

## PROPHETS OF GOD

### DISCERNING TRUE AND FALSE PROPHETS

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## IDENTIFYING TRUE PROPHETS

In prophesying of the end days, the Lord cautioned that we should beware of false prophets who come to us in sheep's clothing, looking harmless and peaceful, yet inwardly are ravenous wolves (see Matthew 7:15).<sup>1</sup>

*And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.*

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<sup>1</sup> Note that references from the Old and New Testament are taken from the Joseph Smith inspired version of the Bible. Any deviance in the King James Version of the Bible is noted in brackets following the reference.

*And many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that remaineth steadfast, and is not overcome, the same shall be saved.*

*Matthew 24:5-11*

Living in the day of prophesy where false prophets and false Christs are arising, it is more critical now than ever to discern true prophets from false prophets, lest we also be deceived. “For in those days, there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if possible, they shall deceive the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant. Behold, I speak these things unto you for the elect's sake” (Matthew 24:23-24).

For the elect's sake, let us define the difference between true and false prophets that we may not be deceived. We'll start out by establishing the baseline of what prophets are and are not based out of scriptures, and then proceed to place this established understanding in our current culture and see how those who profess to be prophets stand up against the thresholds the Lord sets.

## WHAT IS A PROPHET?

A prophet is a man--a prophetess is a woman--who speaks for and in behalf of God. In short, he or she is one who prophesies. That sounds simple enough. To prophesy is to speak of things to come in the future. It is to predict coming events. Joseph Smith said the following about prophets:

*What are we to understand by a Prophet[?] It is his character to predict things that are in the future. I ask what right has any man or set of men or preist or set of preists to say if a man will not do so and so he shall be damn'd. Is he not takeing upon himself or assumeing the character of a Prophet[?] consequently he must either be a true or false Prophet.<sup>2</sup>*

We learn quite a bit from Joseph's statement. If we are predicting something in the future, whether events to come or consequences of others' actions, by definition we “assume” the characteristics of a prophet and therefore “must either be a true or a false prophet.” Hopefully, this declaration makes each of us pause before opening our mouths. The other concept we learn from Joseph is that there are true prophets and there are false prophets. Even if a man or woman does not claim to be a prophet, they assume the mantle of a prophet if they attempt to proclaim future events.

We have this erroneous idea that some individuals are prophets simply by station and calling and others are not or cannot be. Particularly in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the term “prophet” is a calling from God given to the highest ranking leader of the church, and once a prophet always a prophet. How often do members of the church proclaim, “Follow the prophet,” and what they mean is to follow the president of the church. Not only does Joseph debunk this idea, he goes further to declare that a prophet is only a prophet when he is acting as such, meaning when he is prophesying.

*This morning, I read German, and visited with a brother and sister from Michigan, who thought that ‘a prophet is always a prophet;’ but I told them that a prophet was a prophet only when he was acting as such.<sup>3</sup>*

If the mantra of the members of the church is to “follow the prophet,” it would behoove each the members to determine whether those men leading the church that proclaim to be prophets are 1) true prophets or false prophets, and 2) what they have prophesied. If there is no prophesy, then how can they be a prophet?

## HOW DOES ONE BECOME A TRUE PROPHET?

If we are going to listen to one man or another, our responsibility is to determine whether a prophet is a true or false prophet. If we are willing to place our eternal salvation in the hands of individuals who claim to be prophets, we better be sure that they are indeed what they say they are or we will suffer the consequences of following false prophets.

<sup>2</sup> Ehat, A.F. and Cook, L. W. (1980). *The Words of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center BYU. Page 230.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973) 5:265. (Hereafter *History of the Church*.)

So, how does someone determine whether a man or woman is a true prophet(ess)? It should be obvious to us that true prophets are called by God's voice to speak his words. God determines whom he will choose, not men. It is not left up to an individual, committee, counsel, group, common consent, election, or any other man-made process to select a prophet. Only God can call a prophet and give him authority to prophesy in his name.

The structure of the church relies heavily upon the hierarchical approach to authority. They claim to be the only entity upon the earth that holds the priesthood authority of God and have a "living prophet" at the head of the church. It is true that the church is dependant upon the priesthood of God in order to function. But it is not true that the priesthood requires the church to function. The priesthood is the power of God given to men, and God is not limited to working with only members of the church to do his work. After all, according to church history, the church was not organized when Joseph Smith received his authority from God.

True prophets do not need to get their priesthood or authority or calling from an organization or another person, nor do they have to be an apostle or presiding leader in any church. True prophets get their authority directly from God. Answering a question of whether the priesthood of Melchizedek was taken away when Moses died, Joseph Smith said:

*All priesthood is Melchizedeck; but there are different portions or degrees of it. That portion which brought Moses to speak with God face to face was taken away; but that which brought the ministry of angels remained. All the Prophets had the Melchizedeck Priesthood and was ordained by God himself.<sup>4</sup>*

Notice how Joseph stated that "all prophets" held the priesthood of God and that priesthood was "ordained by God himself," not by man. To claim that a man is called as a prophet of God because he fills the vacancy of a particular position in an organization or church is preposterous. Additionally, to claim that God cannot call and ordain a prophet outside the leadership of the church is distortion of truth and an attempt to confine God to man's manipulation. As much as the leadership of the church may claim to have all the keys and authority of God, the truth is that God holds all those keys and will give them to whomever he pleases. Joseph Smith was called by God and given authority without being a member of any church. His calling as a true prophet of God shows us that there are no prerequisites to be a true prophet. God can call anyone of any age of any background.

## WHAT DOES A TRUE PROPHET DO?

One way to identify a true prophet from a false prophet is the fruits of their works. What distinguishes a true prophet from a false prophet? A true prophet always leads people to Christ and teaches them to become like the Christ. When preaching or prophesying, they will never stand in the way of the Lord, puffing up their own position or status, but will stand aside so you can come directly to God. Joseph Smith suggested that true prophets will teach the characteristics and nature of God. They can do this because they themselves have come to know God. Joseph knew that unless we come to know God ourselves, then we cannot attain eternal life. A true prophet will want to help bridge that gap, not stand in the way of it. "Remember," Jacob declared, "that his paths are righteousness. Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him, and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel: and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way, save it be by the gate, for he cannot be deceived; for the Lord God is his name" (2 Nephi 6 [9:41]).<sup>5</sup>

Joseph said the following:

*If any inquire what kind of a being God is, I would say If you dont know God you have not eternal life, go back & find out what kind of a being God is. If I am the man that shows you what kind of a being God is, then let evry man & woman sit in silence and*

<sup>4</sup> "Discourse, 5 January 1841, as Reported by William Clayton," p. 5, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-5-january-1841-as-reported-by-william-clayton/2>.

<sup>5</sup> Note that scripture references from the Book of Mormon come from the 1830 published edition. The standard 2013 edition reference is found in brackets.

*never lift up his hand against me again[.] if I do not do it, I will not make any further pretensions to inspiration or to be a prophet, I would be like the rest of the world, fals teachers & you would want to take my life.*<sup>6</sup>

Like Joseph did for our ancestral fathers, the early saints of this dispensation, so should all true prophets do. True prophets teach people the nature and character of the Christ and how to come to know him personally, and then they will allow you the opportunity to do it. They will teach that only the Savior can save and that the Redeemer is the only foundation we can rely upon. In contrast, a false prophet will stand in our way in coming to know God. False prophets proclaim that you can only receive salvation if you follow their words or obey their precepts. They teach scriptures mingled with their own ideas and philosophies. They twist the scriptures and manipulate their words so that they will sound so close to the truth that you will want to follow them. They make claims that if you follow them then you will never be led the wrong way.

A false prophet will teach what looks like truth, but will be off the mark. What is the mark? It is the Savior, Jesus Christ. These men often look like holy men outwardly--in sheep's clothing. They act and look like good shepherds, but inwardly are wolves. They are deceivers. The Lord said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits" (3 Nephi14:15-16; see also Matthew 7:15-16). Additionally, Joseph taught:

*When a man goes about prophesying and commands men to obey his teachings, he must be either a true or false prophet; false prophets always arise to oppose the true prophets, and they will prophesy so very near the truth that they will deceive almost the very chosen ones.*<sup>7</sup>

Regarding false prophets, Joseph prophesied that "in these times in the last days there will many fals prophets arise and false teachers and decieve many[.] the[y] Shall have many followers by their deceit. the[y] Strive to have power and by their pernicious ways lead of[f] many."<sup>8</sup>

## WHO CAN BE A PROPHET?

Anyone can become a prophet. There is no prerequisite, nor is there any class distinction. It does not matter what you do for a living, how much money you make, where you live, or how you live. It does not matter how old or how educated you are. To Jeremiah, the Lord said he was chosen before he was born. "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:4-5). Joseph Smith said "every man has a right to be a false prophet as well as a true prophet."<sup>9</sup> A man does not need to be a member of any specific church or denomination.

God gives priesthood to man; man does not claim it for himself. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not have a monopoly on the priesthood of God. Though the church is dependent upon the priesthood, the priesthood is not dependent upon the church. Joseph said, "The Lord knows I do not care how many churches are in the world. As many as believe me, may. If the doctrine that I preach is true, the tree must be good. I have prophesied things that have come to pass, and can still."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> "Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 4, 1 March–22 June 1844," p. [67], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-4-1-march-22-june-1844/69>

<sup>7</sup> "History, 1838–1856, volume F-1 [1 May 1844–8 August 1844]," p. 18, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-f-1-1-may-1844-8-august-1844/24>

<sup>8</sup> Ehat, A.F. and Cook, L. W. (1980). *The Words of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center BYU. Page 370.

<sup>9</sup> "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Willard Richards," p. [67], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-willard-richards/1>

<sup>10</sup> Ehat, A.F. and Cook, L. W. (1980). *The Words of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center BYU. Page 375.

