The term *prophet* is a subjective title in today’s world—it refers to the bedraggled man on a New York City street corner, warning of an impending apocalypse; the ascetic who walks the streets of India, gathering followers with his messages of unconditional love; the mystic who reports visions of angels; and the ancient voices buried in the pages of the Bible. How does one distinguish a true, divinely-sanctioned messenger from a false prophet? In one sense, it is impossible to designate a true prophet as someone whom God spoke to or spoke through, because there is no way to definitively prove such an event occurred. Neither science nor religion has yet found a way to quantify God. The belief that someone was a true prophet lies completely in faith, an indefinable *knowing* of one’s own definition of absolute truth and the resonance of that definition in the teachings of someone else, the ‘true prophet.’ Such faith is subjective; each individual experiences it in slightly different ways. As such, true prophets are in fact defined by each individual person; it is one’s faith in a prophet that makes him a true prophet, and it is this ability to uncover faith in people that defines a *successful* prophet.

One of the major requirements for a successful prophet is sincerity. The prophet must truly believe himself to be called by God. He must not doubt the veracity of the visions, prophecies, covenants, and doctrines that he receives. Although he might doubt his own ability to carry out his duty, he must *never* doubt God, because God is his reason for being.

A prophet has a “dual battle of sympathy,” in that he is imbued with the divine ability to see man from God’s point of view, on top of his innate ability to see God from man’s perspective. A prophet embodies all of mankind in himself during his interactions with God. Fright, struggle, guilt, and desperation; we see these emotions in the Biblical major and minor prophets, in Jesus of Nazareth, in the Prophet Muhammad, and in the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Such feelings are not indications of weakness; they are instead signs of truth and sincerity. A prophet is, despite his divine calling, a flawed human being, not perfect as only God can be. There is no one more aware of this fact than a prophet. Indeed, he is tormented by this because he feels his inadequacy all the more potently through constant interaction with God. Even so, the prophet must speak for God, not only with his voice, but with his entire being; he must speak as though his “life and soul are at stake in what he says and in what is going to happen to what he says.” And they *are* at stake! What happens to mankind also happens to the prophet.

Such prophetic anguish manifests itself as a palpable, desperate faith. When a prophet is called to be a messenger of God, this faith and the ability to inspire such faith in others is what creates believers. Therein lies the core commonality of the true religious prophets of the world, the successful prophets who delivered their messages, who had such deep faith that others could not help but listen to the prophecies with body, mind, and soul. Such an ability in a prophet is far beyond simple charisma, it is that undefinable empathic ability of embodying all of mankind in a single person, and of reflecting back to mankind the prophet’s desperate struggle. To feel the entire world in oneself is both glorious and torturous, but that is what a true prophet must do.

**The Act Of Prophecy**

The actual act of prophecy encompasses both “inspiration and experience.” This inspiration comes at a single dynamic moment; it is “an act of giving; not an eternal word, but a word spoken.” “In the beginning was the Word…and the Word was God...In him was life; and the life was the light of men.” There was a word, a message of God that was God himself, a giving of himself to mankind in the most intimate way possible. When mankind blots out that light, they no longer see life in its ultimate glory, they no longer see life as God, as a transcendental experience in every moment, in every touch and sound and sight. A prophet is called on to restore that light to mankind, to show them what life truly is—not a timespan of simple existence, but a state of being *in* God, *part* of God, of being the light of absolute transcendental divine existence in every moment.

This existence is what the prophet experiences during his visions and his communications with God. It is something that
comes “upon [the prophet], not out of him”; something that is much greater than a single moment, that happens not to a single man, but to the collective man, because the prophet is acting as all of mankind. It is the difference between simply hearing the word and having the word become part of oneself: “Thy words were found, and I did eat them”. The prophet becomes that light, the prophet is inside of God and God is inside of the prophet. Barriers have ceased to be and the prophet becomes the revelation; he understands, in the intangible manner of unshakeable knowing and faith, what ‘dwelling with God’ really is.

Covenantal Prophets And Prophetic Personality

The Hebrew prophets dealt with the present, historical concerns of God’s people, but it was the duty of another subset of prophets, heretofore referred to as covenantal prophets, to introduce, on God’s behalf, entirely new covenants to mankind. While the Hebrew prophets strove to understand God’s relationship with man, covenantal prophets sought to change mankind’s relationship with God, to add new aspects to it, to bring man closer to God and the Word.

