
A Christian apologetic response to the claim of 'prophet' by the founders of Islam and Mormonism, Muhammad and Joseph Smith, jr. – Joseph Smith, jr.

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Abstract

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as the Mormon Church, adamantly believes that its founder, Joseph Smith, Jr. was a prophet called of God. He not only allegedly helped to restore New Testament Christianity to its original form, but he received additional revelations and prophecies to assist in bringing the Christian Church to maturity. The entire Mormon structure stands or falls with the truthfulness or falseness of Joseph Smith's claims to be a prophet. This article is in

response to those stated claims. Smith believed in multiple gods, with Heavenly Father being an exalted human being from another planet. He also taught that his "spirit children", whom he conceived with at least one goddess wife, could become gods and goddesses too, if they would only comply with certain laws and ordinances. An examination of his failed prophecy concerning the building of the Independence, Missouri, Mormon Temple in 1832, as well as his failed Civil War prophecy, demonstrated his inability to know what the future held, but also that God was not in the midst of his forecasts. If anyone was to be acknowledged as a biblical prophet of God, that prophet's theology and ability to know the future had to be consistent with those who went before him. Neither Joseph Smith's theology, nor his prophetic prowess, were consistent. Therefore, he cannot rightly be aligned with those who were recognized as biblical prophets, who were called by God to act as His spokespersons.

1. Introduction

Without Joseph Smith, Jr. (hereafter Joseph Smith) there would be no Mormonism.¹ Everything that Mormonism embodies is a reflection of the personality of its founding prophet. Despite the biblical evidence to the contrary, the Mormon faithful argues that the principles of Mormonism extend back to the days of Adam, Moses, and Jesus, all of whom were Mormons, as those former Mormon prophets put into practice Mormon beliefs.² To Mormons, Joseph Smith was simply the most significant of all of God's prophets.³ Although Joseph Smith was admittedly a mere man, still he was, according to his followers, the exemplar for humanity to follow who delivered a divine message of warning, glad tidings, and restoration. With the coming of Joseph Smith is the coming of God's revelation in the form of a book: the Book of Mormon. It was God's continuing revelation to humankind designed

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- 1 "He *did* organize the 'Mormon' Church. And he was undoubtedly the soul of the movement during the first fourteen years of its existence" (Evans, 1930:308). "Joseph Smith is the key figure in the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in these latter days ... Every doctrine, organization, movement, and achievement of the Latter-day Saints must be attributed directly or indirectly to the latter-day Prophet" (Widtsoe, 1951:322).
 - 2 *TPJS*, 1976:59-61; Alma 46:13, 15; 48:10 cf. Acts 11:26.
 - 3 "Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it" (D&C 135:3; Smith, 1980:6.408-409).

to clarify and correct what others had complicated and corrupted in texts such as the Bible.⁴ Joseph Smith, in other words, became to his followers God's intimate spokesman, revelator, and visionary, "the foremost in the company of historical prophets", doing what no other man in human history had ever done, namely reveal God's final word and unify humanity in worship of the one God under one roof, the Mormon Church.⁵ Failure to recognize Joseph Smith as God's most significant modern-day prophet, seer, and revelator could only result in personal damnation.⁶ What follows concerning his theology, prophetic swagger, and views about Jesus are what made him attractive to those who called him "Prophet".

2. Joseph Smith's Theology

As observed in previous articles (*Journal for Christian scholarship*, Vol 54(1&2) 2018) on the claim of prophet by the founders of Islam and Mormonism,⁷ in order for a person to be a prophet of God entailed a correct theological view of God, as guided by God's revelation, the Bible. "Latter-day" revelation, therefore, must be corroborated by previous revelation that is only recorded in the Bible to ensure doctrinal and prophetic consistency. Any aberration of or straying from said revelation, whereby the "prophet" led people to follow other gods or to engage in false prophetic pronouncements is, according to Biblical statements, a clear indication that that prophet was not of God (Deut. 13:1-5, 18:22 cf. Matt. 7:15-ff.).

To determine whether or not Joseph Smith was a biblical prophet, it must be asked whether his theology was consistent with what God already revealed about himself as an omnipotent, omniscient, infinite being of self-existence. The question must also be asked about the accuracy of Smith at forecasting the future. Did all of Smith's predictions come true? Finally, were Smith's views about Jesus Christ consistent with what the Bible has revealed about him? Smith confessed that Jesus was God's son: but God's son in what way? No better source can be found to begin to answer these questions, than Smith's own words found in his most famous sermon delivered in memorial honour of Mormon member, King Follett.⁸

4 *Gospel Principles* 2009:46.

5 Widtsoe, 1951:288.

6 Joseph Fielding Smith [1954]:1:189-90.

7 This article focuses on the question whether the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, could be regarded as the final Biblical prophet, as he and his followers claim.

8 What makes The King Follett Discourse so famous is that Joseph Smith not only delivered

2.1 *Inspirational Authority*

In his sermon in honour of King Follett, a brief mention is made about the source of Smith's authority. When Joseph Smith orated to an estimated 20 000 friends, family, and acquaintances of the deceased King Follett,⁹ Smith asserted that his words were "inspired by the Holy Spirit". Although inspiration is analogous to revelation in Mormonism and is a gift to be exercised as a "right" by every Mormon,¹⁰ it is understood differently by most orthodox Christians.¹¹ To a Mormon, *Heavenly Father* has spoken, whether to individual members of the Mormon Church or more importantly to the Mormon leadership! Therefore, His words are established and that without the possibility of alteration or appeal, unless the previous claims of anyone who inspirationally spoke or wrote are contradicted. And no one spoke or wrote with more established authority about Mormon history and belief than did Joseph Smith.