The Lord stated that his church is composed of those who repent and believe on his name. “Behold this is my doctrine: whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church. whosoever declareth more or less than this, the same is not of me, but is against me: therefore, he is not of my church” (D&C 36:16 [10:67-68]).<sup>11</sup>

There are several examples of God calling prophets who are not within church or government leadership. God is no respecter of persons but chooses whomever he will, and does not discriminate on age, gender, wealth, learning, etc. Some are called when they are very young, like Samuel, Daniel, and Joseph Smith. Others were aristocrats or well known in their respective kingdoms, such as Obadiah and Isaiah. Like Obadiah, some were very wealthy, including Lehi. Some were priests or of a priestly lineage, including Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Most were simple men with simple lives, such as shepherds like Amos, Micah, and David. All of these men were prophets, yet none of them acquired that divine calling through succession or committee. How did they become prophets? All of them were called of God. And all of them were obedient to God’s commandments.

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## CHURCH TEACHINGS ON PROPHETS

Now that we have a core baseline of prophets, let’s see how the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints applies these principles to the doctrines of the church, since the church claims to have a living prophet but rejects the idea that any other person can become a prophet aside from the president of the church.

One of the core teachings regarding prophets in the church comes from an address given at Brigham Young University in 1980 by then Elder Ezra Taft Benson. In a speech to the university student body he gave fourteen fundamental points of following the prophet. (Notice the subliminal use of the article “the” throughout his speech.) He called these fundamentals “aspects of a grand key” to which if the students followed they will be crowned with God’s glory. Here is the grand key he gives: follow the prophet.

Much of the current theology of modern-day prophets in the church comes from Benson’s landmark speech. His speech set a foundation of belief upon which many church leaders and members over the past 30 years have built their understanding of a prophet. The 14 fundamentals he declared have become church doctrine. In his closing remarks, Benson stated, “If we want to know how well we stand with the Lord then let us ask ourselves how well we stand with His mortal captain—how close do our lives harmonize with the Lord’s anointed—the living Prophet—President of the Church, and with the Quorum of the First Presidency.”<sup>12</sup>

Though not the first to say something like this, this statement encapsulates the entirety of the concept of prophets to members of the church. The only living prophet in the eyes of church members is the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And even though members are required to proclaim each of the 15 members of the leading quorums of the church as “prophets, seers, and revelators,” only the presiding leader is consider “the” prophet.

This statement suggests that no one can be in harmony with God unless they are in harmony with the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and with the “Quorum of the First Presidency.” Though Benson’s fundamentals set a precedent for church doctrine regarding prophets, it also expanded unilateral authority and power for the leaders of the church. It has created a temperament within the church where to question the leaders is to question God himself. It has created an opportunity for the president and highest quorums of the church to do almost anything without accountability to the members, because to question their policies, processes, actions, declarations, or practices is to question their authority. It is heresy in the eyes of the church. It is apostasy.

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### FOLLOW THE BRETHREN

Several statements within Benson’s speech contradict ideas and doctrines recorded in scripture, and though supported by mainstream cultural belief in the church, they are not support by historical precedent. Scriptures both ancient and modern counsel that we not lean upon men for salvation, but only upon God, yet Benson is suggesting that in order for us to know

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<sup>11</sup> Note that scripture references from the Doctrine & Covenants (hereafter D&C) come from the 1835 published edition. The standard 2013 edition reference is found in brackets.

<sup>12</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet.” Address given Tuesday, February 26, 1980, at Brigham Young University.

our standing before God, we have to look at how closely we follow the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Dallin Oaks, a member of the first presidency in the church, stated in a question/answer session with members of the church in Boise, Idaho, “For most Mormons, the key question on who’s on the Lord’s side is how they feel about the church’s current prophetic leadership. If those feelings are sufficiently negative, they take members into what we call apostasy.”<sup>13</sup>

One of the complicated issues related to Benson’s speech is that in his fundamental principles, a living prophet and his words trump all previous prophets and scriptures. So even though scriptures may contradict a beliefs or teachings of the current president of the church, members are discouraged from questioning those contradictions. In his speech, Benson suggests that we can rely upon the president of the church to tell us everything that God wants us to do in order to receive salvation. Yet Isaiah counsels that we should seek direction directly from the Lord rather than from men. “Cease ye from man,” he warns, “whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of” (Isaiah 2:22). Moreover, Nephi adds more pointed language about the dangers of relying upon man for salvation and teachings. “Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm, or shall hearken unto the precepts of men, save their precepts shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 12 [28:31]).

Even in our modern scriptures, the Lord counseled us to not rely upon man, but that each person should be able to speak in the name of God. Speaking about the fulfillment of the words of ancient prophets, the Lord said to Joseph, “the weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh, but that every man might speak in the name of God, the Lord, even the Savior of the world” (D&C 1:4 [1:19-20]). Keep in mind that Joseph Smith intended this section as an introduction to the doctrines and the covenants of the latter-day saints. So, one of the first doctrines we learn in the book Doctrine and Covenants is that man should not rely upon others, but upon God alone.

Church leaders teach that we should seek answers from God, but only if they are within the parameters set by the leadership of the church. Dallin Oaks addressed this idea.

*Another claim we sometimes hear is that the leaders won’t answer our doubts. Doubts. Here we need to define the difference between doubts and questions. Questions, when asked with a sincere desire to increase ones understanding and faith, are again encouraged. Such questions, questions we call them, are asked with the real intent of better understanding and more fully obeying the will of the Lord. Questions are very different from doubts.”*

Richard Truley, a church historian speaking with Oaks added, “One difference between questions asked in faith and doubts is that questions lead to faith and to revelation whereas doubts lead to disobedience, which in turn renders people less able to receive revelation, or in other words, doubt is darkness. Questions asked in faith lead to light.”<sup>14</sup> The position taken by these two men during that question and answer session is that doubts equate to questioning the judgement or statements of leaders of the church. In short, they say that you can question them in order to better understand them, but not question them to disagree. That is doubt.

In 1979, Boyd Packer, an apostle of the church, stated, “Though I may elaborate and attempt to illustrate and emphasize, there is the fact, the disarmingly simple fact, that in the three words, FOLLOW THE BRETHREN, rests the most important counsel that I could give to you.”<sup>15</sup> Years later, the church magazine, the Ensign, printed an article stating, “Because the President of the Church speaks for the Lord (see D&C 1:38), it is not wise to pick and choose just the parts of his counsel that we want to follow. Rather, we treat his counsel and invitations as if we had received them directly from Jesus Christ, ‘in all patience and faith’ (D&C 21:5).”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> “Full Transcription of Boise Meeting with Dallin H. Oaks.” Address given Sunday, June 21, 2015, at Boise Idaho. Transcript Accessed 9 March 2022 from <http://johnslds.blogspot.com/2015/06/full-transcript-of-boise-meeting-with.html>.

<sup>14</sup> “Full Transcription of Boise Meeting with Dallin H. Oaks.” Address given Sunday, June 21, 2015, at Boise Idaho. Transcript Accessed 9 March 2022 from <http://johnslds.blogspot.com/2015/06/full-transcript-of-boise-meeting-with.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Boyd K. Packcer, “Follow the Brethren.” *Liabona*, September 1979.

<sup>16</sup> “We Believe In Following the Prophet.” *Ensign*, June 2016.

In a regional conference in California in February 2022, Wendy Nelson, wife of the current president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, gave a speech regarding prophets. She testified that she strongly believes that Russell Nelson was “foreordained” from before this life to be “the prophet” of the church at this time. She then talked about what the members can do to emulate President Nelson. She gave several examples of his characteristics. She reported how following the prophet will bring one closer to the Lord. “I know that following the prophet is the only way to be safe in these latter-days,” she said.<sup>17</sup> Yet she never mention that the members should follow the Lord directly. As wonderful as Russell Nelson may be, and as inspired as he may appear to be, he does not hold the keys of salvation. A man cannot lead another to salvation. Only the Lord holds those keys, and only the Savior stands at the gate. There is no doubt that Russell Nelson seems to be a very kind and genuine man. The question is not about his character, but whether the president of the church is a true prophet called by God.

Joseph Smith throws all these directives to follow the prophet or the brethren into disarray. In an article written in the *Millennial Star*, the following statements were made about the priesthood of God:

*Because of...the apparent imperfections of men on whom God confers authority, the question is sometimes asked,—to what extent is obedience to those who hold the priesthood required? This is a very important question, and one which should be understood by all Saints. In attempting to answer this question, we would repeat, in short, what we have already written, that willing obedience to the laws of God, administered by the Priesthood, is indispensable to salvation; but we would further add, that a proper conservative to this power exists for the benefit of all, and none are required to tamely and blindly submit to a man because he has a portion of the Priesthood.*

How starkly these words ring against those declared from pulpits across the church. The statement above is very plain that “willing obedience to the laws of God” is required in the pursuit of salvation. It is “indispensable.” But willing obedience to the laws of God does not equate to following blindly any man despite what “portion of the priesthood” he may hold. In fact, the article continues:

*We have heard men who hold the Priesthood remark, that they would do any thing they were told to do by those who presided over them, if they knew it was wrong; but such obedience as this is worse than folly to us; it is slavery in the extreme; and the man who would thus willingly degrade himself, should not claim a rank among intelligent beings, until he turns from his folly. A man of God, who seeks for the redemption of his fellows, would despise the idea of seeing another become his slave, who had an equal right with himself to the favour of God; he would rather see him stand by his side, a sworn enemy to wrong, so long as there was place found for it among men. Others, in the extreme exercise of their almighty (!) authority, have taught that such obedience was necessary, and that no matter what the Saints were told to do by their Presidents, they should do it without asking any questions.*

*When the Elders of Israel will so far indulge in these extreme notions of obedience, as to teach them to the people, it is generally because they have it in their hearts to do wrong themselves, and wish to pave the way to accomplish that wrong; or else because they have done wrong, and wish to use the cloak of their authority to cover it with, lest it should be discovered by their superiors, who would require an atonement at their hands.<sup>18</sup>*

The current culture in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints discourages anyone from questioning the leaders. We sing and declare the motto “Follow the Prophet” as if that declaration and action will create safe passage through this life and into the next. Our predecessors clearly denounced that idea stating that those expecting such obedience generally “have it in their hearts to do wrong themselves.” Joseph Smith gave us the ideal pattern in life to follow. In his teachings in the Lectures on Faith he teaches that there is only one individual who we know has coursed through this life and attained his exaltation, and by following the example of that man we can be assured to also attain eternal life.

