

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be looking at what "revelation" is.

I'm extending an invitation for submissions to be published in The Gospel Notes Newsletter. The primary criteria for inclusion are these:

1. It should be oriented towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It should use the scriptures as a source of information.
3. It should include the references for any quoted 3rd party sources.
4. It should not be political.

Also, if you have any Gospel subjects that you would like me to cover in the Newsletter, please let me know.

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If there is one thing that distinguishes The Church of Jesus Christ from other churches, it is the belief that God still lives and reveals himself to us in modern times as well as times past. Yes, there are other things as well, but without that first revelation to Joseph Smith, Jr. in the grove the idea that God lives today would be an interesting hypothetical belief for yet another denomination of Christianity. Likewise, the necessity for those continued revelations would invariably have fallen on unrepentant ears.

Granted, many churches **today** believe that God reveals himself in a variety of important but non-verbal ways, such as being "led by the Spirit" but in fairly non-specific ways most of the time. People **today** in other churches report that they **felt** the call of the Spirit to their various ministries, but this was absolutely, irrevocably, and undeniably not the case in the early 1800's.

Consider that when Joseph Smith, Jr. made this claim, he was quickly denounced as a fraud, a charlatan, and even a man possessed by the devil. In that day all such people who said they were inspired by God were quickly denounced as followers of some "foreign religion" and branded as heretics. Let it not be forgotten that Joseph Smith, Jr. was tarred and feathered at least twice. Let it sink in that someone had to take the time to **boil** tar to the point it could be poured onto someone's flesh – which could cause deep burns and terrible pain, and to add insult they would fluff chicken, turkey or goose feathers on them to humiliate them further. Joseph reported the difficulty he and others had in **scraping** the **now cooled** tar from his skin.

Yes, it was Christian denominations that performed these heinous acts against someone who testified that Jesus lives and that dared to speak of continued revelations from God. Joseph didn't hold it against them though – he knew that they were fulfilling prophecies with every act they performed. Nor do we today hold any of those terrible things against them. He understood that Jesus suffered far worse things for our sakes.

Even today there is still condemnation placed upon us by many of these groups which say that "the Bible is a closed book." It's remarkable that they likewise sell all sorts of different bibles, some of which are so far departed from the original text that it would be merciful to call it a paraphrase.

While we do believe in continued revelation from God, it is not always that we testify of hearing a spoken voice from heaven telling us things – we do also believe in the more mundane, though it is sometimes difficult to qualify any communication from God as mundane. The idea is that we do not believe that God has limits in how he is able to communicate with us, even when that sometimes does mean hearing a voice from heaven.

I would, however, make one observation. I don't know of any place recorded in scripture where God tells his people things they didn't need to know. Another observation may be that God's purpose in communicating with us is to tell us things we don't know or don't understand. If we receive a communication from God that only serves to confirm things we already know, how truly useful is that communication?

But, you may say, God confirms things with a 2nd or 3rd witness. True enough. Two or three **different** witnesses. I know what you're probably thinking: What about Gideon and Peter. What do I mean by that?

In the days before the Kings of Israel and Judah were established, they had judges whom God would raise up to judge Israel and to deliver them from their enemies. Gideon was told by an angel that he was to be a means for saving Israel from their enemies. Over the course of two days there was a conversation that Gideon had with God concerning this.

Judges 6

36 And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand as thou hast said,

37 Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only and it be dry upon all the earth besides, **then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand as thou hast said.**

38 And it was so; for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece--a bowl full of water.

39 **And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once; let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.**

40 And God did so that night; for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

For the second example regarding Peter, we find that the Lord had something important to get across to him which would significantly affect his ministry.

Acts 10

9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour;

10 And he became very hungry and would have eaten; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,

11 **And saw heaven opened and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners and let down to the earth,**

12 Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

13 And there came a voice to him: Rise, Peter; kill and eat.

14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.

15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time: What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

16 **This was done thrice; and the vessel was received up again into heaven.**

Surely this means that God will show us something that we already know, right? Not exactly.

Gideon received his first witness but was not entirely confident that he wasn't the victim of a deception or of chance, so the second witness he received made it incontrovertible. Peter received his witness three times and **still** didn't understand it, at least, not until he received word to go see some Gentiles.

Acts 10:17 Now **while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean,** behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,

It was not until he opened his mouth to share the Gospel that he understood,

Acts 10

34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said, **Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons;**

35 But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.

Notice in both of these examples that the revelation had little meaning until it was unfolded to their understanding. That is important. Revelation without meaning is little more than words without form.