According to Mormon teaching, to receive inspiration (direct revelation) is to receive the Holy Spirit; to reject inspiration is to sin against the Holy Spirit, which is essentially impossible for a Mormon to do, for that would require a knowledge greater than the assurance the Holy Spirit provides when he gives a revelation.¹² So, unless the Holy Spirit changed his mind when he revealed to Joseph Smith information regarding the person and attributes of God, thereby making the Spirit fickle, what Smith proclaimed about God during King Follett's funeral (which was also during General Conference on April 7, 1844) is as true and special today as it was then.

2.2 *God's Creation*

When discussing God's creation in the context of whom or what God is from the Mormon perspective, the emphasis is not on his creative acts, but on how he became God. In fact, according to Mormon teachings, God created nothing, nor could He, since all the "elements" that comprise existence already existed eternally alongside God, including the "intelligences" that

it during General Conference, or during a time when Mormon Church leaders are thought to deliver *inspired* messages directly from the Holy Ghost (Uchtdorf, 2011:4; *TLP*, 2010:71; Benson, 1988:335), but "because of its comprehensive doctrinal teachings" (*EM*, 1992:2.791), especially as they relate to the person of God.

9 Smith, 1980:6.302, 312. The deceased member's first name was actually "King".

10 *EM*, 1992:2.684; McConkie 1966:383.

11 Most Orthodox Christians understand Scripture to be inspired (2 Tim. 3:16), not the writers of Scripture (Frame, 2010:82, 140-ff.; Gaussen, 2007:28-33; White, 2004:30-31; Geisler, 2002:1.235-36, 239-41; Grudem, 1994:74-75; Warfield, 1948: 34-ff., 296; Strong, 1907:197).

12 Kimball 1969:123.

would become humanity (D&C, 93:29, 33).¹³ According to Joseph Smith, God was not always God. God became God. At the funeral, Smith told his followers:

God himself, was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by His power, was to make himself visible, – I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form – like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with Him, as one man talks and communes with another.¹⁴

- 13 “And the Lord said unto me: These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all” (Abr. 3:19) ... “I dwell in the midst of them all ... for I rule in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath, in all wisdom and prudence, over all the intelligences thine eyes have seen from the beginning; I came down in the beginning in the midst of all the intelligences thou has seen” (Abr. 3:21). There is some discrepancy, though, over what the Mormon leadership means by “intelligence,” much less the “more intelligent” of the intelligences (Abr. 3:19). Joseph Smith equated intelligence with the mind of man (*TPJS*, 1976:353), but also revealed that the intelligences were spirits that were “co-equal” with God (*TPJS*, 1976:354). B.H. Roberts (2013:175) explained, “Spirits are uncreated intelligences inhabiting spiritual bodies; while ‘intelligences’, pure and simple, are intelligent entities, but unembodied in either spirit bodies or bodies of flesh and bone.” John A. Widtsoe (*HotR*, 1944:192) was more confused and abstract in his explanation of intelligences by stating, “Intelligence is compounded of knowledge and love, the latter sometimes called Wisdom ... Intelligence is the glory of man also.” Later, Apostle Bruce R. McConkie (1966:387) interpreted the intelligences to be “the spirit children of the Eternal Father”, who were not created, since “God never had the power to create the spirit of man at all” (*TPJS*, 1976:354), but were combined with all the eternal elements to comprise humans bodies via natural sexual copulation between Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother (See Widtsoe, 1915:64-65; *EM*, 1992:2.961). Intelligence(s), however, are nothing new, as even Plato discussed them, which is probably why Mormon philosopher Sterling McMurrin (2000:29) wrote: “As a constructor or artisan God, not entirely unlike Plato’s demiurge of the *Timaeus*, the Mormon deity informs the continuing processes of reality and determines the world’s configurations, but he is not the creator of the most ultimate constituents of the world, either the fundamental material entities or the space and time that locate them ... In any case, it is entirely evident that it is a basic article of Mormon theology that God is related to a world environment for the being of which he is not the ultimate ground and by which he therefore is in some sense conditioned. This means that God is a *being* among beings rather than being as such or the ground of being, and that he is therefore finite rather than absolute.” See also Widtsoe, 1951:148-49; *HotR*, 1944:199-200; *GCR* Oct. 1907:51; Apr. 1904:17. Interestingly, Mormon apologists frequently accuse Christians of adopting and implementing Greek and pagan sources to establish their doctrines, when it is clear from the preceding that that is exactly what Joseph Smith and subsequent Mormon apologists have done (Roberts, 2013:459-61; 1998:116-18; Robinson, 1991:40; Hopkins, 1988:19-ff.).

- 14 Smith 1980:6.305.

God was and is a human being, in other words, who was reformed, just as Adam was; who through the secretive process of exaltation became a god.¹⁵ Even though he achieved such a lofty status, those privileged to stand in his presence may commune with him, as could any human being. God is special, but not so special as to be different from all other reformed beings. Some Mormon leaders would later argue that God is of the very same species or race as humanity.¹⁶ He was merely more “intelligent” than all the rest and advanced more quickly than they did. Although humans were naturally reformed in God’s image through an act of procreation on his part, thereby becoming “Avatars of God”,¹⁷ God is also reformed in man’s imagination, as he shares in the very same image and likeness as they do. Such genetic affinities would later manifest themselves in Joseph Smith’s “First Vision”, whereby Jesus and his Father appear as identical twins in Mormon artistic depictions. But, who exactly reformed the most intelligent intelligence into a man? Joseph Smith does not tell the reader, even though he promised during his discourse, “I will show it from the Bible” how “God came to be God”.