*To be a little more particular, let us ask, where shall we find a prototype into whose likeness we may be assimilated, in order that we may be made partakers of life and salvation? or in other words, where shall we find a saved being? for if we can find a saved being, we may ascertain, without much difficulty, what all others must be, in order to be saved—they must be like that individual or they cannot be saved: we think, that it will not be a matter of dispute, that two beings, who are unlike each other, cannot both be saved; for whatever constitutes the salvation of one, will constitute the salvation of every creature which will be saved: and if we find*

<sup>17</sup> Wendy Nelson, Remarks given at a Member Devotional in California on 27 February 2022.

<sup>18</sup> “Priesthood.” *Millennial Star*, 14:38. 13 November 1852, pp. 594–95.

*one saved being in all existance, we may see what all others must be, or else not be saved. We ask, then, where is the prototype? or where is the saved being? We conclude as to the answer of this question there will be no dispute among those who believe the bible, that it is Christ: all will agree in this that he is the prototype or standard of salvation, or in other words, that he is a saved being. And if we should continue our interogation, and ask how it is that he is saved, the answer would be, because he is a just and holy being; and if he were any thing different from what he is he would not be saved; for his salvation depends on his being precisely what he is and nothing else; for if it were possible for him to change in the least degree, so sure he would fail of salvation and lose all his dominion, power, authority and glory, which constitutes salvation; for salvation consists in the glory, authority, majesty, power and dominion which Jehovah possesses, and in nothing else; and no being can possess it but himself or one like him: Thus says John, in his first epistle, 3:2 and 3: Behold, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not 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. And any man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.— Why purify himself as he is pure? because, if they do not they cannot be like him.*

*Lectures on Faith 7:9*<sup>19</sup>

Mainstream Latter-day Saints whole heartedly-believe Benson’s words, “If we want to know how well we stand with the Lord then let us ask ourselves...how close do our lives harmonize with...the living Prophet—President of the Church, and with the Quorum of the First Presidency.” The premise of this statement all hinges on the belief that the president of the church is: 1) truly a prophet chosen by God, and 2) not only a prophet, but God’s only prophet (or at least the only one who can speak for God.)

## BEING CHOSEN OF GOD

In the early 1800s, Joseph Smith, a young boy, was praying in a grove of trees when he received a very unexpected experience in which he saw God the Father and his son Jesus Christ. This experience is very unique among the people of the world, yet among prophets it is a common experience. When God chooses a prophet, he makes himself known to them as he calls them to their work. “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream” (Number 12:6).

In 1830, the Lord told Joseph Smith, “thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet” (D&C 46:1 [21:1]). In 1841, the Lord told Hyrum Smith a similar thing. “From this time forth I appoint unto him [Hyrum] that he may be a prophet, and a seer, and a revelator unto my church, as well as my servant Joseph” (D&C 124:94; 2013 version).

Since that time, the presiding leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have used those titles for those sitting in the highest quorums of the church, in the first presidency and in the quorum of the twelve apostles. As part of admission into the temples of the church, members must vocally affirm that they believe each of their leaders are prophets, seers, and revelators. The recommend questions ask the following:

*Do you sustain the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the prophet, seer, and revelator and as the only person on the earth authorized to exercise all priesthood keys?*

*Do you sustain the members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators?<sup>20</sup>*

## PROPHETS

There is great value in using the fundamental principles of following a prophet taught by Ezra Benson if and when they refer to true prophets of God. Any man acting as a prophet without the express authority of God is a false prophet. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have developed a culture in which we believe that a prophet is called by succession through the apostles and leadership of the church rather than by the express voice from God.

In 2014, Russell Nelson stated, “All leaders in the Lord’s Church are called by proper authority. No prophet or any other leader in this Church, for that matter, has ever called himself or herself. No prophet has ever been elected. The Lord made

<sup>19</sup> Lectures on Faith, as found in the 1835 publication of the Doctrine & Covenants. (Hereafter, Lecture.)

<sup>20</sup> “Church Updates Temple Recommend Interview Questions.” LDS Newsroom. 6 October 2019. Obtained online 30 March 2022 at <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/october-2019-general-conference-temple-recommend>.



that clear when He said, 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you.' You and I do not 'vote' on Church leaders at any level. We do, though, have the privilege of sustaining them."<sup>21</sup>

Sustaining, according to the church, "involves more than just a raised hand—it means that we stand behind them, pray for them, accept assignments and callings from them, obey their counsel, and refrain from criticizing them."<sup>22</sup> Nelson stated that "our sustaining of prophets is a personal commitment that we will do our utmost to uphold their prophetic priorities. Our sustaining is an oath-like indication that we recognize their calling as a prophet to be legitimate and binding upon us."<sup>23</sup> In short, sustaining these men is doing what they say you should do without questioning their motives or their directives.

The irony of this concept is that the members of the church are to assume without question that their leaders are indeed prophets without any revelation or record of the Lord calling them as he has all other prophets. With Joseph and Hyrum, it was clear that the Lord gave them those assignments. Nearly every ancient prophet describes how they received their prophetic assignments. But in the church, those vision or dreams or revelations are missing. If God truly does call them as prophets, the body of the church is unaware of any direct revelations regarding those assignments from the Lord. Instead we rely upon the process of succession. The next "prophet" to lead the church is the next apostle in successive line who survived long enough to become the leading apostle. Who chooses the apostles when there is a vacancy? Those who constitute the presidents and apostles of the church, or in other words, they select their own. The selection process is not publicized and any revelations, if there are any, on why one man or another is chosen is held secret. Therefore, the church body relies upon the word of the leaders that their selection of a new apostle—one of which could become the president of the church—comes through revelation rather than election or committee.

This process of becoming a prophet is not supported by scripture or historical precedent. Moses taught how prophets are truly called. "And he said, Hear now my words; If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold" (Numbers 12:6-8). We see this pattern throughout ancient history up to Joseph Smith. Each of these prophets were called by vision or dream or similar manner, and some, like Moses and Joseph Smith, even spoke with God face to face. However, we do not see this pattern occurring after Joseph Smith died. If it does, then it is not recorded. Not one single president of the church after Joseph Smith has declared any such vision, dream, or calling as they took the mantle of the leader of the church.

When asked about how we can pray to receive an experience like Alma had in the scriptures, Dallin Oaks said, "I don't think you're likely to have that kind of experience.... Most of us don't have that kind of experience.... I've never had an experience like that and I don't know anyone among the First Presidency or Quorum of the Twelve who have had that experience."<sup>24</sup> This is one of the most transparent and revealing confessions from a member of the presiding leaders of the church that none of the leaders of the church (to his knowledge) have ever seen God or angels. This flies in the face of the beliefs of many members of the church: that the president of the church speaks with God face to face on a regular basis. But it also brings to question how they can be considered a prophet if they were not called as a prophet should be called.

We have numerous historical examples from the scriptures of what a prophet is and how they are called. Each of them testify of their calling in one form or another, and all of them prophesy. If the current leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are prophets, where are the prophecies? Is that not the definition of a prophet, one who prophesies? If one does not prophesy, then how can he be a prophet? We have ample examples of what prophecies look like as we look into the scriptures, both ancient and modern. You be the judge.

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<sup>21</sup> Russell M. Nelson, "Sustaining the Prophets." *Ensign*, November 2014.

<sup>22</sup> "What does it mean to sustain my Church leaders?" Come Follow Me--For Young Women. Accessed 30 March 2022 from <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/youth/learn/yw/priesthood-keys/honor?lang=eng>.

<sup>23</sup> Russell M. Nelson, "Sustaining the Prophets." *Ensign*, November 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Dallin H. Oaks. Audio recording of a question and answer session with young church members in a multi-stake youth fireside in Bellevue, Washington, 23 January 2016. Accessed 9 March 2022 at [https://www.reddit.com/r/mormon/comments/cl7wsu/elder\\_oaks\\_none\\_of\\_the\\_brethren\\_have\\_seen\\_god/](https://www.reddit.com/r/mormon/comments/cl7wsu/elder_oaks_none_of_the_brethren_have_seen_god/).

## SEERS

According to Ammon, a seer “can know of things which has past, and also of things which is to come; and by them shall all things be revealed, or rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which is not known, shall be made known by them; and also, things shall be made known by them, which otherwise could not be known” (Mosiah 5 [8:17]). When Enoch anointed his eyes with clay and began to see, the people said, “A seer hath the Lord raised up unto his people” because “he beheld the spirits that God had created, and he beheld also things which were not visible to the natural eye” (Genesis 6:38 [Moses 6:36]).

Indeed the Lord stated that it is the “duty of the president of the office of the high priesthood is to preside over the whole church, and to be like unto Moses. Behold, here is wisdom—yea, to be a seer, a revelator, a translator and a prophet—having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church” (D&C 3:42 [107:91-92]). In 1830, Joseph Smith received such a calling or ordination from God. “Behold there shall be a record kept among you, and in it thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (D&C 44:1 [21:1]).

When Joseph received the ancient records from an angel--the Book of Mormon--he stated that with those records were a device called the Urim and Thummim. He stated that “the possession and use of these stones were what constituted ‘seers’ in ancient and former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book,” meaning the Book of Mormon.<sup>25</sup> Mosiah confirmed this statement saying, “these things was prepared from the beginning, and was handed down from generation to generation, for the purpose of interpreting languages...and whosoever has these things, is called seer, after the manner of old times” (Mosiah 10 [28:14-16]). With these Mosiah was able to translate the Jaradite records that were discovered by his people.

