in-law, etc. If she had no such male provider, she was truly destitute – as was the case for Naomi and Ruth.

When Christ preached the Gospel in New Testament times, He preached only to the Jews. This was not because Christ did not want Gentiles to hear the Gospel; it was only because it was necessary to give the Jews full opportunity to receive the Gospel first. The Apostles continued with this practice until Peter had a vision in which he was commanded to begin preaching to the Gentiles.⁹⁶ This is another parallel to Elimelech’s family, as his wife is Jewish, while his sons’ wives are Gentiles. In this way, their story is set up as a prophetic symbol of the early Christian Church, with the Jews being the first generation of the Lord’s people, followed by a generation of Gentiles being brought into the arms of the Lord’s people through their faith in Christ. The deaths of Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion – probably due to the famine – are therefore symbolic of the deaths of Christ and the Apostles due to the people’s rejection of the Gospel.

Destitute and grieving, Naomi apparently hears that there is sustenance in her native land of Judah. As she decides to go back, both Ruth and Orpah express a desire to go with her. Orpah, however, ended up not doing so. As the Bible relates:

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.

And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.⁹⁷

This passage highlights an important undercurrent in the narrative: the intent to seek out the Lord. While Naomi and Ruth go seeking the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Orpah returns “unto her gods”. In this way, Ruth represents those spiritually forlorn Gentiles who, like Roger Williams and others, decided to continue earnestly seeking the Lord. Orpah, on the other hand, represents those believers who, though not being overtly rebellious to God, have allowed themselves to be led astray by false teachings without continuing to earnestly seek the Lord and His prophetic counsel.

The return of Ruth and Naomi to Judah is symbolic of the turning of the faithful to the Bible – the “stick of Judah”⁹⁸ – for guidance. While they have no direct prophetic guidance, they do have these words of the ancient prophets, and they will take whatever they can get to survive spiritually. When Ruth and Naomi return to the land of Judah, they decide to glean the fields of Boaz, who is “a kinsman of her husband’s, a mighty man of wealth”.⁹⁹ This meant that they would go to Boaz’s fields after they had been harvested and pick up anything left behind. However, discovering who Ruth is, Boaz quickly favors her and instructs his servants to take care of her.

Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?¹⁰⁰

Ruth is favored by Boaz – who represents Christ – and is thereby welcomed among the people of Israel. Similarly, as explained in Chapter 3 of Galatians and elsewhere, Gentiles are brought into the Abrahamic Covenant by their allegiance to Christ.

Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not:

And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.¹⁰¹

Continuing with the metaphor of food as spiritual truth, this command that Boaz gives to his servants is a symbol of God continuing to trickle truth down to the people of the world even during the Great Apostasy. While there was no revelation, there was inspiration, and great minds were able, by the grace of God, to relate marvelous truths to the people of the world to the extent at which they were capable of receiving it. Such minds include the great artists, statesmen, philosophers, and religious reformers of the world, such as Martin Luther, Leonardo di Vinci, St.

Francis of Assisi, Sir Isaac Newton, Muhammad, etc. These great minds helped to sustain humanity with some truth, if not the whole truth through the ideal channels, until the Restoration could occur.

In Chapter 3, Ruth the Gentile is instructed by her Jewish mother-in-law to seek out Boaz, with the hope that Boaz will take her to wife. Similarly, the Gentiles (led by Joseph Smith) have followed the words of the Jews (as found in the Bible) and supplicated themselves before Christ. As Ruth sought to be brought back into the family of Abraham through marriage, so do the Gentiles seek to be brought back into the family of Abraham through their devotion to Christ.

In supplicating herself before Boaz, Ruth goes in as he is resting among his people after a long day of work and lies down at his feet. When Boaz awakens and asks who is there, Ruth says:

I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.¹⁰²

The comparison with our relationship to Christ can be seen in Boaz's own words from the previous chapter:

The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.¹⁰³

As Ruth sought refuge beneath the robes of Boaz, so do we seek refuge beneath the wings of Christ.