Nowhere in the Bible does God claim to be an “exalted man”, to have been a man, much less could he be a reformed being. Instead, the observant Bible reader is confronted with statements like those found in Numbers 23:19 and John 4:24, which explicitly tells him or her that “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent” and “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” In the former example, God’s immutability is contrasted with man’s corrupted

15 “Exaltation” is a Mormon-specific term used to denote those who have attained “true” salvation, whereby the faithful and obedient Mormon has satisfied all the legal requirements necessary to become a god in the Celestial Kingdom. See D&C, 76:52-58; 93:18-20, 27; 132:17, 22, 29, 37, 49; McConkie & Millet, 1996:336-37; *EM*, 1992:4.1674; Talmage, 1984:424; *TSWK*, 1982:51-53; *DBY*, 1978:21, 392; Cannon, 1974:1.102, 107, 111-12, 154, 232-33; Clark, 1971:5.31; McConkie, 1985:337; 1982:632, 644; 1981:19, 353; 1966:231, 237, 256-58, 321, 395, 404, 451, 480, 546, 577, 669-70; Smith, [1955]:2.47-48; Snow, 1899:530.

16 See Roberts, 2013:176, 505-506, 536-37; 1998:165, 222, 255; Millet, 2005:144; *EM*, 1992:1.272-73, 2.549; Matthews, 1990:190; McConkie, 1981:305; 1966:466, 744; Berrett, 1964; Smith, 1954:1.103, 139; Widtsoe, 1915:27, 61; *GCR*, Oct. 1910:37; Oct. 1965:58; Oct. 1968:132, Oct. 1969:18; *JD*, 4.217; 19:323.

17 See B.H. Roberts, Joseph Smith’s Doctrines Vindicated, *Improvement Era*, March 1910:432-440, specifically page 432, where the first point in his piece is entitled “Men the Avatars of God”. This same article would later appear in his *Defense of the Faith and the Saints* (2002:Vol. II, 623-639), where his main argument was that since secular scientists, university professors, and aberrant religious movements (Christian Science, New Thought, and Swedenborgianism) were all coming to the same conclusions, which is “a pluralistic panpsychic view of the universe”, then Joseph Smith’s teaching was vindicated.

nature, whereby lying is a distinct human possibility at any moment. If God were a man, he would be predisposed to lie like a man (Rom. 3:4). Since God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18), which would be a denial of himself (2 Tim. 2:13), then he cannot be a man either. In the latter example, Jesus is speaking emphatically about God's ontological makeup: πνεῦμα ὁ θεός. While some translations have included the indefinite article before πνεῦμα (KJV, ASV, Douay-Rheims), rendering the translation "God is [a] spirit", that is not the best way to understand Jesus' focus. God is not being compared to other spirits or gods.¹⁸ Since God is spiritual by nature and in order to worship him truly (cf. Isa. 31:3), it requires the worshipper to approach God spiritually or "the need for complete sincerity and complete reality".¹⁹

Of course, some Mormon faithful frequently appeal to the person of Jesus being a man as evidence that God the Father is a man as well.²⁰ Such an appeal, though, is fallacious at best, since it fails to take into account the fact that Jesus "became flesh" (Jn. 1:14) for the specific purpose of humbling himself to die on a Roman cross for the redemption of humanity (Phil. 2:7-8 cf. Rom. 3:24-25; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:15). The flesh, in other words, was not an original aspect of Jesus' nature. It was inherited (Jn. 1:14; Phil. 2:7). What is additionally fallacious and unfortunate is that Joseph Smith also advocated his own brand of Patripassianism in his effort to equate, physically, God the Father with Jesus.²¹ Joseph proclaimed at the funeral:

The scriptures inform us that Jesus said, as the Father hath power in himself, even so hath the Son power – to do what? Why, what the Father did. The answer is obvious – in a manner to lay down his body and take it up again. Jesus, what are you going to do? To lay down my life as my Father did, and take it up again.²²

Worse yet, Smith believed that there were, are, and will be future gods on other earths who will repeat what both God and Jesus had done previously, which ultimately means that Jesus was not telling the truth when he said, "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). The sin debt had not been paid in full, meaning that the dualistic struggle between good and evil would continue. Joseph Smith's theology, if true, not only reduced God to the level of a creature, and

18 See Wallace, 1996: 270; Carson, 1991: 225.

19 Morris, 1995: 239; Köstenberger, 2004: 157.

20 See D&C, 130:22; Alma, 18:26-28, 22:9-11 cf. Robinson, 1991:79-81; McConkie, [1981]:1.82, 730, 853, [1973]:3.136, 138; 1979:21; 1966:288.

21 See Bavink, 1997 reprint: 287-88; Brown, 1988:85; Kelly, 1976:120; Pelikan, 1971:179-80 for definitions and discussions about Patripassianism.

22 Smith, 1980:6.305.

a reformed one at that, it completely destroys any real hope that humanity might have for eternal life after death.