If the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are seers, where is the fruit of that spiritual gift? We have no record of any newly translated ancient records other than what Joseph accomplished. We have little to no record of presidents testifying of “seeing” as seers did in ancient times. Is that not a definition of a seer, on who “sees” and ancient seers did? Is that not the role of a seer, to translate ancient records and bring to light things that have been hidden? If these leaders have seen as seers see, then why have they not revealed those things? After all, Ammon said, “by them shall all things be revealed, or rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which is not known, shall be made known by them; and also, things shall be made known by them, which otherwise could not be known” (Mosiah 5 [8:17]).

It is the role of a seer to not only see, but to make those mysteries known to the people, just as Joseph did. Yet when the early saints entered the Utah valley, Native Americans presented some ancient records of their ancestors to Brigham Young, then president of the church, and asked him to translate them. Brigham declined receiving the records stating, “We have not wherewith to translate these records.” The story continues, “In 1957, the Council [of Mayan Elders] requested that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints translate and publish the books of the library. They report that the Brethren of the Church with whom they met responded just as Pres. Young had to the Chiefs of the Indians in Sanpete County – ‘We have no way of translating these things. No one speaks this language anymore.’”<sup>26</sup> If these leaders were seers, could they not translate ancient records as Mosiah and Joseph did? That is what a seer does.

## REVELATORS

In addition to being a prophet and a seer, Joseph and Hyrum Smith were revelators, meaning they received revelations from God. There is no question that Joseph received these revelations; we have ample evidence within the Doctrine and Covenants alone, among many writings. As we read the Doctrine and Covenants and as we read revelations through the Old and New Testaments and the Book of Mormon, we begin to have a clear idea of how the Lord speaks. If the leaders of the church require members to proclaim them “revelators” in order to enter the temple, where are the revelations today? The church culture believes that the speeches in general conferences and the writings in the church magazines constitute the present-day revelations and scriptures. Compare the writings of ancient and modern scriptures found in the Old and New Testaments and in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, to the writings within the church magazines and determine for yourself if God himself is speaking or if there is any evidence of revelation.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Smith, “The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith.” *Book of Mormon*, introductory pages.

<sup>26</sup> “A Short History of the Archives.” *Mentinh Archives*, Vol. 1, Introductory Page.

If the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are truly revelators, where are the revelations? Is that not the definition of a revelator, to reveal the mysteries of heaven? The Lord instructed, “If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation; knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries, and peaceable things; that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal” (D&C 13:17 [42:61]).

Each and every individual has the right to any of the gifts of the spirit, even if it be the spirit of prophecy or revelation, if it is according to the will of the Lord. And though those prophecies and revelations need not be recorded, there is still very little evidence of revelation in the conference reports or writings of the leadership of the church. Just to be clear, revelation is different than reiterating truths already recorded in the scriptures or regurgitating statements already spoken from other people. Revelations reveal the mysteries of heaven and expand the depth of the scriptures. They bring to light the knowledge that brings eternal life.

In an article published in the Salt Lake Tribune in 2018, the reporter stated, “By his own account, Russell M. Nelson speaks often to God, or, rather, God speaks often to him.” The reporter continues to describe Nelson uses the term “revelation” over and over again. She quotes him saying that this is an “era of revelation” and continues to share some inspiring stories about his process of receiving revelation.<sup>27</sup> Let’s hope that this era of revelation reveals greater truths about the mysteries of heaven and how we can ascend to God. We are all entitled to receive inspiration and revelation. Despite the increased discussion and stories about revelation, where are those revelations?

If a man sees the future but never prophesies, is he still a prophet? If a man sees the hidden things of God but never makes them known, is he still a seer? If a man received knowledge and understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom of God but never reveals them, is he still a revelator? Perhaps. But why would they do such? The gifts of God are to bless others, not ourselves.

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## A PROPHET VS. THE PROPHET

Benson makes two assumptions in his speech that alter the entire perspective of following a prophet. The first assumption is that the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a true prophet of God. The second assumption given in Benson’s messages is inherent in his use of the phrase “the prophet.”

Use of the article “the” significantly narrows the definition the church membership uses to define a prophet. Despite all 15 leaders of the church being ordained as prophets, the church only calls one of them “the prophet,” suggesting his calling is greater or his prophecy is of more affect than the others. Using that definite article gives no leeway in the doctrine of prophets other than 1) the president of the church being the only prophet who can function as a prophet, suggesting his prophetic ability supersedes all others, and 2) that there could be no other prophets than those in the leadership of the church.

Being a president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and being a prophet of God are not synonymous. To be the president of the church does not inherently infuse that man with the spirit of prophesy. Being a prophet of God does not require a man to be the president of the church.

If we want to have an inclusive conversation on true fundamental principles of following prophets, then it should expand the fundamentals to include all prophets, not just the presidents of the church. If we are encouraged to follow only one prophet, then why would the Lord send other prophets? Historically, the Lord has often called multiple prophets at one time, many of whom are called outside of ecclesiastical hierarchy in the modern and ancient churches. Take for example the prophets Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah. All were called during the same era, yet none of them were within church leadership. Isaiah was probably the closest as an aristocracy and possible relative of the kings, though he was not a priest. Each of them were from different backgrounds and different regions of Israel, yet all three were call as prophets by God. Isaiah’s prophesies did not trump that of Hosea or Micah, or vis-a-vis. In fact, their prophesies are remarkably similar.

The use of the article “the” in front of the word “prophet” should be used only in one of two scenarios. First, when describing a specific prophet, such as “the prophet Isaiah” or “the prophet Jonah” as seen in the scriptures. In every use of the phrase “the prophet” found in scripture, it is referencing a particular person, not indicating a hierarchical status. Yet

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<sup>27</sup> Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Nelson and the ‘R’ word: Why this Mormon prophet speaks more openly about revelations from God than his predecessors did.” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 2 October 2018. Accessed 31 March 2022 from <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2018/10/02/nelson-r-word-why-this/>.

Benson uses the word here as a hierarchical title, suggesting that the president of the church is the only prophet of consequence and no other voice can speak God's words.

Second, appropriate use of "the prophet" should be in reference to the only prophet that truly matters, Jesus Christ. All prophets are called as servants or messengers from God, yet none of them hold the keys of salvation. Nephi declared, "The keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel: and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way, save it be by the gate, for he cannot be deceived; for the Lord God is his name" (2 Nephi 6 [9:41]).

When we speak about a prophet whose words are truly definitive, we speak of only one individual. Jesus told the Nephites, "Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that prophet, shall be cut off from among the people" (3 Nephi 9 [20:22]).

## THE 14 FUNDAMENTALS OF FOLLOWING THE PROPHET

The 14 fundamental principles of following a prophet have become part of the doctrine of the church in regards to defining prophets. Yet the fundamental principles are narrow in focus and misleading at best regarding how prophets work anciently and in our day today. As we evaluate the 14 fundamental principles of a prophet, we will remove the following assumptions from each of the 14 statements to more appropriately evaluate the prerogative and role of a prophet:

1. The president of the church is a prophet. Just by nature of being the president of the church does not mean that presiding individual is a prophet, therefore, we will modify the statements to reflect this assumption. It is possible that he is indeed a prophet, and each individual needs to discover for themselves whether they believe he is or is not. But the assumption will be replaced with the concept that any individual can be a prophet if called by God.
2. There is only one individual that can function as a prophet at a time. We will remove the definitive article "the" and replace it with the indefinite article "a" to reflect the idea that any and all can be prophets if called by God.

The following are commentary on the 14 fundamentals of following a prophet as taught by the church and some alternative fundamental principles that would more accurately reflect following true prophets.

### FIRST FUNDAMENTAL

#### THE PROPHET IS THE ONLY MAN WHO SPEAKS FOR THE LORD IN EVERYTHING.

Misleading. To be more accurate, perhaps the first fundamental principle should say:

#### ANY PROPHET HAS AUTHORITY TO SPEAK FOR THE LORD ABOUT ANYTHING.

The Lord told Joseph Smith, "What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself, and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice, or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:8 [1:38]). Sometimes members of the church quote this verse saying, "whether by mine own voice, or by the voice of my servants, the prophets, it is the same." Because of the narrow belief of the members of the church regarding prophets, this declaration of the Lord inherently means that what the servants--the prophet or leaders--say they must do because it is as if the Lord said it.

Benson's quoted verses out of the Doctrine and Covenants to verify his point.

*In section 132, verse 7, of the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord speaks of the Prophet—the President—and says: 'There is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred.'*

*Then in section 21, verses 4–6, the Lord states: 'Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me; for his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith. For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you.'*

*Did you hear what the Lord said about the words of the prophet? We are to 'give heed unto all his words'—as if from the Lord's own mouth.*<sup>28</sup>

Benson's statement assumes the following concepts are innate among prophets:

1. Only one prophet can speak for God at a time, and that prophet is the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
2. If there are other prophets, the chief prophet is more authorized than another to speak God's words, suggesting one prophet has more authority than another.
3. The president of the church has received direct authority from God just as Joseph Smith.
4. The promises given by the mouth of Jesus Christ to Joseph Smith are transferable to his successors.

Let's address the initial two points first and the following two points afterward.

## ONE PROPHET TOO FEW

As a church, we have developed the belief that there is only one living "prophet" at a time, yet members of the church also sustain 14 other men to be "prophets, seers, and revelators" over the church. Does prophecy from the president of the church truly trump prophecy from any of the other 14 leaders? If prophecy truly comes from God, could not any one of them speak in the name of the Lord on any subject at any time?

Regarding hierarchical structure found within the church, it is true that the president of the church has the right to receive revelation for the entire church based on his stewardship. That does not mean that another individual cannot receive revelation about the church, whether a leader within the church or not. Isaiah and Micah both received revelations regarding the nations of Judah even though neither were the high priest or the king. It is the prerogative of every member to verify for themselves the truth of any statements made by church leaders. Yet many members believe that they are to follow whatever that current president of the church says, no matter what he says, believing that his words are always prophetic.