That is not to say that when a revelation is given that the meaning necessarily follows it so quickly. The prophet Daniel received a revelation that not even he understood very well:

Daniel 12

4 But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.

5 Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, there stood other two--the one on this side of the bank of the river and the other on that side of the bank of the river.

6 And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?

7 And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven and swore by him that liveth forever that it shall be for a time, times, and a half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished.

8 And I heard, but I understood not. Then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?

9 And he said, Go thy way, Daniel; for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

10 Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.

11 And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days.

12 Blessed is he that waiteth and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days.

13 But go thou thy way till the end be; for thou shalt rest and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.

In this passage we find that Daniel has just seen a great vision and has been visited by angels, and still did not understand everything that he just saw. The answer the angel gave to his question is perhaps surprising, which is essentially, "Don't worry about it – it is enough for you to just record what you saw."

The important thing is that ***there is a meaning***, and not just a random spewing of images and conversations. This is a true revelation from God.

Let us then compare true meanings with false meanings.

Perhaps one of the most popular things for different churches to do is to speculate about the end of times, due in no small part to the way many of these revelations were given. In some respects, the less secure the understanding of a prophecy may be, the more interesting and debated it is, with all the imaginative and diversionary interpretations it brings up. Speculation on the interpretation of prophecies is perhaps as popular a sport in churches as baseball, basketball, football, or soccer is for sports enthusiasts.

The Church of Jesus Christ is not immune to these influences either. Where lack of knowledge is, there is speculation, regardless of where you are from or where you are at.

Before I proceed, I must admit that I do not understand all prophecies and revelations, so I am not immune to the speculation bug myself. However, I do try to temper my views with the openness of learning the truth wherever I may find it. Sometimes that leads you into an understanding that opens your mind to a much greater reality than you knew before, and sometimes it leads you to an understanding that is in significant opposition to what you may have thought before. My purpose here is not to “showcase” all of my views on prophecy – which may or may not be accurate -- but to show somewhat how to begin to understand and recognize the truth. There have been many times when I had to realize that I had made one or more assumptions about a given prophecy that were just not valid assumptions. Realizing that can make all the difference in how you see things.

Generally speaking, a false interpretation of a prophecy or revelation requires several things (this is my personal list, so be forewarned that it may be biased.)

Warnings signs that a “revelation” or “prophecy” is false:

1. If the interpretation seems to require all other scriptures to refer to it alone, even putting aside the Gospel of Christ as a pre-requisite.
2. If any one part of the interpretation can fail under simple questioning.
3. If extra scriptural sources must be used to prove it.
4. If the interpretation inspires fear or anger to the exclusion of love and faith.
5. If any one verse of scripture is used to provide different meanings for different parts of the prophecy or revelation.
6. If the interpretation diminishes your view of the plan of salvation.
7. If the interpretation ignores the plan of salvation.
8. If understanding of the entire prophecy hinges on the specific (perhaps obscure) translation or definition of only one or two words.
9. If the context of a passage is ignored because a small phrase within the text encompasses the whole meaning.
10. If it clearly violates the commandments.
11. If the interpretation requires you to ignore other scriptures that suggest a different meaning.
12. If it denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

I could go on, but these are some general guidelines to consider before you metaphorically jump onto a bandwagon when introduced to some new interpretation of a revelation or even a new “revelation.” Do some of my views get tagged by any of these points? Possibly, (hopefully not,) but that is why I put this list together – to challenge my understanding as much as the understanding of anyone else. My growth in understanding is not complete.

God communicates with his people in many ways, and while any such communication **may** be considered a revelation, not all of them reveal future events. A revelation is a “reveal-ment” of God to his creation, giving insight into his nature and character, his commandments and promises, things about ourselves and the world around us that we didn’t know before, and yes, also including things that have been and things that will be.

To show the diversities of the ways by which revelation can be given, consider this example. The apostles cast lots to decide which of the disciples should be ordained as the next apostle after Judas Iscariot died. This was not just a random selection, they **asked the Lord to use this means** to show them which one should be ordained.

Acts 1

24 And they prayed and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen,

25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Why didn’t they ask the Lord to speak with them and just tell them who the next one should be? Perhaps it was because the Lord wanted them to do their homework before just throwing out random names. We know that Saul (Paul) and Barnabas were called by the voice of the Holy Ghost:

Acts 13

1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted, and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Why didn’t these “prophets and teachers” cast lots like the apostles did? Maybe they didn’t know there was a need to fill those roles, giving room for the Holy Ghost to show them something they didn’t know. The Holy Ghost uses different means at times to communicate with people.