Covenantal prophets are the messengers through which God offered covenants to humanity, covenants which were much more than laws or acts of negotiation. They were experiences of God giving himself to mankind in return for mankind doing the same for God. They were events of surrender where God and man become not Creator and Created, but simply Creation. The covenantal prophet is a living symbol of the covenant, of man’s struggle to reconcile himself with the idea of a personal God, a God embodied inside himself.

Moses, Jesus of Nazareth, Muhammad, Joseph Smith, Bahá’u’lláh: all were covenantal prophets, each delivering the logos spermatikos, the embryonic essence of the Word that exists everywhere. Despite their individual existence in widely disparate historical time periods, they all embodied the essences of a true prophet: the intense prophetic personality that consumed the Hebrew prophets, and the precarious dual self-identity as man’s representative to God and God’s representative to man.

Covenantal prophets fulfill four major criteria: (1) they receive direct divine delivery of a “new” covenant; (2) they have a major hand in founding the new religion that comes out of the new covenant; (3) they display human personality—struggle, anger, sadness, perhaps even transgression, all associated with their enormous divine calling; and (4) they have unshakeable inner faith in God and his message, as evidenced by their influence on humanity during the time of their living prophecy.

Decoding prophetic personality is perhaps the most challenging aspect of identifying covenantal prophets. The majority of the prophets lived and died before literacy was widespread, and thus there are no personal journals by the prophet, only snippets of personality culled from Scriptures and revelations attributed to the particular prophet. But when a prophet is called to duty in the modern world of printing presses, literacy, and newspapers, his life is much more readily examined. Putting aside the question of veracity in favor of the prophet’s success at delivering his message, one name springs to the forefront: Joseph Smith, the American covenantal prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), also known as the Mormon Church.

Joseph Smith: A Case Study Of A Modern Covenantal Prophet

Joseph Smith was a poor farmboy, a truant at times, who spent his teenaged years searching for buried treasure on his family’s farm in upstate New York. Located in the middle of the Burned-over District, so-named because the region was ‘burning with the fires of the spirit,’ Joseph grew up surrounded by constant religious fervor. A combination of “Yankee…moral intensity,” industrious immigrants, and an upsurgence of evangelistic preachers led to an environment where “emotional religion was…a congenital characteristic, present at birth”.

A typical young man in the Burned-over District awaited the day when the Holy Spirit would marvelously elect him to church membership… He might…change [religious] affiliation several times as one sect or another held services nearby… He could scarcely evade a religious experience in New York.

This was an environment where it was common for people to have divine visions, visits from the Holy Spirit, and ecstatic religious communions with God in the midst of revivals. It was the perfect place for a prophet to appear.

In 1820, 14-year-old Joseph Smith sought refuge in the woods near his home in Palmyra, NY, in order to pray for an answer to his question of which church he should join. In response, he had a vision in which God and Jesus appeared to him and told him that he should not join any church, because, as the light-enshrouded figure of God said, “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”. Despite God’s appearance, Joseph had not yet been informed of his impending prophetic duty, but he had received personal revelation, an experience that would play an important doctrinal role in the future LDS Church.

Although such a vision had to have a deep psychological impact on Joseph, he was relatively reticent about it, merely telling his mother that “I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true”. The friends with whom he did share details were antagonistic; according to Joseph, a Methodist preacher friend “treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil”.

In itself, a vision was an exciting event to an individual, but one must remember the socio-religious environment of the Burned-over District—visions and other ecstatic religious experiences were not uncommon. It was the nature of his vision that caused Joseph such persecution. This was no simple case of an answer to a prayer—this was God saying that all of the churches were wrong. To unbelievers of Joseph’s vision, it was heresy of the greatest degree, but Joseph could not doubt the veracity of his personal revelation.

On September 21, 1823, Joseph had another divine visit, this time from the angel Moroni, who informed Joseph that “God had a work for [you] to do; and that
Moroni then explained that there was a book written on golden plates, the lost gospel that Christ had delivered to early American inhabitants, buried on a nearby hillside along with two stones that “God had prepared...for the purpose of translating the book.”

Joseph's call to covenantal prophecy had begun.