There is no doctrine supported in scripture indicating a prophet must lead the church or be in the leadership of the church. Nor is there any doctrine supported in scripture that suggests a lay member of the church—or even a non-member—cannot become a prophet. We see such examples throughout scripture. Lehi is a prime example.

Lehi was not in any leadership positions in the Jewish community. According to Nephi's writings, Lehi was a merchant. Yet Lehi was also a humble man concerned about the spiritual state of his people. Nephi records, "Wherefore it came to pass, that my father Lehi, as he went forth, prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people. And it came to pass, as he prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard, he did quake and tremble exceedingly" (1 Nephi 1 [1:5-6]). He later went to his home and was overcome by a vision where he saw much more. After which, "he went forth among the people and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard" (1 Nephi 1 [1:18]).

Lehi did not ask for permission from the high priests or the leaders of the Jews before prophesying. Lehi did not need their permission. He received all the authority he needed from the Lord directly, despite not being a Levite or holding any religious authority over the people. Lehi's experience is similar to many others. Jeremiah was thrown in prison by the high priest for his prophesying. That would be akin to lay member of the church receiving church discipline from the leadership of the church today.

Throughout history there have been occasions where more than one prophet is called at one time, and when such happened, none had more authority over another to speak, nor did they need to coordinate their messages. They also did not need approval of their ecclesiastical leaders to speak truth. A review of the Babylonian captivity era should be evidence enough to validate this fact. Contemporary prophets of that time include Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Lehi, and Nephi. All lived and prophesied at or near the same time, though some were in different geographic locations. Similarly, during Isaiah's day Hosea and Micah also prophesied.

In another example on this continent, Samuel the Lamanite prophet who stood on the wall of Zarahemla prophesied to the people while Nephi and Lehi preached in the streets. They also did not coordinate their messages. But Nephi did recognize

<sup>28</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, "Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet." Address given Tuesday, February 26, 1980, at Brigham Young University.

a prophet when he saw one and recorded Samuel's words. During the early era of the latter-day church, the Lord gave a revelation to Joseph Smith declaring Hyrum as a prophet of God.

*Let my servant William be appointed, ordained, and anointed, as counselor unto my servant Joseph, in the room of my servant Hyrum, that my servant Hyrum may take the office of Priesthood and Patriarch, which was appointed unto him by his father, by blessing and also by right; that from henceforth he shall hold the keys of the patriarchal blessings upon the heads of all my people, that whoever he blesses shall be blessed, and whoever he curses shall be cursed; that whatsoever he shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever he shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. And from this time forth I appoint unto him that he may be a prophet, and a seer, and a revelator unto my church, as well as my servant Joseph; that he may act in concert also with my servant Joseph. (D&C 124:91-95)*

God does not have to speak to one man at a time, but will call as many as he needs at any time he wants to declare his message to whomever the Lord sees fit. Benson quotes D&C 132:7, which states, "There is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred." The power in which the Lord is referring is what the church refers to as the keys of Elijah, or the power to seal individuals to their exaltation. This power was given to Joseph Smith, and in that revelation the Lord says, "I have appointed [this power] unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days." There is no other documented revelation from the Lord available to members of the church that states Joseph no longer holds that power or that it was transferred to another individual. Using this scripture to validate that the president of the church is the only man who can speak for the Lord on any subject is presumptive at best.

#### VALIDITY OF SUCCESSION

One of the most controversial debates on authority regarding the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is whether the authority to lead the church was truly transferred from Joseph Smith to Brigham Young. Despite the arguments and the evidence displayed by both sides, the truth is that there is not document to validate this transfer of authority, but just a claim by those who purportedly received it. That's pretty convenient. Yet, it is left to each individual to determine for themselves whether they believe a mantle of leadership was passed on from Joseph to Brigham, and thence to each subsequent successor.

Joseph Smith heard directly from the Lord and wrote down the words he heard, which we can access in the Doctrine and Covenants. None of his successors have provided any such similar revelation, either because they cannot or will not. And so, we have to assume, but cannot know for sure from them, whether they truly received what they claim to receive. This brings further question into the idea of whether the priesthood authorities held by Joseph Smith can be handed down successively.

Since the death of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, leaders in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have handed down the title of "prophet" to the next highest ranking official in the church after the death of the previous president. In this successive pattern, there is no leeway to question whether they truly receive authority from God to be a prophet, a seer, or a revelator. This group of men select their own successors, give them the titles and ordinations, rank themselves as junior and senior apostles, and wait in line to be the next president, and therefore, "prophet" of the church. Historical precedent does not support such a successive pattern of authority. Priesthood authority and power does not get passed around like a baton or a like a worn cloak. Instead, each prophet is called directly by God, despite what function or role they play in society.

Benson quotes D&C 21:4-6, "Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me; for his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith. For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you." Again, this is a statement the Lord gave to and regarding Joseph Smith. If we read the first verse, the Lord says a record will be kept that Joseph Smith should be "called a seer, a translator, a prophet, and apostle of Jesus Christ." Others have assumed the rights given to Joseph in these scriptures, but there has been no recorded revelation from the Lord that suggests that a promise given to one is transferable to a successor. Where is the revelation to Brigham Young or any subsequent successor that matches Joseph's?

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## SECOND FUNDAMENTAL

### THE LIVING PROPHET IS MORE VITAL TO US THAN THE STANDARD WORKS.

Partially true. Perhaps the second fundamental should say:

### GET THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY SO YOU CAN KNOW THE WILL OF THE LORD FOR YOURSELF.

Again, the assumption is that the president of the church is the only living person who can speak the words of God. It also assumes that the president of the church is a true prophet. It may be true that a true living prophet is more important than the standard works in many respects, particularly in what the Lord wants to counsel, advise, or warn in our day. But to assume that God will only reveal these truths through the leadership of the church is false and presumptive.

#### TESTIMONY THROUGH SCRIPTURE

To disregard the scriptures is also folly, for we know that the Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The Lord said to our ancestors, “What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself, and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice, or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:8 [1:38]). His servants are those who are truly called by him to speak his words, whether angels or men. That servant could be a lay member of the church or may not even be a member of the church, as long as he or she has been called by the Lord.

Though God may reveal new or expanded truths through a living prophet, the patterns we view in history teach us truths and lead us to know God. We call these truths scripture. Could any of us have come to our current knowledge, including any living prophet, if it were not for the testimony of ancient prophets and the truths taught within the holy scriptures? Clearly no. Joseph Smith teaches this pointedly in the Lectures on Faith. He explained how mankind first had the inkling that God existed because of the testimonial we have from Adam down to Abraham, and from Abraham to today through the scriptures.

*We have now shown how it was that the first thought ever existed in the mind of any individual, that there was such a being as a God, who had created and did uphold all things: that it was by reason of the manifestation which he first made to our father Adam, when he stood in his presence, and conversed with him face to face, at the time of his creation.*

Lecture 2:54

He further goes on to explain that once we have that testimony that God exists and about his characteristic and attributes, through the testimony of those that preceded us, it is the responsibility of each individual to further seek him until they come into his presence as did the ancient prophets.

#### LIVING ORACLES

Despite having ample testimony in the scriptures, it is true that present-day revelation is much more vital to us than that which is written in the scriptures. That is not to say we throw out the scriptures, but that personal revelation and present-day prophecies can provide direction for our needs today.

In his speech, Benson uses a quote from Wilford Woodruff of how Joseph and Brigham declared the living oracles are more important than the written scripture. As you see below, Joseph and Brigham testify of the importance of living oracles.

*I will refer to a certain meeting I attended in the town of Kirtland in my early days. At that meeting some remarks were made that have been made here today, with regard to the living oracles and with regard to the written word of God. The same principle was presented, although not as extensively as it has been here, when a leading man in the Church got up and talked upon the subject, and said: ‘You have got the word of God before you here in the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants; you have the written word of God, and you who give revelations should give revelations according to those books, as what is written in those books is the word of God. We should confine ourselves to them.’*

*When he concluded, Brother Joseph turned to Brother Brigham Young and said, ‘Brother Brigham, I want you to take the stand and tell us your views with regard to the living oracles and the written word of God.’ Brother Brigham took the stand, and he took the Bible, and laid it down; and he took the Book of Mormon, and laid it down; and he took the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and laid it down before him, and he said: ‘There is the written word of God to us, concerning the work of God from the beginning of the*

*world, almost, to our day. And now,' said he, 'when compared with the living oracles those books are nothing to me; those books do not convey the word of God direct to us now, as do the words of a Prophet or a man bearing the Holy Priesthood in our day and generation. I would rather have the living oracles than all the writing in the books.' That was the course he pursued. When he was through, Brother Joseph said to the congregation: 'Brother Brigham has told you the word of the Lord, and he has told you the truth.'*<sup>29</sup>

By oracle, Joseph means those who hold the gift to speak for the Lord. Often we consider oracles and prophets to be synonymous. In the quote above, the “leading man” spoke unilaterally in saying that we need no additional word than that which was given in the scriptures. It is foolish that we would disregard present-day revelation from living prophets or oracles. The Lord does not confine himself to that which he previously revealed, but the Lord’s words are ever expanding and growing. Yet to rely completely upon the words of living oracles while ignoring the scriptures is also foolish. If one studies the revelations received by Joseph Smith, they will find those revelations riddled with references from scripture.

God often uses what we already have available to us to expand on what he wants to teach us. He can and does teach greater truths and mysteries that may not be found within canonized scripture. Yet most of what he teaches are synchronous with established truths in the scriptures. If a living prophet is a true prophet, then we should not have to choose between that prophet and the scriptures, but they will complement each other.