It is important to understand that God communicates about things, people and events, but most especially he communicates about himself. Many Psalms were written by the prophetic influence of the Holy Ghost, and in them are described many of the perfections and attributes of God. If we know more about the kind of being we are to worship, our worship will be more fruitful. Fruitful in this case refers to how our worship is accepted by the Lord and how the Lord blesses us.

We can see 1 Corinthians 12 and Moroni 10 (concerning the gifts of the Spirit) as showing numerous examples of how the Lord may communicate information to us, but even this list is not absolute and complete – they only serve to demonstrate some of the means that the Lord has at his disposal. An infinite being like God is not constrained as we are. (Notice that it does not strictly list visitations of angels, for example, though we know from other scriptures that God uses angels to communicate with us, such as with Daniel and Gideon as described earlier.)

The benefit that we have in the latter days is that we have so much given to us for examples of revelations which are true that it should be simpler for us to discern the good from the bad. In the days of the apostles, the idea of receiving a revelation was not a revolutionary idea – they had a culture that accepted the role of prophets and of prophecy as well as revelation...even if they didn't always follow the truth when it was given to them. That is perhaps the disadvantage that we have in the latter days – much of the culture we live in consists of people who are unwilling to accept the idea that the spirit of revelation and prophecy is a real and continuing gift from God.

As the saying sometimes goes, ***I'll give you three guesses, but only the first one matters***, as to who would want us to believe that there is no further revelation or prophecy from God. The enemy of God, the devil, also known as Satan, wants us to lose faith. For Satan to destroy our faith, he needs to keep us from hearing the word of God. We know how the process of faith takes place because the scriptures tell us:

Romans 10:16 So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

If you take away someone's belief that the word of God is given to them today as well as yesterday and forever, then you take away their faith in the being who wants to communicate himself to them. Satan desires to take away your faith, and he can do so for some by working to take away their belief that God is alive enough and powerful enough to talk to his creation today as well and as much as he did in times past.

God has messages for all of his people in one way or another, but we need to understand the content of those messages for them to have any effect upon us. There are some things that God wants us to work out for ourselves as well – he never asked us to be mindless drones after all. In most cases it is safe to say that God wants to communicate matters of life to us, eternal life. Sure, if we want to know tomorrow's weather forecast we might ask God, but the reality is that we should ask him about things that matter to him. He will share that with us, or at the very least point us in the right direction. Is that asking for a revelation? One could argue that it is, but Jesus did tell the apostles this:

Luke 10

10 And I say unto you, **Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.**

11 **For everyone who asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him who knocketh, it shall be opened.**

12 If a son shall ask bread of any of you who is a father, will he give him a stone? or, if a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?

13 Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

14 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good gifts, through the Holy Spirit, to them who ask him.

And there are some cautions provided by James:

James 4

1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

2 Ye lust and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war; **yet ye have not because ye ask not.**

3 **Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.**

The purpose of communicating with God is not to elevate yourself among others, or to gain adulation or congratulations from those around you, nor yet is it the purpose of communicating with God to ask for things that you don't truly need. Knowing what those important things to ask actually are is one of the reasons we have the scriptures and why we need to be diligent about understanding our own purposes. We need to make sure that our purposes are in alignment with God's purposes.

Once we've confirmed this we understand that our faith and prayers will be more effectual –

James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. **The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.**

The “effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” is not just true in prayers for healings, but for anything related to faith and our desires for good. The carefulness and diligence we use in our prayers of faith are likewise explained by James:

James 1

5 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.

6 But let him ask in faith, **nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea,** driven with the wind and tossed.

7 For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.

8 A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

It should not be surprising that this passage in James was key to how Joseph Smith, Jr. applied himself to prayer that notable day in the grove when he saw the Lord and therefore had his first revelation from Jesus Christ. When he went to pray, he believed that it was important, he believed that he would get an answer, and he believed that it was necessary. That is not to say that we should all expect to receive the same experience Joseph had, but it should set the stage for us to understand that if God wanted it to be so, he could. You should also note that Joseph didn't ask to see the Lord, but to get guidance from him. The Lord surpassed Joseph's expectations and we have gleaned the benefit.