Revelation In The Book Of Mormon

Joseph's translation of the golden plates (the Book of Mormon) was revelation in itself, both because heretofore hidden truths were being revealed, and because Joseph was given divine assistance while translating. The angel Moroni provided Joseph with “two transparent stones, clear as crystal,” spectacles of a sort, called the Urim and Thummim. Using these divine stones, Joseph "translated [the Book of Mormon] by the gift and power of god, by [the] means of the urim and thummim." In order to receive revelations, "[t]hose using [the stones] offered their prayers unto the Lord and the answer appeared written with letters of light on the Urim and Thummim, but disappeared again very soon after". This was divine revelation in the most literal sense, almost magical, and certainly miraculous to witnesses, which furthered the veracity and reality of Joseph's prophethood among his followers.

The lingual structure of the Book of Mormon is very similar to that of the King James Version of the Bible (KJV); the stories it relates, however, are radically different. The relationship between man (mainly the prophets) and God in the KJV Bible is a two-sided dialogue where God and man have the power to influence each other. The Book of Mormon takes this relationship even further into the realm of human terms — by incorporating the petitionary prayers of individuals (1 Nephi 2:19-24; 1 Nephi 11:2-36; Ether 3:9) and the answers that God gives them, God becomes more human, a definable character, and almost finite.

A finite God has enormous implications for a theology — by defining God's revelations in terms of personal, literal dialogue, one runs the risk of assigning a certain changeless personality to God, which in turn denotes that you, the individual, and the collective believers, know the limits of God. This is a God who people can know in such a way that they are comfortable engaging in dialogue with him, asking for and then fully expecting his help in their daily lives. This is an act of knowing God in a much deeper and psychological sense than the traditional Christian definition of knowing, which typically implies only that one accepts the existence of God and his influence on people. This Mormon knowing is on a much more personal and intimate level, and stems from a unique aspect of the Book of Mormon — the immense importance of personal divine revelation.

This personal revelation in the Book of Mormon is given not just to prophets but to almost every personage in the book. While divine revelation in the Bible is relegated to the prophets, the most important aspect of revelation in the Book of Mormon is that it is widespread, available to everyone; in fact, it is every person's right to receive divine revelation. Of course, this revelation is not on the order of a covenant, but that of more ordinary, everyday matters — where the best place to hunt is, where the enemy camp is, further explanations of 'God's mysteries' as manifested on Earth. Covenantal revelation, however, involves much greater truths that have either not yet been told to man, or that have been so lost through time that God's direct and concerted effort is required to unveil them. In the case of Joseph Smith, this effort was manifested in the production of the Book of Mormon, which once again revealed certain truths that had long been absent from religious practices.

It was imperative that Joseph complete the translation as soon as possible, not simply because God wanted it, but out of necessity for the spreading of this new covenant. While Joseph's oral revelations, whether from the Holy Spirit, the angel Moroni, or from God himself, were used to build the theological and sociological structure of the Church, they were not enough to spread his latter-day message. A book was symbolic of something greater than a mere man; it was a foundation to the Prophet's message, it gave a sort of divine sanction to his words. The early Mormons saw it as a solid, unchanging testament of the veracity of their Prophet. "From eternity to eternity [God] is the same," Mormon scripture asserts. The Book of Mormon was needed as proof of that sameness, to show that the truths of the Bible were also evident within it, to prove that the same deity who inspired the Bible also inspired the Book of Mormon. To Mormons, both books are revelation, both God's words, both truth, but one is more accurate truth because it was translated by God himself, not by man. It was Joseph's proof, the living evidence of the veracity of his visions and revelations. One did not have to be a prophet to truly experience this new revelation.

In and of itself, the Book of Mormon corroborated with the Bible; many passages are essentially reworked from the Bible (21 chapters of Isaiah contained in 1, 2, and 3 Nephi and Moriah 12, 14; 1 Corinthians 12:1-2 in Mosiah 12, 14; Malachi 3:4 in 3 Nephi 24-5; 1 Corinthians 12:1-2 in Moroni 10; Acts 3:22-6 in 3 Nephi 20). However, the 'hidden truths' it revealed clashed with some aspects of the Bible. This is understandable if, as Joseph said, translation had marred the original meaning and text of the Bible. With such focus on the subjectivity of translation, it is not surprising that God eventually commanded Joseph to commence an "inspired translation" of the King James Version of the Bible.