Yet in truth, as important as the living oracles are today, most important is that each of us become a living oracle. The intent of the Lord was never that we should rely upon one or even 15 individuals to speak to God for us, but that the living oracles teach us how to come to God ourselves. Joseph continued in the Lectures on Faith to say the following:

*Let us here observe, that after any portion of the human family are made acquainted with the important fact that there is a God who has created and does uphold all things, the extent of their knowledge, respecting his character and glory, will depend upon their diligence and faithfulness in seeking after him, until like Enoch the brother of Jared, and Moses, they shall obtain faith in God, and power with him to behold him face to face.*

*Lecture 2:55*

Each man or woman can become a living oracle, or a prophet, and find out the will of God for themselves. When it was told to Moses that Eldad and Medad were prophesying, Moses said, “Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them” (Numbers 11:29). In the end, each man and woman must learn how to “obtain faith in God, and power with him to behold him face to face,” and we cannot do that unless we ourselves become oracles of God.

### THIRD FUNDAMENTAL

#### THE LIVING PROPHET IS MORE IMPORTANT TO US THAN A DEAD PROPHET.

Misleading. Perhaps the third fundamental should say:

#### YOU ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PROPHET FOR YOU.

Again, the assumption in this principle is that the president of the church is the only living prophet and that he is a true prophet. You’re may get sick of that repeated assumption, but it is the first faulty premise of the 14 fundamental principles. Benson stated, “Beware of those who would pit the dead prophets against the living prophets, for the living prophets always take precedence.”<sup>30</sup> How convenient. By dismissing the validity of ancient prophets, one removes accountability of present actions and decisions, doctrines and policies. God’s word is eternal, and a true prophet—living or dead—will often speak synchronous.

A living prophet would not have to pit himself against a dead prophet and would not make you choose between one or the other. Living prophets are important only if they are true prophets prophesying things that bring us closer to Christ, but they will build upon the words of Christ already written in his holy scriptures.

<sup>29</sup> Wilford Woodruff, Conference Report, October 1897.

<sup>30</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet.” Address given Tuesday, February 26, 1980, at Brigham Young University.



## RECEIVING REVELATION FOR OURSELVES

Benson also says, “God’s revelation to Adam did not instruct Noah how to build the Ark. Noah needed his own revelation.”<sup>31</sup> This is absolutely true. But Noah also did not need to go to another person to get his own revelation. Noah got the revelation himself because of his personal diligence in seeking after the Lord. Lehi did not need Jeremiah’s permission to receive revelation and act on it. Jeremiah did not ask for the high priest’s permission. In fact, Jeremiah was thrown in prison by the high priests for his prophesying.

Benson makes the following conclusion, “Therefore the most important prophet so far as you and I are concerned is the one living in our day and age to whom the Lord is currently revealing His will for us. Therefore, the most important reading we can do is any of the words of the prophet contained...each month in our Church magazines. Our instructions about what we should do for each six months are found in the General Conference addresses.”<sup>32</sup>

Many members of the church have taken this message to heart and focused nearly all of their study on only the current writings of church leaders. In fact, the current church curriculum almost exclusively teaches from those conference addresses in many classes. As a general population, members of the church have a gross lack of understanding from canonized scripture. It is very surprising to see how few members of the church know the teachings of ancient prophets. Many of these ancient prophets saw our time and forewarned us of things in our day to prevent us from misstep. Some of these prophets include Isaiah, Daniel, Nephi, Ezekiel, John, and Moroni, among others. Church magazines may include inspiring words, but rarely if ever do they include revelation from God. They are full of beautiful stories and share some good advice and doctrinal insight, but they hardly equate to scripture.

In contrast, when we read from the scriptures written by true prophets authorized to speak in God’s name, we hear the voice of God speaking through his prophets. This was the context of the Lord’s statement that when he speaks through his servants it is as if he is speaking himself (refer to D&C 1:8 [1:38-39]).

Compare the writings of prophets from Moses to Joseph Smith with what we read in church magazines and hear in general conference and you will see a stark difference. Just because a man is called as an apostle or a leader of the church does not guarantee they are speaking on behalf of God. Joseph stated in a journal entry, “‘A Prophet is not always a Prophet’ only when he is acting as such.”<sup>33</sup>

In the end, neither a living nor a dead prophet can save anyone. Neither is more important than another if we cannot come to God ourselves to claim salvation. Unless a man or woman can call upon heaven and hear the voice of God and bring down the promise of eternal life for themselves, it doesn’t matter who speaks. This is why no man can promise another that if we follow them we will not be led astray. It doesn’t work that way. You and I have to go to God directly and obtain our own salvation.

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## FOURTH FUNDAMENTAL

### THE PROPHET WILL NEVER LEAD THE CHURCH ASTRAY.

False. Perhaps the fourth fundamental ought to say:

### TRUST NOT UPON THE ARM OF THE FLESH.

Never in the history of mankind has there been any example to suggest that a person in a position of power and authority would not be allowed to lead a congregation, group, or nation astray. There have been good and bad leaders throughout the ages of men, but God has never prevented any man from deceiving another. On the contrary, he gives each of us agency to choose. In fact, examples from history and our present day show us a very different truth. As John Dalberg-Acton

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet.” Address given Tuesday, February 26, 1980, at Brigham Young University.

<sup>33</sup> “Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 1, 21 December 1842–10 March 1843,” p. [170], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-1-21-december-1842-10-march-1843/178>.

famously quoted, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”<sup>34</sup> How interesting that he was speaking about religious powers regarding the papacy.

A true prophet would not dissuade people from following Jesus Christ. Prophets are called by the Savior to bring people to him. Rather, they would do everything in his power to bring people to the feet of the Lord. But simply because a man was nominally called a prophet and elevated to the presidency of a church does not mean that he has risen to the mantle of a true prophet, nor does it mean that he is always in line with the mind and will of God. The leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has pushed a strong campaign persuading their members that any man who presides as the church president must be a prophet or God would not allow that man to assume that role. They also strongly push the idea that no leader among the highest quorums of the church would be allowed to lead the church astray.

## TRUST NOT IN FLESH

Benson quotes Wilford Woodruff, who stated, “I say to Israel, The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as president of the Church to lead you astray. It is not in the program. It is not in the mind of God.”<sup>35</sup> He further goes on to quote Marion Romney, stating, “I remember years ago when I was a Bishop I had President Grant talk to our ward. After the meeting I drove him home. . . . Standing by me, he put his arm over my shoulder and said: ‘My boy, you always keep your eye on the President of the Church, and if he ever tells you to do anything, and it is wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it.’ Then with a twinkle in his eye, he said, ‘But you don’t need to worry. The Lord will never let his mouthpiece lead the people astray.’”<sup>36</sup>

These are very bold statements, and frankly very manipulative. There is no scripture nor prophet that has ever said such a statement. Joseph Smith taught a doctrine much different from this.

*We have heard men who hold the Priesthood remark, that they would do any thing they were told to do by those who presided over them, if they knew it was wrong; but such obedience as this is worse than folly to us; it is slavery in the extreme; and the man who would thus willingly degrade himself, should not claim a rank among intelligent beings, until he turns from his folly. A man of God, who seeks for the redemption of his fellows, would despise the idea of seeing another become his slave, who had an equal right with himself to the favour of God; he would rather see him stand by his side, a sworn enemy to wrong, so long as there was place found for it among men. Others, in the extreme exercise of their almighty (!) authority, have taught that such obedience was necessary, and that no matter what the Saints were told to do by their Presidents, they should do it without asking any questions.*

*When the Elders of Israel will so far indulge in these extreme notions of obedience, as to teach them to the people, it is generally because they have it in their hearts to do wrong themselves, and wish to pave the way to accomplish that wrong; or else because they have done wrong, and wish to use the cloak of their authority to cover it with, lest it should be discovered by their superiors, who would require an atonement at their hands.<sup>37</sup>*

No man or woman is perfect. No prophet is perfect. All make mistakes. Israel was carried away into captivity by Assyria, and later the Jews by Babylon and sacked by Rome, and all were the covenant nation of God led by their high priests and kings. How did they fall? Because they gradually declined in obedience before the Lord. Who was usually the catalyst of such a decline? The leaders of nations and churches. Moses declared to the house of Israel right before his death, “I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Isaiah saw this decline in his day, but also prophesied that it would happen in ours. “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people

<sup>34</sup> John Dalberg-Acton, “Letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton.” 5 April 1887. Accessed 15 March 2022 at <https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/165acton.html>.

<sup>35</sup> The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, selected by G. Homer Durham [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946], pp. 212-213.

<sup>36</sup> Marion G. Romney, Conference Report, October 1960.

<sup>37</sup> “Priesthood.” *Millennial Star*, 14/38. 13 November 1852, pp. 594–95.

laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters; they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward” (Isaiah 1:2-4). Notice the gradual generational decline that makes a “sinful nation” into a “seed of evildoers” who forsake the Lord. Avraham Gileadi gave the following commentary on these verses:

*From addressing his people personally as “Israel . . . my people” (v 3), Jehovah now addresses them impersonally as “a nation,” signifying their alienated state. Additionally, a regression occurs from his people’s simply going “astray” to their burdening themselves with “sin,” which, over time, ends in outright “wrongdoing.” That occurs collectively and generationally. The “offspring of wrongdoers” turn into “perverse children,” meaning that the rising generation has by now become thoroughly corrupt. “Forsaking” Jehovah and “spurning” him finally become conscious and deliberate acts.<sup>38</sup>*

Though Benson is not implying that the president of the church does not make mistakes, he is saying that the president of the church cannot lead the church or people astray. Heber Grant’s words are disturbing. They sound much like the doctrines related to the infallibility of the papacy. That is not the doctrine taught within the scriptures. Nephi prayed, “O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. -- Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm” (2 Nephi 3 [4:34]).

Nephi must have listened to Jeremiah preach prior to leaving Jerusalem, or the spirit prompted them both to exclaim a curse for anyone who trusts in the arm of man. Jeremiah exclaimed the following:

*Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm; and the man whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.*

*Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.*

*Jeremiah 17:5-8*

Isaiah similarly declares, “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of” (Isaiah 2:22). Why not trust in man? Isaiah says, “All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field; The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it; surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever” (Isaiah 40:6-7). Men are fallible. Only God is constant and reliable.