There is a conflict in this story, however. As Boaz says to Ruth:

And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.¹⁰⁴

This "near kinsman" – who is never named – is important because, having a closer relationship to Naomi and Ruth than Boaz, he is the one who, in their society, has authority and responsibility over these women. The interesting thing, though, is that, despite his responsibility, he has not been doing anything to take care of these women. In this way, the "near kinsman" represents the Devil, as he has claim over us in our lost and fallen state. As the prophets have said:

Thus all mankind were lost; and behold, they would have been endlessly lost were it not that God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state.¹⁰⁵

And again:

And our spirits must have become like unto [the Devil], and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself; yea, to that being who beguiled our first parents, who transformeth himself nigh unto an angel of light, and stirreth up the children of men unto secret combinations of murder and all manner of secret works of darkness.¹⁰⁶

Being fallen, we are the subjects of a master who has neither the ability nor the willingness to help us. In order to be saved and brought again into a state of holiness, we must rely on another who can redeem us. Symbolic of Christ, Boaz redeems Naomi and Ruth by purchasing from this kinsman

everything that once belonged to Elimelech. In carrying out this transaction, Boaz becomes the caretaker of Naomi and Ruth. At this point, it becomes Boaz's right to marry Ruth – which he does. He then takes Ruth and Naomi into his house. Ruth conceives and bears a son, whom Naomi takes to her bosom. This entire episode has parallels with something written in another prophetic work:

Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.

Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes;

For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.

For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.

For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.¹⁰⁷

These words were written by Isaiah long after the events of the Book of Ruth took place, but they are clearly both referencing the story of Ruth and prophesying of future events that will take place with regards to the People of the Lord. Some will say that, while the parallels between Boaz and Christ are clear, the story is not about the Restoration of the Gospel at all. They may say that it is actually about any of the following:

- The Jews initially taking the Gospel to the Gentiles (through the marriage of Naomi's sons to Ruth and Orpah and through Ruth's obedience to Naomi's guidance), followed by the Gentiles bringing it back to the Jews (through Ruth's marriage to Boaz, in which she helped to save Naomi from her destitute state as well).
- The journey each woman or man must make in life, escaping a lost and fallen state by supplicating oneself before Christ.
- The literal Gathering of Israel in the final era of the world.

Truth be told, the story of Ruth is about all of these things, as they are inseparable. However, it is essential to understand one key aspect of the first interpretation: It depicts the Great Apostasy! Yes, many Gentiles are brought into Christ's fold through the preaching of Christ and the Apostles, but

then a famine occurs – “a famine of hearing the words of the Lord”! Despite their faithfulness, Naomi and Ruth – the Jews and the Gentiles – are in a state of woe, without a holder of the priesthood to lead them. They are lost. In order for this state to end, there needed to be a restoration:

And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.¹⁰⁸

For centuries, the faithful sought the Word of God, wandering to and fro, seeking it out. As Ruth and Naomi were sustained by what they were able to glean from the fields of Boaz, these faithful were sustained by a nourishing trickle of truth that came through the Bible and through the words of inspired men and women, but they lacked the authoritative prophetic guidance that they knew was necessary for true religion. In 1820, Joseph Smith saw and conversed with God the Father and Jesus Christ. In 1830, he used the priesthood power he had been given by heavenly messengers to restore Christ’s true Church and Gospel to the world. This Restoration did not come as a sudden rash act on the part of God, but as one step in a great chain of events that had been planned out for a long, long time.

13 – TESTIMONY

As the term “Christian” was invented as a derisive term by those who did not follow Christ, the term “Mormon”, when used to identify the followers of Joseph Smith and his successors, was coined by those who were belligerent toward the movement. In both cases, the followers of Christ and the prophets originally referred to themselves as “Saints”. Enemies of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began using the term “Mormon” in this way because they saw that the Saints went about preaching from the Book of Mormon. Mormon was actually an ancient prophet who, under God’s direction, worked to compile his people’s holy record into a single text. His son Moroni finished the work he started, and Moroni then named that compilation after his father.