The Nature Of Revelation In The JST Translation Of The Bible

Translation has historically been a major topic of contention in the area of religious writings. This is understandable — it is a task in which man must be able to interpret and understand the Word of God in its original written language well enough to translate the very spirit of the Word into another language. This is truly an impossible task theologically, because it requires that man understand the underlying reasons and goals of God's actions, and to presume to know what God was trying to convey with each word, each letter.
It is not shocking then, to purport that "no human being is able to reproduce God’s word as revealed to man in its entirety unless a new revelation takes place in which God makes known His word to the translator in a new language". According to this viewpoint, every translation of the Bible is wrong. Because of its divine origin, every word and every letter of Scriptural text "contains God’s mystery". Any change at all to the original text takes away some aspect of God’s revelation, rendering it hidden from all readers of that particular translation.

While the major reason for Biblical translation is to put the word of God into the hands of non-Hebrew, non-Aramaic, and non-Greek readers, it is also an "opportunity to give divine sanction to one’s ideas". Because translation is really interpretation, one’s particular religious beliefs will inevitably be incorporated into one’s translation. They will shape interpretation and thus shape the end result—at the very best, imbuing a passage with meaning that was not originally intended, at the worst, inadvertently changing the original, intended meaning.

Truly, only one type of person can justify major addendums to Scripture, and that is a covenantal prophet. Because they act on God’s direct instructions and new revelations, changes in laws, wording, even theology is technically permissible, as long as one agrees that the particular prophet actually is acting under God’s directives rather than on his own inclinations.

The 8th Article of Faith of the LDS Church states: "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly." Joseph’s reasoning, as he explained to his followers, was that the history contained within the Book of Mormon highlighted the fact that many truths in the Bible had been lost to years of mistranslation and misinterpretation. In a way, this is undeniably true—some aspects of the original work is always lost in translation. Not only are there copist mistakes to take into account, one must also consider that languages are not mirror images of each other, and many verbal nuances are simply untranslatable.

But Joseph did not simply correct sentences or word choices; he changed sentence structures, he added entirely new sections and scenes to various books, and he inserted new aspects of theology. In doing so, he changed the nature of the man-God relationship as contained in the KJV Bible, added references to Jesus in the Old Testament, and inserted information on the age of accountability of children (age eight), the afterlife and God’s ultimate plan, the nature of premortal existence, the roles of the priesthood, and the priesthoods of Enoch and Melchizedek.

Small sentence structure changes can have large effects on theological doctrine—several passages in the KJV (Jer. 26:13, Amos 7:3) include the text "the Lord repented." The Joseph Smith Translation (JST) redirected the repenting to a human, rather than God, for the Prophet Joseph decreed that God does not repent because he is perfect; only man repents. Similarly, instead of God hardening Pharaoh’s heart in the KJV Exodus, the JST version has Pharaoh hardening his own heart. The responsibility of human failing is removed from God and transferred to imperfect man. While such revision does strengthen the idealistic ‘perfection’ of God, it also adds to the ‘changelessness’ of God—God cannot change his mind, because he does not make mistakes or reconsider actions; everything that he does is perfect and complete the first time. Combined with the personal, dialogical revelation of God in the Book of Mormon, the JST changes are almost paradoxical about the nature of God. God is at once like man, yet far removed; perfect, yet once imperfect; changeless and eternal, yet he was not always God. The JST explains God, while also making him even more of a mystery, a paradoxical being that is both God and man in one essence.

A being who is often considered in Christian theology to be both God and man at once, Jesus Christ, is subject to a new theory of origin in the JST. The JST version of the early chapters of Genesis is included in the Pearl of Great Price as the "Book of Moses." The presence of the premortal Jesus is evident from the beginning of mankind’s existence—an angel appears to Adam in the Garden of Eden and tells him: "thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son." The coming of Jesus is also revealed to Noah (Moses 8:24), Moses (Moses 1:6), Enoch (Moses 6:52), and to the Hebrew patriarchs (JST Bible). This addition of prophetic prediction of the Messiah is the reason behind the extreme emphasis of Jesus in the LDS faith, but this is not the typical Christian version of Jesus. The LDS Jesus is both a redeemer, a prophet, and ‘spirit-child’ of God. This Jesus has always existed alongside God; the prophets spoke of him from the beginning—he was a covenantal prophet, but a unique one who brought a crucial covenant to mankind, a covenant of which the full import was lost from history until Joseph was called to restore it.