## FIFTH FUNDAMENTAL

**THE PROPHET IS NOT REQUIRED TO HAVE ANY PARTICULAR EARTHLY TRAINING OR CREDENTIALS TO SPEAK ON ANY SUBJECT OR ACT ON ANY MATTER AT ANY TIME.**

True. For better clarity, perhaps the fifth fundamental should say:

**A TRUE PROPHET IS NOT REQUIRED TO HAVE ANY PARTICULAR EARTHLY TRAINING OR CREDENTIALS TO SPEAK ON ANY SUBJECT OR ACT ON ANY MATTER AT ANY TIME.**

Just a reminder: a true prophet must be call by God in order to speak on “any subject or act on any matter” in the name of the Lord. No man has the right to speak for God or in his name without his authorization. Benson stated, “Sometimes there are those who feel their earthly knowledge on a certain subject is superior to the heavenly knowledge which God gives to His prophet on the same subject.”<sup>39</sup> The assumption to this statement is that “His prophet” is the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is fair to say the opposite is true, that the president of the church may

<sup>38</sup> Avraham Gileadi, “Apocalyptic Commentary on Isaiah 1.” *Isaiah Explained.com*. Obtained online 16 March 2022 from <https://isaiahexplained.com/commentary/1>.

<sup>39</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet.” Address given Tuesday, February 26, 1980, at Brigham Young University.

sometimes feels his knowledge is superior to those who have earthly knowledge, especially since most of the leaders of the church are physicians, lawyers, judges, and successful businessmen and educators.

Benson said, “We encourage earthly knowledge in many areas, but remember, if there is ever a conflict between earthly knowledge and the words of the prophet, you stand with the prophet, and you’ll be blessed and time will vindicate you.” Again, that is a bold claim. If a man (president of the church or any other man) claims to be a prophet of God yet speaks his own words, then he is taking the name of the Lord in vain. Speaking or acting in God’s name without his express permission is a form of taking the Lord’s name in vain. How are we to know if they are speaking in the name of God or speaking his name in vain? By asking God. Nephi was inspired by his father’s dream, and wanting to know the truth of Lehi’s words went to God directly.

*I, Nephi, was desirous also, that I might see, and bear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men; for he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

1 Nephi 3 [10:17]

Moroni tells us that “by the power of the Holy Ghost, ye may know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10 [10:5]). This concept was taught to Enoch long before Moroni’s time. The Lord told Enoch, “Therefore it is given to abide in you, the record of heaven, the Comforter, the peaceable things of immortal glory, the truth of all things, that which quickeneth all things which maketh alive all things, that which knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice and judgment” (Genesis 6:64 [Moses 6:61]).

Joseph Smith suggested we use this comforter, the Holy Ghost, to obtain knowledge directly from God. “The only way to obtain truth and wisdom, is not to ask it from books, but to go to God in prayer and obtain divine teaching.”<sup>40</sup> It does not matter who is speaking or proclaiming the words of God, we should always go to the Lord to verify their words. And if the truth and wisdom that you receive from God is different from that which another person says, even if they are a prophet of God, then you should follow God’s voice, “for you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God,” not the mouths of any other person (D&C 4:7 [84:44]).

The credentials a true prophet receives are not earthly, but heavenly. If they have not the heavenly credentials, they can call themselves a prophet or anything else and it will never give them the right or authority to speak for God or act in his name. But we do not have to take their word for it, we can lean upon the Lord to teach us. John said, “Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). If many false prophets were in the world at the time John wrote that epistle, then there are certainly more in the world today. The Savior warned us that we can know the verity of a prophet by his or her fruit.

*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing; but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits; for do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*

Matthew 7:24-27 [7:15-18]

Joseph said that our day would be much like Peter’s day and Paul’s day, full of false prophets.

*Peter in prophesying concerning the church says, “But there were false prophets among the people, even as there shall also be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and shall bring upon themselves swift destruction; and many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoke of; and through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you; whose judgment of long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.” Paul in speaking of the difficulties that he had to encounter, says, “I am in perils at home, in perils*

<sup>40</sup> "Minutes and Discourse, 1–5 October 1841," p. 577, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed March 16, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-and-discourse-1-5october-1841/2>.

*among false brethren.” Such is a brief history of that people; and if we examine the history of this church we shall find it much the same.<sup>41</sup>*

## SIXTH FUNDAMENTAL

### THE PROPHET DOES NOT HAVE TO SAY “THUS SAITH THE LORD” TO GIVE US SCRIPTURE.

True, but misleading. Perhaps the sixth fundamental should say:

### A PROPHET WILL SPEAK THE WORDS OF GOD, AND WILL BE TRANSPARENT THEY ARE GOD’S WORDS.

A prophet of God does not have to say phrases like, “Thus says the Lord.” Yet throughout scripture, you continuously see ancient prophets saying that exact phrase. So, why is it that they feel obliged to say that, but those who claim to be the “living prophets” of our day do not?

## TRANSPARENCY IN MESSAGE ORIGINS

One of the unique differences of prophetic words in scripture from those spoken over the pulpits in the church is the transparency of the origins of their message. The words of the prophets in the scriptures are very clear and transparent about their origin. “Thus saith the Lord...,” they say, or some other statement of origin. Yet the origins of the words of the modern-day leaders of the church are ambiguous at best. Though they testify “of the name” of Jesus Christ, they do not specify that their words come directly from the Lord. Perhaps that is because their words do not come from the Lord. Could this fundamental principle be a justification for their speaking words that are their own?

Benson stated in his speech, “Sometimes there are those who haggle over words. They might say the prophet gave us counsel but that we are not obligated to follow it unless he says it is a commandment. But the Lord says of the Prophet Joseph, ‘Thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you’ (D&C 21:4).”<sup>42</sup> When speaking of “the prophet,” Benson is speaking of the president of the church, yet he pulls this scripture from D&C 21:4 out of context. The scripture states the following:

*Behold there shall be a record kept among you, and in it thou [Joseph Smith] shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church through the will of God the father, and the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ; being inspired of the Holy Ghost to lay the foundation thereof, and to build it up unto the most holy faith; which church was organized and established, in the year of your Lord eighteen hundred and thirty, in the fourth month, and on the sixth day of the month, which is called April.*

*Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words, and commandments, which he shall give unto you, as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me: for his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith; for by doing these things, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you: yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you; and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory.— for thus saith the Lord God, him have I inspired to move the cause of Zion in mighty power for good; and his diligence I know, and his prayers I have heard: yea, his weeping for Zion I have seen, and I will cause that he shall mourn for her no longer, for his days of rejoicing are come unto the remission of his sins, and the manifestations of my blessings upon his works.*

*D&C 46:1-2 [21:1-8]*

The words in this revelation, which do state, “Thus saith the Lord,” are directed to and about Joseph Smith, not any other man. It is quite presumptuous for Benson or any other man to apply those words to themselves. The revelations given to Joseph are for Joseph. His calling from the Lord to “be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church” are his own promises. It is a bad habit of church leaders, and misleading indeed, for them to ascribe revelations given to Joseph for themselves, especially when it benefits them most. If we are to “give heed unto all [Joseph’s] words, and commandments, which he shall give unto [us], as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before [God]: for

<sup>41</sup> “Times and Seasons, 1 August 1842,” p. 868, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed March 16, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-august-1842/6>.

<sup>42</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet.” Address given Tuesday, February 26, 1980, at Brigham Young University.

his word [we] shall receive, as if from [God's] own mouth," then we would clearly see a discrepancy from these fourteen fundamentals of following a prophet and Joseph's own teachings about prophets. But since Joseph is dead, are his words now obsolete?

The same contextual misplacement is found in Benson's words as he says, "And speaking of taking counsel from the prophet, in D&C 108:1, the Lord states: 'Verily thus saith the Lord unto you, my servant Lyman: Your sins are forgiven you, because you have obeyed my voice in coming up hither this morning to receive counsel of him whom I have appointed.'" Again, the man whom the Lord had appointed is in this scripture Joseph Smith, not any other man. And, note the irony in this message as well, where the Lord says, "Verily thus saith the Lord unto you." In both scriptures quoted by Benson, the author--Joseph Smith--clearly states from whom the revelation and scripture originates, and both are to him and not another.

A true prophet will always be a transparent window into the words of the Lord and will never claim that message came from himself or herself. There will be no ambiguity from where the message originates. That does not mean that every word a prophet speaks is prophetic or from God, but when the message originates from a divine messenger the prophet will transparently recount it's source.

One of the most confusing parts of the messages that come from the pulpit is their lack of transparency. Members of the church have become so acclimated to believing that whatever comes from the pulpit represents the words and will of the Lord that few question it's authenticity. After all, Benson did say, "Our marching orders for each six months are found in the general conference addresses." And even though they may declare "in the name of Jesus Christ" that he is this or that, they rarely if ever say that their words are from the Lord. And therefore the members are left to themselves to wonder if God was really speaking through a servant or whether they are simply the words of a man.

#### THE SCRIPTURES OF BRIGHAM YOUNG

The last quote Benson provided in this section of his speech was from Brigham Young, stating, "I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call scripture."<sup>43</sup> That is a remarkable statement! Unlike Joseph's prolific revelations documented in the Doctrine and Covenants, we do not see writings or revelations from Brigham Young in which the Lord calls him as "a seer, a translator, a prophet." His claim to become the leader of the church is that Joseph transferred the keys of the priesthood to him in a meeting that was undocumented.