2.3 *God's Conversion*

Being that Joseph Smith believed that God did exist, even though "God is an exalted man", it must be asked how that man converted into a god. "We have imagined," argued Smith, "and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea and take away the veil, so that you may see." In Gnostic-like fashion, Smith rejected God's immutability and unraveled the "secret" of theosis or the deification of humanity. Of course, Smith's idea of theosis and orthodox Christianity's understanding of the same are in different universes. Whereas Smith envisioned an ontological transformation of humans into gods, the Christian view sees humankind becoming like God through the restoration of the image of God lost at the fall.²³ Again, God was special, according to Smith, but not so special as to distinguish himself from all other entities in existence, except, as noted above, by a few degrees of intelligence. Deity was not reserved only for the God whom Joseph understood him to be. Deity was an inherent part of all of humanity. It was incumbent upon humanity to realize its divine potential.

According to Smith, godhood was something to be "learned", as all of the gods and goddesses have done from eternity past. "By going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power" (Smith, 1980:306). Becoming a god was a possibility for everyone! The key to exaltation unto godhood is to "learn" the "principles of the gospel" and then put them into practice. As a person learns to climb a ladder, to use Smith's analogy, so it is when becoming a god. All one had to do was take one step, one rung, at a time. One caveat Smith issued is that such progress is not learned exclusively in this life, but includes education "beyond the grave" (Smith, 1980:307). Even God himself, as a man, lived on another earth prior to his glorious self-transformation. How long the process would took, or would take others, Smith does not divulge. What is assured is that Jesus, Heavenly Father, and all the fathers preceding them, *ad infinitum*, all patiently attained their divine statuses. Therefore, those listening to the voice of Joseph Smith can rest assured that they can do the same. It is all in the Bible. Smith simply never showed where it was to be found.

23 See James White's (1997:207-227) precise rebuttal of LDS abuse of Christian sources used to defend theosis. See also Stavropoulos, 2003:183-ff.; Rakestraw, 1997:261.

What the Bible does say about doctrines such as God's evolution, or the evolution of man unto godhood, is completely contrary to Smith's revelation, because God has not evolved or "progressed" at all. Instead, God is immutable or does not change (Ps. 102:26-28; Mal. 3:6; Jam. 1:17).²⁴ God's essence necessarily remains the same; otherwise the discussion is about something other than God.²⁵ "The divine immutability," however, "should not be understood as implying *immobility*, as if there were no movement in God," wrote Berkhof (1991 reprint:59). God is active in his creation, as it changes, and men or women repent or harden their hearts toward God. Also, God's immutability works perfectly with all of the rest of his divine attributes – aseity, eternality, love, omniscience, infinity, etc., – which means that there is no increase or decrease in any of them as well.²⁶ To say that God's infinite essence, which would include his perfection,²⁷ for example, is changeable makes no sense. It would be the equivalent of arguing that there is something infinitely more perfect than God's infinite perfection, which he has not attained. If God is not absolutely and infinitely perfect, then he is not God. He is a creature, after the order of Joseph Smith's Mormonism, at best, or an idol at worst.²⁸

2.4 *God's Company*

Whenever there is a denial of basic biblical truth regarding the person of God, it is inevitable that, before long, God will have competition from all of the gods that fallen humanity has created to either rival or succeed him. Such is the case with Joseph Smith's "revelation" that God is an exalted man who evolved unto deity. Such is the case that Smith argued was a possibility for all human beings. Whereas at one time that Smith advocated at least a quasi-monotheistic view of God (Alma, 11:28-29; 14:5; Moses, 1:6), later "revelation" found in the King Follett Discourse shows Smith's departure from his previous theological stance unto henotheism (Smith, 1980:6.474), which received its impetus from polytheism. Not only are there previous humans who have "learned how to become gods", there was a "grand council" of

24 Bavink, [2004]:2.153-59; Frame, 2002:559-61; Horton, 2002:330; Grudem, 1994:163-64; Ware, 1986:432-34; 1985:179-ff.

25 Frame 2002:568.

26 Hodge, 1977 reprint:1.390; Berkhof 1991 reprint:58; Henry 1999:5.286-ff.

27 Bavink [2004]:2.160.

28 Bavink (1997 reprint:149) wrote, "Nevertheless the doctrine of God's immutability is of the highest significance for religion. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between the Creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable, constantly striving, seeks rest and satisfaction, and finds this rest in God, in him alone, for only he is pure being and no [sic] becoming."

gods already in existence prior to the reformation of the elements that would become the constituents of the reformation (Smith, 1980:6.307-8). Eleven days prior to Smith's death, he presented an all-out assault on monotheism by proclaiming, "I will preach on the plurality of Gods" and "the doctrine of a plurality of Gods is as prominent in the Bible as any other doctrine. It is all over the face of the Bible. It stands beyond the power of controversy. A wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein" (Smith, 1980:6.474). What is unfortunate is that he completely misrepresented the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, as well as the Apostle Paul, in his effort to validate his argument.²⁹

The Bible makes it perfectly clear that God has no company, let alone a "council of gods", of which he is a part, or that he consults with to make decisions about his creation. There is only one true God, there were none formed either before or after him (Isa. 43:10), and he knows of none besides him (Isa. 44:8).³⁰ Even though God exists in trinity that in no way implies a plurality of gods, whereby through legalistic effort and pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps a finite man can become an infinite god.³¹ God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Ps. 102:25-27; Mal. 3:1; Rom. 1:23; Jam. 1:17). He has not evolved, nor has he progressed unto his station of existence. "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14 cf. Jn. 8:58) is an emphatic reminder of God's constancy. Had God changed or "progressed", as Joseph Smith argued, then there would have been a time when God did not exist. And if there were a time when God did not exist, then nothing would exist, including Joseph Smith or time.