The presence of a premortal Christ introduces an entirely new view of the realm of God—the spirit world. Everyone is “born as a spirit to Heavenly Parents before being born to mortal parents on the earth…[and] lives with God as his spirit children before coming to the earth as mortal beings.” While KJV-based Christian doctrine recognizes a distinctive ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ versus the physical body, Mormonism takes this a step further and separates existence into ‘spiritual’ and ‘physical’. Thus the passage in Jeremiah, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee” takes on a
whole new meaning.26 This is a literal knowing, not so much fore-ordained in the sense that God transcends linear time and can see the past, present and future equally well, but as God tells the JST-version of Abraham, "thou wast chosen before thou wast born."12 The prophets were spirits with God in the spirit world, and were chosen at that point to be mortal prophets. It is no longer a matter of the measure of man in life that makes a prophet, but the measure of the man's spirit in his premortal life. A prophet is a prophet before he is born, not just when his call to prophecy begins; a prophet is a prophet before he even knows that he is one.

On top of the new revelation of the existence of a spirit world, the entire issue of creation underwent revision in the JST. In fact, creation becomes a relative term—instead of the KJV "God created the heaven and the earth," the JST version says: "the Gods organized and formed the heavens and the earth".12a The theological import of this passage is immense; all of Judeo-Christian-Islamic theology holds monotheism and the concept of "there is no god but God" at its very core. Joseph Smith's revelation in the Book of Abraham breaks with this core in such a way that one cannot classify Mormonism as a Christian sect; it is an entirely different religion, albeit heavily based on Christianity. Although Mormons recognize one god as 'the heavenly Father,' doctrinally they acknowledge the existence of other gods.

Such acknowledgement is implicitly required when one takes the Mormon nature of God into account. Modern Christianity agrees that while man was made in God's image, man can never become God, he can only hope to dwell with him. God's nature is unreachable, untouchable for mere mortal men. But the ultimate state of existence in Mormon theology is godhood—Joseph revealed that in the highest kingdom of heaven (the celestial realm), very devout and pious Mormons will dwell with God as equals, as gods themselves. In the celestial realm of heaven, God will make believers "equal in power, and in might, and in dominion" with himself.14 This is the crux of the new covenant that was revealed to Joseph Smith—that man might become like God if he followed the laws contained in the revelations that his latter-day prophet received. To follow God's commandments is to emanate God and the state of godhood that a person can attain after physical death.

If man is able to become a god himself, then what is God? Or more importantly, what was God? He may be an "unchangeable God" now, but, according to the revelations of his prophet Joseph, "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!...[H]e was once a man like us...God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth".8b.13 With this revelation, Joseph tore away a good bit of the mystery of God. No longer was he the ethereal, indefinable being of Judeo-Christian theology—he was something definitively finite, something palpable, something within the reach of human experience.

In fact, the Biblical prophet of sorts, Enoch, is an incredible focus in Mormonism, precisely because of this 'man as God' theology. Even in the KJV, Enoch does not die a normal death; "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him".26 Judaic mysticism explicates this passage in the phrase "Enoch is Metatron," meaning that Enoch encompasses man, God, and angel into one figure.14 In Mormon theology, Enoch represents the ideal of man and man's purpose—to create a Zion, the Mormon New Jerusalem, and then to dwell with God in one's original highest spirit state.14a The Melchizedek priesthood that Enoch represents is the divinely sanctioned position where one "hold[s] the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the church".8 This is the state to which man must aspire, to act as a prophet of God, to embody God on earth through this priesthood. This is to walk the path that God once walked when he was a man.

Because the almost unanimous agreement among theological religions that the nature of man is not akin to the nature of God, Joseph Smith had to have had tremendous faith in his own revelations to go against millenniums of theology. The concern at hand is not whether Joseph's visions and revelations were true, but the manner in which the revelations of God's new covenant changed the relationship between man and God. Joseph had endless faith in the divine sanction of his revelations, and that belief is not to be taken lightly; such deep-rooted faith in revelation translated itself to his followers and is at the core of Mormonism.