In the last chapter of the Book of Mormon, Moroni issues a challenge and a promise to every person who reads that holy record:

Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.¹⁰⁹

The fact that the Bible and the Book of Mormon are two witnesses of the same truth is evident in this passage by Moroni, in which he attests to the same doctrine of which Paul wrote that moved Joseph Smith to seek guidance from God in the first place¹¹⁰: it attests to the fact that, after all arguments have been made, God is our only guide in sacred matters. Those who want to know which church to join and which authority figures to trust in doctrinal matters must go to God with their question. Those who faithfully do so after putting forth the required amount of effort and introspection will not be misguided.

Despite the obvious fact that God is the one on whom we should rely to know whether or not the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be, many detractors, claiming to be Christian, say otherwise. Give me thirty minutes and a fast Internet connection, and I will give you thirty examples of Protestant and Catholic leaders telling their flocks that they should not pray to God to find out whether or not the Book of Mormon is true. (I know this because I have done it.) Praying about the Book of Mormon, they say, causes far too many people to be misled. Well, if you do not believe anything else I have written in this book, believe this: Anyone who would counsel you to trust his advice instead of God’s is not a servant of God. There is no closure in spiritual matters without prayer and personal revelation. Any religionist who tells you otherwise is a charlatan.

Some would excuse their unwillingness to appeal to God in such circumstances by claiming that the Book of Mormon does not have the same archaeological validity as the Bible, and that it therefore

does not even deserve consideration. However, the problems with this viewpoint are numerous, including the following:

- Until the last century, archaeology was essentially nonexistent. If these same detractors had lived during the year 1200 or 1700, would they have rejected the Bible due to a lack of archaeological evidence? No, because it was never about archaeology to begin with.
- Any archaeological evidence substantiating the Bible's claims is hardly meaningful in light of the fact that all current scientific understanding suggests that it is impossible for someone to turn water into wine with a thought or make bread and fish appear out of thin air.
- While no amount of archaeological evidence is enough to prove either the Bible or the Book of Mormon to be true, there is much more evidence available to substantiate the Book of Mormon's claims than what our detractors let on. Most critics' arguments about anachronisms in the Book of Mormon are based on egregiously outdated archaeological assumptions, and they ignore a vast array of compelling pieces of more recent evidence that actually seem to support the Book of Mormon.

Those who would counsel against taking the question of the Book of Mormon's legitimacy to God ignore Paul's teaching to the Corinthians:

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.¹¹¹

The things of the Spirit of God are spiritually discerned. If one knows that a book of scripture is the Word of God, he only knows it because God told him so. One may suppose this or that, but to know something with the level of sureness at which he knows that he exists or that he is loved, only a testimony communicated to his heart by the power of the Holy Spirit will suffice. All else is prejudice, conjecture, or madness. Supplicating to the Lord in faithful prayer regarding the Book of Mormon will result in a testimony of its truthfulness. Upon gaining such a witness of the Book of Mormon, one must accept Joseph Smith as a prophet of God.

As a missionary in Taiwan, I encountered a man who proudly told me that he was a third-generation Presbyterian. He told me the story of how his grandfather found Christ. His grandfather, a Daoist priest, went into town one day and heard a Christian missionary preaching in the street. He was so moved by the missionary's words that he came home and broke his Daoist idols to pieces, professing a belief in Christ from that day forth.