3. Joseph Smith's Prophecies

To reiterate, the role of the biblical prophet called by God was to (1) proclaim sound doctrine consistent with God's inspired revelation, and (2) predict future events relative to the nation of Israel or God's called-out assembly,

29 Although "Paul's letters do not present a developed doctrine of the Trinity or a lengthy explanation of the interrelationships in the Godhead, but in predicating divinity of Father, Son and Spirit, Paul provided the raw data for later Christian trinitarianism" (Hawthorne, Martin & Reid, 1993:103-104).

30 Henry (1999:5.169) wrote, "The Bible is monotheistic from core to circumference. From its beginnings Christianity is no less irreducibly monotheistic than Judaism. It unwaveringly joins the Old Testament in insisting that the living God reveals himself as the one and only God."

31 Spencer W. Kimball (1982:28), "Man can transform himself and he must. Man has in himself the seeds of godhood, which can germinate and grow and develop. As the acorn becomes the oak, the mortal man becomes a god. *It is within his power to lift himself by his very bootstraps* from the plane on which he finds himself to the plane he should be. It may be a long, hard lift with many obstacles, but it is a real possibility" [emphasis added].

the church. Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:14-22 serve as general guidelines for God's people to discern whether or not anyone speaking in the name of the Lord was a prophet of God or whether that person was speaking "presumptuously". Since Joseph Smith's theological views deviate radically from the Bible as seen above (see point 2), it should not come as a surprise that his attempts at prophesying the future are equally subpar. Although Joseph Smith uttered or wrote numerous prophecies, only two will be examined here to demonstrate his deficiency: the Independence, Missouri Temple prophecy and his Civil War prophecy.

3.1 Independence, Missouri Temple Prophecy

Much ink has been spilled by both advocates and opponents of Mormonism in respect to Joseph Smith's prophecy about a Temple being built in Independence, Missouri during the days in which he lived. The prophecy itself is found in Doctrine & Covenants 84:1-5 and reads,

(1) A revelation of Jesus Christ unto his servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and six elders, as they united their hearts and lifted their voices on high. (2) Yea, the word of the Lord concerning his church, established in the last days for the restoration of his people, as he has spoken by the mouth of his prophets, and for the gathering of his saints to stand upon Mount Zion, which shall be the city of New Jerusalem. (3) Which city shall be built, beginning at the temple lot, which is appointed by the finger of the Lord, in the western boundaries of the State of Missouri, and dedicated by the hand of Joseph Smith, Jun., and others with whom the Lord was well pleased. (4) Verily this is the word of the Lord, that the city New Jerusalem shall be built by the gathering of the saints, beginning at this place, even the place of the temple, which temple shall be reared in this generation. (5) For verily this generation shall not all pass away until an house shall be built unto the Lord, and a cloud shall rest upon it, which cloud shall be even the glory of the Lord, which shall fill the house.

The major problem with the whole Independence, Missouri temple prophecy is that it simply cannot be fulfilled. The key to understanding this failed prophecy centers in the phrase "this generation", Joseph Smith and key contemporary Mormon General Authorities all believed that "this generation" pertained to those living at the time when Smith uttered the prophecy.³² It was to be a time of heightened expectation and joy that the Mormons would soon build, or return to build, God's kingdom on earth, starting with the Temple, and the return of Jesus to rule there. Mormon President George Q. Cannon (*JD*:10:344) stated in 1864, "The day is near when a Temple shall be reared

³² See D&C, 57:2-3; Smith, 1980:1.189, 287-88; Roberts, 1965:1.254, 261, 310n9, 5.532-33, 6.430.

in the Center Stake of Zion, and the Lord has said his glory shall rest on that House in *this generation, that is in the generation in which the revelation was given, which is upwards of thirty years ago*" [emphasis added]. Joseph Smith's original prophecy concerning the building of the Independence Temple was given in 1832. Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt (*JD:15:365*) reasoned, "When the Temple is built the sons of the two Priesthoods ... will enter into that Temple in *this generation, or in the generation that was living in 1832* ... and he will purify the sons of Moses and of Aaron, until they shall be prepared to offer in that Temple an offering that shall be acceptable in the sight of the Lord" [emphasis added]. Lorenzo Snow repeatedly argued that the Temple would be built by those listening to his voice. During General Conference, which is a particularly important time of supposed divine revelation that Mormon authorities dispense to the faithful, Snow would share that,

Now the time is fast approaching when a large portion of the people that I am now addressing will go back to Jackson county. *A great many people that are now dwelling in the State of Utah will have this privilege ... a large portion of the Latter-day Saints that now dwell in these valleys will go back to Jackson county to build a holy city to the Lord*, as was decreed by Jehovah and revealed through Joseph Smith [emphasis added].³³

Of course, when the day came and went without fulfillment of the prophecy, several Mormons, including Joseph Smith, offered what they thought were plausible explanations why. Smith (1980:2:129) cited persecution by Jackson county residents. Later, Joseph Fielding Smith (1974:197) wrote that only "after tribulation, and after the nations have been punished for their sins" would the Temple and Zion be built leading to Jesus' return. Bruce R. McConkie would proffer two explanations, one already cited above, namely sinners thwarting God's plans and then imperfect Saints.³⁴

The problems with the explanations or excuses for this prophecy that did not come to pass is that they do not make sense if the Mormons believed that God and Jesus are omnipotent, superior beings that they claimed them to be. If sinners can halt God's plans so easily, then just what kind of God is God? Moreover, if God must punish the wicked first, before he may proceed with his plans to build the Temple, then how does that comport with the biblical witness that the Jerusalem Temple will already be rebuilt at the time the antichrist takes his seat in the Temple when Jesus returns (2 Thess. 2:1-4)? Finally, if saintly perfection is a necessary prerequisite for Jesus' return,

33 *GCR*, October 1900:61. See also *GCR*, April 1898:61, Lorenzo Snow's, "Notable Reunion of Weber Stake", *The Deseret Evening News*, June 15, 1901.