Continuing Revelations

Somewhat at odds with the exalted position of written Scripture in modern religion, Orson F. Whitney, an ordained Apostle of the LDS Church, asserted in 1916 that "no book presides over this Church and no books lie at its foundation".72 Because "the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are prophets, seers, and revelators to the Church and to the world," such a statement was meant as revelation and thus, fact.15 Canonical evolution is true of most major religions, of course, especially in American religions. But Mormons readily admit this; in fact, continuous canonical change is a major part of the LDS religion. The ease of this admittance is probably due to the presence of a living prophet—in this way, it is always God who decrees changes that follow the flow of societal change. In other forms of Christianity, it is often the people who demand a change of Church doctrine and policy; God is left out altogether. The only major Christian branch that parallels Mormonism in this sense is the Catholic Church, with the Pope acting as a prophet of sorts. But the Pope, while said to be the closest living man to God, is acknowledged by Catholics to act as a man, to issue decrees from a human standpoint, and not to act as merely a mouthpiece of God. When the LDS Prophet (the President of the Church) speaks on doctrinal issues, he is assumed to be 'inspired' by the Spirit, by God. "Today's inspired utterances may become part of tomorrow's standard works"—this is how easily LDS canon can change when the Prophet speaks.76

Continuing revelation is an LDS doctrinal standard: "God … is not silent. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is led by revelation from God to a living prophet, who
receives God’s word just as Abraham, Moses, Peter, and other ancient prophets and apostles did.” While much of Christianity characterizes truth as something unchanging and eternal like God himself, in Mormonism, today’s truth might not be tomorrow’s—truth is a fluid, living entity. As Joseph Smith defined it, “truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.” God is the “Spirit of truth,” continually being revealed. Such revelation is an eternal, endless process, because God himself is eternal and endless.

Conclusions

The depths of prophetic identity cannot be understood unless one truly tries to see through the eyes of a prophet. Who was the Prophet Joseph Smith? Imagine what it would be like to want an answer so desperately, to throw oneself entirely into a prayer so that self dissolves and there is only the question. In this moment, God the Father and Jesus Christ appear and reply to the prayer and the petitioner. There are no disembodied voices, no whispers on the breeze, no subtle signs from the heavens; this is God, appearing as he did for Abraham and for Moses, now appearing to Joseph Smith. And what was Joseph? A poor farmboy, a younger son? A man who wanted more than anything to make his mark on the world? Who had potential and the talent but did not understand how to channel it? Out of everyone in the world, God came to Joseph and prepared him to be a prophet. And not just an ordinary prophet, a covenantal prophet, the rarest kind.

Why Joseph? And yet, why Jeremiah, why Ezekiel, why Moses and Muhammad? In a sense, these are unanswerable questions; they presume to understand the mind of God, and ordinary theology says that such understanding is impossible. But there must be some key aspect of chosen prophets, some spark that calls God, that God perhaps identifies with. If man was made in the image of God, what is that divine image? It is quite far beyond anything physical; God is not about form, God is about the mind, about transcendence, faith, deep connection. That is the realm in which one may find the image of God, and that is where the covenantal prophets innately dwell. They embody God without realizing it.

Covenantal prophecy is an evolving calling, depending on the state of society for the type of revelations that God bestows on his chosen prophet. Early societies appeared to respond best to impassioned speaking, physical metaphors, and parables. More modern societies increasingly required literary revelations in the form of books—God’s divine words translated into written language, something that everyone could have and hold, a form of personal revelation. While the method of prophetic delivery to mankind may be a changing entity, the true covenantal prophets are always characterized by distinctive psychological qualities—their faith and their triumph through suffering.

While the revelations of Biblical prophets were tinged with divine pathos, God’s sorrow for the mess that mankind had made of his perfect world, Joseph Smith’s revelations rang with divine exaltation. The time of latter-day prophets had arrived; mankind could receive the lost scriptures and truths and understand God’s plan more fully. They could dwell with God, become gods, achieve transcendence. This Mormon God is not a jealous god, angry about idolatry and transgressions; he desperately wants his creations, his ‘spirit children’ to understand their true divine potential, to embrace the godhood that dwells inside of them, to become an equal, and to beget their own spirit children on their own Earths.

Such revelation is the Prophet Joseph Smith’s greatest gift to mankind, whether one chooses to believe its truth or not. Joseph took Christian theology far beyond the rigid bounds that society had given it, building an entire religion based entirely on faith, rather than rooted in dogma. The basis of Mormonism is personal revelation, and one can never receive the Spirit, which confers such revelation, without deep, unyielding faith. Joseph’s great miracle as a prophet was to re-introduce the value of faith to mankind, to be a living demonstration of how far faith can carry a person, to show that God is not far removed, but is with every person. All one had to do, Joseph wordlessly demonstrated, is listen.

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Hill Cumorah monument with angel Moroni on top.