After hearing his inspiring story, as I had done with Ami, I told this man that there is a prophet alive in our time of the same caliber as Moses and John the Revelator. His response floored me: "Even if what you say is true, why should that be important to me?" Compare this man's attitude to the way Brigham Young described his time before learning about Joseph Smith:

I felt in those days, that if I could see the face of a prophet, such as had lived on the earth in former times, a man that had revelations, to whom the heavens were opened, who knew God and his character, I would freely circumscribe the earth on my hands and knees; I thought that there was no hardship but what I would undergo, if I

could see one person that knew what God is and where he is, what was his character, and what eternity was.¹¹²

Anyone who truly believes in Jesus Christ should feel the same as Brigham Young did. A true disciple of Christ, like Roger Williams and Brigham Young, should see the confusion and conflict that inevitably result from a lack of prophetic leadership as an unbearable affliction. Faith in God should directly result in a burning desire to hear the words of God's prophets and see them lead the Lord's people in our time as they did in times of old.

Finding and following an authoritative representative of God should especially be the quest of Christians in our age, as we live in a time of multifarious challenges to the Christian faith, both from without and from within. Governments espouse atheism and take legal measures to silence religions that believe in God – especially Christianity – while giving special preference to new secular religions simply because they claim not to be religions. Pop culture portrays Christian belief as being silly, outdated, and intrinsically hurtful. Agenda groups seek to reinvent Christianity to legitimize their lifestyles and permit their favorite sins. In response, some Christian groups change their doctrines to please society, not worrying about what God thinks, while others obsess over single issues at the cost of every other aspect of the message. Televangelists turn God into a commodity to be marketed, publishing their overpriced, ghost-written, god-sponsored self-help books by the millions and proclaiming a cotton-candy Christianity that saves people without changing them. Ministers who preach of some trite and hateful god burn the Qur'an, publish propaganda, issue death threats, and picket funerals and other faiths' meeting houses. Sincere ministers do their best to preach the Bible's message, but their congregations dwindle while they grope for answers themselves. With enemies close behind and no staff-wielding champion in front of them, a minority group of fervent believers faces a churning abyss.

The Christian world wants and needs a prophet. Without revelatory guidance, Christianity is doomed to continue on its current course, in which it is tainted by political correctness, diluted by consumerism, drunken with blind extremism, or simply confused. Christianity came from God, but all of its problems have come from humanity. It is irrational to think those problems can be fixed by any means other than by the means through which the message of Christianity originally came. Thus, no amount of scholarship, debate, rage, or concession can compensate for our need for God's direct guidance.

It is a lack of faith in the Bible's message that results in the assumption that God will never send another prophet like Moses or John until the Second Coming. It is ridiculous to assume that Joseph Smith cannot be that prophet merely because he interprets scripture differently from other Christian leaders – men and women who have never even claimed to bear the prophetic mantle, and therefore certainly do not bear it. It was never God's intention for us to walk in darkness, feeling about without a prophet to light the way. The Bible does not teach us to believe that God used to speak to mortals: it teaches us that God *does* speak to mortals. Anyone who says otherwise would stand as a barrier between mortals and God.

Immediately after the young Joseph Smith began to tell others of his first visitation from the Father and the Son, he began to face severe persecution. His persecutors told him that the Heavens were closed, and that, for whatever reason, God no longer spoke with mortals as He had with the prophets of old. Various people warned him never to speak of the experience again. In a sense, these warnings were justified, as his account of heavenly manifestations did, in fact, lead to years of

suffering and his eventual death. Undaunted, though, Joseph would not deny what he knew to be true. He later wrote the following:

I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart: Why persecute me for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision; and who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation.¹¹³

Joseph Smith saw God and Jesus Christ. God has communicated the truthfulness of this to me through the power of the Holy Spirit. I know it, and I know that God knows it. I cannot deny it, and I dare not do so. The knowledge of Joseph Smith's prophetic calling is a fire in my bones that will not be stayed. Having heard of Joseph Smith's claim, a humble follower of Christ should feel an unyielding desire to verify its truthfulness by taking the question to the source of all truth – and the only way of doing so is by reading the scripture he brought forth – The Book of Mormon – and taking the question to God as he did. Anything short of that is mere conjecture.

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