34 McConkie, 1982:281; 1985:602.

and it is believed to be a purely human endeavour to merit God's grace (2 Nephi 25:23), then the question must be asked: Is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ even possible?³⁵ Clearly, if the Mormon reasons for the delay in building the Temple are true, then Jesus cannot be the sovereign King of kings and Lords of lords. Fallen human beings are.

3.2 The Civil War Prophecy

All eight verses of Doctrine and Covenants 87 cover Joseph Smith's lauded Civil War prophecy. Given on December 25, 1832, Smith informed his followers that the state of South Carolina would rebel against the Union, which would result "in the death and misery of many souls". While it is true that South Carolina led the way in attempting to secede from the Union, Smith failed to provide any actual reasons for the secession, but did include many details that turned out to be patently false. At issue was the subject of slavery, the inclusion of Kansas and Nebraska as new states, and whether either should be slave states in lieu of the Compromise of 1820 that set the limits on slavery in the old Louisiana territory based on the 36° 30' parallel. No new states, excluding the state of Missouri, could become a slave state above that line. When settlers in Kansas engaged in their own precursor to "Civil War" over slavery and Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States, the more formal Civil War was on, which began with several southern states seceding from the Union, beginning with South Carolina. Joseph Smith predicted none of these events.

Instead, Smith proffered "the time will come that war will be poured out upon all nations", "Great Britain" and "other nations" would become involved, after being called upon by the southern states. Smith continued by revealing, "after many days, slaves shall rise up against their masters, who shall be marshaled and disciplined for war". Any leftovers would also be marshaled "and shall become exceedingly angry, and shall vex the Gentiles with a sore vexation". During or after the time of bloodshed "the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with famine, and plague, and earthquake, and thunder of heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations". Finally, Smith encouraged the listeners to "stand ye in holy places,

35 "In our journey toward eternal life, purity must be our constant aim. To walk and talk with God, to serve with God, to follow his example and become as a god, we must attain perfection. In his presence there can be no guile, no wickedness, no transgression. In numerous scriptures he has made it clear that all worldliness, evil and weakness must be dropped before we can ascend unto 'the hill of the Lord'" (Kimball, 1969:26).

and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come; for behold, it cometh quickly, said the Lord”.

It does not take much reflection to notice the falsity of the whole prophecy, of which it would only take one false detail to disqualify Joseph Smith as a prophet of God. First, war was not “poured out on all nations” (87:2-3, 6) when the Civil War broke out. The four-year conflict was confined only to the United States and none else. Second, while those in the South may have wished for outside intervention, and especially from Great Britain, to come to its aid (87:3), so did those in the North. That said, no foreign government came to the aid of either and Great Britain made it a point to remain “neutral” concerning the whole affair, even though it sympathized with the South’s cause.³⁶ Third, while there were sporadic backlashes by slaves against their southern slave owners, none of them materialized to the degree that Smith projected. If anything, the southern slave owners grew paranoid after rejecting all arguments to emancipate their slaves due to all the incendiary propaganda being published.³⁷ “Few slave rebellions were systematically planned, and most were merely spontaneous and quite short-lived disturbances by small groups of slaves.”³⁸ In fact, very few black men were a part of the Civil War effort, with only about 10% of the Union forces consisting of black men³⁹ – and that after Congress passed the Second Confiscation and Militia Act legalizing Negro enlistment and participation – and absolutely zero participation in the Confederate Army, since “Black men were not legally allowed to serve as combat soldiers ... they were cooks, teamsters, and manual laborers.”⁴⁰

Fourth, while a few nations were effected by the final outcome of the Civil War, those effects were not dire (87:6). Ultimately, Smith called for an end

36 See Megan Gambino, “Britain and the American Civil War,” Smithsonian, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-unknown-contributions-of-brits-in-the-american-civil-war-2478471/> [accessed March 16, 2017].

37 See Bailey & Kennedy, 1987:361-62.

38 See “Slave rebellions,” Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/slave-rebellions> [accessed March 16, 2017].

39 See Freeman, Elsie, Schamel, Wynell Burroughs & West, Jean, “The Fight for Equal Rights: A Recruiting Poster for Black Soldiers in the Civil War.” *Social Education* 56, 2 (February 1992):118-120. [Revised and updated in 1999 by Budge Weidman] as “Black Soldier in the Civil War.” National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war> [accessed March 16, 2017].

40 Sam Smith, “Black Confederates: Truth and Legend,” Civil War Trust, <http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/untold-stories/black-confederates.html> [accessed March 16, 2017].

of the world, which did not happen.⁴¹ The Lord Jesus did not return, as is obvious by a casual perusal through contemporary news headlines and a comparison with biblical revelation that describes Jesus' return (Matt. 24:27, 30; Rev. 19:11-ff.). Conversely, when the Civil War ended, slavery was abolished, the United States was born anew, and nations like Great Britain were democratically strengthened. In short, Joseph Smith's Civil War prophecy was an abject failure; projecting much, but falling far short of realization.