Moreover, God knows us better than we know ourselves, so he understands if our faith is unwavering, or if it is shaky; he knows if the reason we are asking is because of pure desires for good; he knows if our heart is prepared to get the answer; he knows if it is necessary to further the work of his kingdom or for the salvation of our soul.

That is to say, God is the smarter of the two of us, and we can't trick him; he knows what is best for us.

God reveals himself to us in myriad ways, but we need to be prepared to accept the truth when it is given. The scriptures are full of people that wanted to know the will of the Lord but refused to accept the answer. King Ahab famously refused to believe the Lord despite getting answers through Elijah. The rulers among the Jews refused to accept the reality of who Jesus was despite all the evidences given to them.

There is a somewhat famous quote which says, “Don't ask questions you don't want the answer to,” and that applies here as well. If you aren't willing to receive the answer, don't ask, but if you truly want to know, ask and it shall be given. There is one further condition given by King Benjamin to his people:

Mosiah 2:36 And now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives and for all that ye have and are, **doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right**, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, oh, then, how had ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another?

Did you catch the part about asking for things that are right? That is a matter of discernment, and it is an important part of this equation.

Desired Results = [(faith + hope) x (unwavering + knowing it is right)] x patience

That is to say, God will reveal himself in the way that is most important, and according to how you pray. For Saul (later Paul) it meant realizing that he was missing the part about “knowing it is right” when he was diligently going about the business of capturing Christians and sending them to be either imprisoned or executed. He didn’t get his desired result, but instead got something better, and it completely transformed him from one kind of person into another. Whether we have as far to go as Paul did is another question, but the Lord was able to work with him to get him on the right track.

How diligent we are about communicating with God and how we serve God will be reflected in how he is able to work with us, as shown by the following passage in John’s revelation:

Revelation 3

14 And unto the servant of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God:

15 I know thy works, that **thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot.**

16 So then, **because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.**

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing--and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked--

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.

19 **As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent.**

Saul (Paul) was hot to serve the Lord, though in his case it meant his zealousness was to destroy and not to save, but the Lord was able to work a change within him to turn that towards saving lives instead of taking them. But if Saul had not been so passionate about what he believed, it would not have been nearly as effective for the Lord to change his heart – like pushing on a rope it wouldn’t have accomplished as much. When Paul was converted, it made a difference in the kind of Desired Results of serving the Lord that he was able to work towards. His equation made sense at that point.

It is true for each of us as well, but we must give the Lord something to work with so that he can reveal himself through us for the salvation of others. In doing so, we shall also be saved if we continue in faith and in the grace of the Lord; not that we save ourselves, but that we let him save us. That is the true purpose of revelation – to bring about salvation -- and it is just as important for us to receive faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and obey his commandments as it was for him to have gone to the cross for our sakes. He reveals himself to us and ultimately we shall have the perfect revelation of him as our savior.

1 John 3

1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; **therefore, the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.**

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that **when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.**

Receiving that revelation is important, because it means we have eternal life.

John 17:3 **And this is life eternal, that they might know thee,** the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

To me that seems like a very important revelation that we can receive. It is not without example.

Ether 1

76 And when he had said these words, behold, the Lord showed himself unto him and said, **Because thou knowest these things, ye are redeemed from the fall;** therefore, ye are brought back into my presence; therefore, I show myself unto you.

77 Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son.

By his faith he could not be held without the spiritual vail (veil) that separates us from the spiritual world any longer, and the Lord gave him the revelation of himself, which had great meaning for the Brother of Jared, with whom this conversation was taking place. We must assume that the Brother of Jared would go on to receive this eternal life which the Lord spoke to the apostles about, and which Jesus prayed for in his last moments before being betrayed by Judas Iscariot.

It was vitally important that we should understand that the God we worship is a living God because only a living God can continue to fulfill his promises and ultimately fulfill his original purpose in us and for us. Occasionally we need a reminder that God is alive because the world wants to turn us down from believing this, but we can be assured that those reminders are powerful and meaningful for us in the long term. This spiritual food is what sustains us and allows us to be productive when otherwise we might fall far short of the plans God has for us.

Let God work in you. Let him reveal himself to you without resistance, but use your whole soul including your mind so that you are not led about by the various winds of doctrine that float around to distract you.

1 Thessalonians 5

16 Rejoice evermore.

17 Pray without ceasing.

18 In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

19 Quench not the Spirit.

20 Despise not prophesyings.

21 **Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.**