4. Joseph Smith's Jesus

Joseph Smith believed in a Jesus. Joseph Smith's Jesus was a good man, a saviour, and a son of a god. Eventually, Joseph Smith's Jesus became a god himself, which is something he saw his father do, as was explained earlier. According to Mormon biographers (*TPC*, 2007:45), Joseph Smith "was blessed to enjoy a personal knowledge of the divinity of Jesus Christ and to understand His role as the Redeemer of the world". But, Joseph Smith's Jesus was "another Jesus" (2 Cor. 11:4).

Previously, it was pointed out Joseph Smith argued that God was "once a man like us" and "dwelt on an earth" somewhere in the universe. He is now an "exalted man", but still resides somewhere in that same universe, "nigh unto Kolob", which is a star near his throne (Abr. 3:9). Joseph Smith's Jesus is the "literal" son of that exalted man who would become a god and would sire Jesus into existence as a spirit child with the aid of a goddess whom Mormons refer to as Heavenly Mother.⁴² Since all human beings share a fallen nature, whereby they perpetually sin and are in need of forgiveness and redemption (2 Chr. 6:36; Ps. 143:2; Rom. 3:23; 5:12), then in order for the "exalted man" to have been truly "like us", Jesus perpetually sinned and was in need of forgiveness and redemption as well. According to Joseph Smith, Jesus did not receive a "fulness" at time of his earthly birth, meaning

41 See the footnote in both the online version of Doctrine and Covenants at 87:6, as well as the hardcopy 1981 edition, where "end of all nations" has been interpreted to mean "World, End of."

42 Ballard, 2016:26, 29; Marriott, 2016:11-12; Holland, 2015:50; *EoJST*, 1997:436; *TLS*, 1996:7, 191; McConkie & Millet, 1996:63; *EM*, 1992:1.234, 384; 2.486-87, 490, 503, 507, 549, 687, 785, 853, 856, 961-62; 3.1088, 1123, 1404; 4.1770; Hinckley, 1991:*LDS-CD*; Burton, 1987:*LDS-CD*; Holland, 1987:*LDS-CD*; TSWK, 1982:52; Kimball, 1978:*LDS-CD*; GCR, 1978:1948:76; 1924:16, 24; 1911:76; 1909:24; 1908:70; 1907:50; 1904:23; Smith, 1974:*LDS-CD*; Clark, 1971:4.203, 206; McConkie, 1966:516-17, 589; Smith, [1960]:3.142-44; Whitney, 1921:258; Roberts, 1912:2.268, 314; *JD*, 26:214; Nelson, 1895:738.

he was not always deity (D&C, 93:12-14, 27).⁴³ He came into the world with the taint of sin, just as his father did on another earth. Jesus was a mere man and merited his deified status one-step at a time, as one ascends a ladder. Jesus, therefore, was in need of forgiveness and salvation too, and that despite claims that he kept every law.⁴⁴ Who Jesus' saviour was, no one has ever said. Perhaps it was Satan. After all, Satan is Jesus' "spirit brother"⁴⁵ and is thought to have been interested in, and apparently capable of implementing, the salvation of humanity (Moses 4:1), until his plan of salvation was rejected in favor of Jesus' plan (Abr. 3:27-28).

Hebrews 13:8 tells us, though, "Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today, and forever." What is essentially true about Jesus in eternity past will be true about Jesus now and in eternity future. Since he is the Son of God by nature and not through a biologically procreative act between his father and his sister, he shared in all the same attributes as God and did not progress from a nebulous existence unto godhood. As God, he created all things – including Satan – without which nothing would exist (Jn. 1:3 cf. Isa. 66:2; Rom. 4:17). All things and beings in the finite universe are contingent upon him and his infinite power to hold them together (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). In him are the words and works of life, without which there is no life (Jn. 6:63, 68). When he emptied himself of the prerogative to act as God and took on the human nature (Phil. 2:6-7), he did not change his essential being as God. As the Son of Man, he bridged the gap between God and man; a chasm that was created when man sinned against God and distorted the image in which man had been created at the beginning. Jesus, as the Son of Man, his favorite self-designation, is the image that God intended for man at creation, and manifests the divine authority necessary to recreate the "new man", whereby God and man are reconciled in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17-20; Rom. 5:10).

43 "We find in the same section [D&C 93] the information that the Savior did not receive a fulness at once, but grace was given Him for grace. As He overcame He developed and progressed" (George Albert Smith, *GCR* Oct. 1906:48). See also Wilford Woodruff *JD* 5:50. Joseph Fielding Smith ([1954]:1.32-33) argued that Jesus "was a God before he was born into this world", but that "The Savior did not have a fulness at first." Yet, what kind of god is a god that is not fully God?

44 McConkie & Millet, 1996:35; Matthews, 1994:204; 1990:260; *EM*, 1992:2.724; Wood, 1958:*LF*: 5.2.

45 *Primary* 7, 1997:6; Hales, (May) 1990:*LDS-CD*; Christensen, (June) 1986:*LDS-CD*; Kimball, 1982:163; 1972:87; (December 1980):*LDS-CD*; Merrill, *GCR* (April) 1949:27.

5. Conclusions

After examining and evaluating what a biblical prophet was and whether Joseph Smith fit the description, the following final thoughts are offered to tie them together into a comprehensive whole.

First, a biblical prophet was a significant, specially called person by God, who served as God's spokesperson in at least two different ways. He divulged the special revelation given by God concerning Himself, as well as events and people associated with the nation of Israel. Whenever a biblical prophet spoke in the name of the Lord, his words never contradicted either God's revelation or another biblical prophet. His theology was consistent, in other words. There was only God, his name was Yahweh, and over the course of time God revealed that His essential being was manifested in three persons: God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. When it came to prognosticating the future, as it dealt with the nation of Israel, and more specifically as the prophecy culminated in the revelation of Jesus Christ as the saviour and redeemer of the world, it, too, was consistent. The biblical prophet did not contradict another biblical prophet. Biblical prophecy ultimately culminated in the person of Jesus Christ, even though at the time the prophet was prophesying, he was unaware of that ramification.

Second, when we turned to the examination of Joseph Smith's alleged calling as a biblical prophet, we found similarities in the person and teachings of Muhammad. Joseph Smith's theology was inconsistent with the claims of the Bible, that there is only one true God, who found expression in His Trinitarian character. In fact, Joseph Smith completely denied the Trinity and chose, instead, to deify humans. There was one god that Smith and the Mormons believed in (henotheism), but there were multiple gods in existence (polytheism), many of whom were "gods in embryo" on earth, that were working their way to the lofty "exalted" state of full godhood, just as "Heavenly Father" had done. God was not always God, in other words, but through the process of "Eternal Progression", God became what he currently is, and because God accomplished such a feat, as did his relatives, then God's offspring, whom he sired with his Heavenly Wife, can do the same.

Third, Joseph Smith is the authoritative spokesperson for all things Mormon. Everything that Mormonism represents stands or falls depending on what he said or wrote. What Smith had to say about God either equated him with creation or equated nature with God. It was a type of pantheism that evolved into polytheism that was defended with henotheism and redefined as monotheism. Smith and Mormonism's "God" is not the God of the Bible,

except in an idolatrous way. Smith's "God" was not always God, but became a god and that only through a process of "Eternal Progression". Since idols are nothing in the world, it could be postulated that Smith's theology ultimately tends toward atheism or no God at all, since idols are not gods either and only exist in the minds of those who create them.

Fourth, Smith's effort at predicting future events demonstrated his lack of knowing anything about it. To this day, there is no Mormon Temple sitting on the Temple Lot in Independence, Missouri, dedicated by Smith that was to be built in the generation in which he lived. In fact, a faction of Mormonism, the Hedrickites, owns the property and that without any prospect of selling it to the Utah faction.⁴⁶ All Mormons in that generation have long since passed away.

Moreover, the Civil War came and went without fulfillment of Smith's projections about it. No foreign nations were involved, the slaves did not rise up against their masters *en masse*, the world did not end, and Jesus did not return.

Fifth, Joseph Smith's prophetic ability was also uncharacteristic of a biblical prophet in the sense that the biblical prophet had to be one-hundred percent accurate to be deemed one of God's own. In the two examples presented, which are two of Joseph Smith's most famous prophecies, neither one happened as stated, nor could they. The Temple Lot in Independence, Missouri is still vacant, with all of the expectant Mormons in that generation – whom Smith *et al.* promised would see the Temple and New Jerusalem build while they were alive – all deceased. The Civil War did not bring about the calamity or participants Smith prophesied that it would. Moreover, neither of the prophecies had anything to do with the nation of Israel, much less the person of Jesus Christ, except perhaps indirectly to bolster the persona of Smith's image. Regardless, the prophecies failed, thereby setting Smith outside the description of a biblical prophet.

Finally, Joseph Smith's view of Jesus, like his view of God, was devoid of biblical fidelity. Rather than an immutable Jesus, who was/is God, very God from all eternity, Smith spoke of an ever-evolving "intelligence" that was sired naturally and "literally" into existence by heavenly parents. Jesus became one of billions of their "spirit children". When it came time for Jesus to become the

46 See Richard Donald Ouelette, "The Mormon Temple Lot Case: Space, Memory, and Identity in a Divided New Religion" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, 2012):337-ff.; Michael De Groote (2009), "Jackson County temple lot saga", *Deseret News*, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705312028/Jackson-County-temple-lot-saga.html> [accessed March 31, 2017].

Saviour of the world, Heavenly Father made a conjugal visit to his daughter Mary, to sire the physical body of Jesus.⁴⁷ Jesus, therefore, is the product of an incestuous relationship between his humanly “exalted” father and his celestially coequal sister. Eventually, Jesus would merit his “fullness” as a god, but not until after he was resurrected.⁴⁸ By biblical deduction, he was a miserable sinner, as his father was, in need of forgiveness and a redeemer. The theological, doctrinal, and prophetic deficiency of Joseph Smith shows clearly that his claim to be a prophet of God in the Biblical sense cannot be true.

Therefore, after examining the biblical evidence as to what a biblical prophet was and comparing it with the theological and historical evidence provided by authoritative references found in both Mormon and Islamic camps, the only possible conclusion that can be drawn is that not even Joseph Smith was a biblical prophet, as many Mormons argue. According to the biblical standard, Smith like Muhammad, instead of advocating a theology and futuristic outlook consistent with God’s revelation recorded by the biblical prophets, advocated theologies and prophecies that were contrary and erroneous.

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47 McConkie, 1981:473; 1966:742; Benson, 1988:7; 1983:3-4; Millet & Top 1987:1.9; 2.230; Smith [1954]:1.19-ff.

48 Some Mormons wish to argue that Jesus was “a God” prior to, as well as during, his earthly visit (see Matthews, 1994:12), but such an argument is more in line with the ancient Gnostic and Arian heresy, as well as contemporary Jehovah’s Witness doctrine, than it is with, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn. 1:1). Moreover, if Jesus was not fully God (cf. Col. 1:19; 2:9), then just what kind of god is “a god” that is not fully one?

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