If every sermon the Brigham Young stated was scripture, then here are some scriptures that church members should revere and follow:

*If Joseph had a right to dictate me in relation to salvation, in relation to a hereafter, he had a right to dictate me in relation to all my earthly affairs, in relation to the treasures of the earth, and in relation to the earth itself.... That is what he had the right to do if he had any right at all. If he did not have that right, he did not have the Priesthood of God.... This same Priesthood has been given to Joseph Smith, and has been handed down to his successor....*

*What would a man of God say, who felt aright, when Joseph asked him for his money? He would say, "Yes and I wish I had more to help to build up the kingdom of God." Or if he came and said, "I want your wife?" "O yes," he would say, "here she is, there are plenty more."<sup>44</sup>*

Brigham created a line of thought in this sermon that Joseph had the right to dictate everything in others' lives, and that priesthood authority was handed down to his successor, which was conveniently Brigham. Then he used a hypothetical scenario that if Joseph asked for a man's wife, the man should be happy to give his wife to Joseph, or subsequently, if Brigham asked for a man's wife, the man should be willing to give his wife to Brigham. And then Brigham did just that. Brigham young had 56 wives, some of which were married to other men. If succession truly happens in the same way the church claims, then Russell Nelson has the right to come and ask for your wife! And because Brigham said it, it is scripture.

Here is another sermon that should be canonized, since it came out of Brigham's mouth:

<sup>43</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, ed. George D. Watt et al (London: Latter-Day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-1886) 13:95. (Hereafter *Journal of Discourses*.)

<sup>44</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*. 2:13-14.

*You see some classes of the human family that are black, uncouth, uncomely, disagreeable and low in their habits, wild, and seemingly deprived of nearly all the blessing of intelligence that is generally bestowed upon mankind. The first man that committed the odious crime of killing one of his brethren will be cursed the longest of any one of the children of Adam. Cain slew his brother. Cain might have been killed, and that would have put a termination to that line of human beings. This was not to be, and the Lord put a mark upon him, which is the flat nose and black skin. Trace mankind down to after the flood, and then another curse is pronounced upon the same race--that they should be the "servant of servants;" and they will be, until that curse is removed; and the Abolitionists cannot help it, nor in the least alter that decree. How long is the race to endure the dreadful curse that is upon them? That curse will remain upon them, and they never can hold the Priesthood or share in it until all the other descendants of Adam have received the promise and enjoyed the blessings of the Priesthood and the keys thereof. Until the last ones of the residue of Adam's children are brought up to that favourable position, the children of Cain cannot receive the first ordinances of the Priesthood.<sup>45</sup>*

Members of the church believed this doctrine for many years, but apparently this doctrine fell out of favor with the members right after the civil rights movements. In 1978, the leadership of the church sent an official declaration to open the "priesthood and temple blessings" for all worthy male members of the church despite their race.<sup>46</sup> How convenient that the leaders claimed the Lord's guidance on this revelation at the same time the church was receiving intense pressure to integrate. It is also interesting that Brigham declared the inability of black men to receive priesthood despite Joseph Smith having already ordained an African American man to the priesthood. Elijah Abel was one of few black members who received priesthood while Joseph Smith was alive. If Brigham Young's words are scripture, then why did Joseph's actions, the prophet of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, contradict those declarations? The precedent that is set is that the "living prophet" creates scriptures by giving sermons, then the succeeding "prophet" voids those scriptures by stating something else.

Also regarding people of African origin, Brigham declared:

*The rank, rabid abolitionists, whom I call black-hearted Republicans, have set the whole nation fabric on fire. Do you know this, Democrats? They have kindled the fire that is raging now from the north and the south, and from the south to the north. I am no abolitionist, neither am I a pro-slavery man; I hate some of their principles and especially some of their conduct, as I do the gates of hell. The Southerners make the negro, and the Northerners worship them; this is all the difference between slaveholders and abolitionists. I would like the President of the United States and all the world to hear this.*

*Shall I tell you the law of God in regard to the African race? If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain, the penalty, under the law of God, is death on the spot. This will always be so.<sup>47</sup>*

I charge every member of the church to learn their own history and decide for themselves whether every sermon that Brigham ever spoke was scripture! And if so, then the entire church has strayed from those scriptures. But if scripture can be changed at will by the succeeding leaders of the church, then it is vain to follow the doctrines within scripture as they may change with each successive president of the church.

Another "scripture" from Brigham suggests penalties for adultery:

*A few of the men and women who go into the house of the Lord, and receive their endowments, and in the most sacred manner make covenants before the Almighty, go and violate those covenants. Do I have compassion on them? Yes, I do have mercy on them, for there is something in our organization which they do not understand; and there are but few in this congregation who do understand it.*

*You say, "That man ought to die for transgression of the law of God." Let me suppose a case. Suppose you found your brother in bed with your wife, and put a javelin through both of them, you would be justified, and they would atone for their sins, and be received into the kingdom of God. I would at once do so in such a case; and under such circumstances, I have no wife whom I love so well that I would not put a javelin through her heart, and I would do it with clean hands. But you who trifle with your covenants, be careful lest in judging you be judged....*

<sup>45</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 7:290-291.

<sup>46</sup> Doctrine & Covenants, Official Declaration 2.

<sup>47</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 10:110

*There is not a man or woman, who violates the covenants made with their God, that will not be required to pay the debt. The blood of Christ will never wipe that out, your own blood must atone for it; and the judgments of the Almighty will come, sooner or later, and every man and woman will have to atone for breaking their covenants.<sup>48</sup>*

One of the most controversial doctrines taught by Brigham was the Adam-God theory. Brigham said the following:

*How much unbelief exists in the minds of the latter day saints in regard to one particular doctrine which I revealed to them, and which God revealed to me--namely that Adam is our father and God--I do not know, I do not inquire. I care nothing about it. Our Father Adam helped to make this earth, it was created expressly for him, and after it was made he and his companions came here. He brought one of his wives with him, and she was called Eve, because she was the first woman upon the earth. Our Father Adam is the man who stands at the gate and holds the keys of everlasting life and salvation to all his children who have or whoever will come upon the earth.<sup>49</sup>*

Interestingly, Gordon Hinckley, denied this doctrine in an interview in 1997. If Brigham's sermons are all scripture, then why would that doctrine change? In Hinkley's interview, the reporter asked, "There are some significant differences in your beliefs. For instance, don't Mormons believe that God was once a man?" Gordon Hinckley responded, "I wouldn't say that. There was a little couplet coined, 'As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become.' Now that's more of a couplet than anything else. That gets into some pretty deep theology that we don't know very much about."<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, a true prophet, seer, and revelator could know a lot about this theology.

#### ORIGINS OF REVELATION

Any messenger from God fulfills the assignment relaying transparency of the originator of that message. If we do not know where the message originated, how can we be accountable to it? Are we left to always guess whether the message came from God or man? Are we required to just assume that all the words of the presidents of the church come from God? Are we just to assume that they are prophets because they say they are? Where is the evidence? Where is the message?

If a prophet is a true messenger, he will tell you where he got his message and deliver the message as he received it. He would not need to couch it in cute or awe-inspiring stories. This is why prophets often do say, "Thus saith the Lord," because they want the people to know that their message carries heavier weight than their own words. When the Lord says that whether the word comes from his own mouth or that of his servants (see D&C 1:8 [1:38-39]) keep in mind that "servants" in this scripture are not equivalent to presidents of the church. The context of that word goes far beyond earthly monikers or titles. It describes any being that is truly sent as a messenger from God, whether mortal or immortal, man or angel, president or lay member, member of the church or not.

One of these servants visited an ancient prophet who led the Nephite people. King Benjamin received his instructions from an angel of God, and he delivered that message to his people. "I would call your attention, for I have somewhat more to speak unto you for behold, I have things to tell you, concerning that which is to come; and the things which I shall tell you, are made known unto me, by an Angel from God. And he said unto me, Awake; and I awoke, and behold, he stood before me. And he said unto me, Awake, and hear the words which I shall tell thee: for behold, I am come to declare unto you the glad tidings of great joy. For the Lord hath heard thy prayers, and hath judged of thy righteousness, and hath sent me to declare unto thee that thou mayest rejoice; and that thou mayest declare unto thy people, that they may also be filled with joy" (Mosiah 1 [3:1-4]). King Benjamin was that servant to his people, speaking the words of God. But the angel was that servant to King Benjamin.

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<sup>48</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:247.

<sup>49</sup> David Evans, "Discourse by Brigham Young." *Deseret News*. 18 June 1873. Accessed 22 March 2022 at <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/desnews3/id/143049>.

<sup>50</sup> Don Lattin, "SUNDAY INTERVIEW -- Musings of the Main Mormon / Gordon B. Hinckley, 'president, prophet, seer and revelator' of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, sits at the top of one of the world's fastest-growing religions." *SFGate*, 13 April 1997. Accessed 22 March 2022 at <https://www.sfgate.com/news/article/SUNDAY-INTERVIEW-Musings-of-the-Main-Mormon-2846138.php>.



True prophets don't need to mingle words with quaint stories or uplifting thoughts. They understand that Christ's words build faith and they deliver His words. A prophet is only a prophet when he is acting as such, and prophets always testify of Christ, so though he may not need to say, "Thus saith the Lord," he will say what God says and testify it comes from God's mouth.

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## SEVENTH FUNDAMENTAL

### THE PROPHET TELLS US WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW, NOT ALWAYS WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW.

True. For better clarity, perhaps the seventh fundamental should say:

### A PROPHET TELLS US GOD'S MESSAGE, NOT WHAT WE WANT TO HEAR.

One of the current mantras within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to "follow the prophet." Children from a young age are taught that the president of the church is a prophet of God and that he speaks with God regularly. It indoctrinates the children and members to believe that whatever the leaders say or do is what the Lord would like them to do or believe. To question the direction of the leadership, their decisions, or the verity of their calling or words is heresy within the church. It is believed that if you question the leaders of the highest quorums in the church then you question God, and therefore are on the path of apostasy.

## PATH TO APOSTASY

Dallin Oaks and Richard Turley discussed this path to apostasy in a speech given to members in Boise, Idaho. As part of a question and answer format addressing claims about the church and its leaders, Oaks and Turley passed the baton back and forth disputing those claims. Concerning following the prophet, Oaks said, "Here's another claim. The church is focused on following the brethren instead of seeking Christ." In response, Turley disputed the claim with the following response.

*This is a preposterous claim. If you think about the period in the New Testament following the crucifixion of the Savior, would you expect that followers of Jesus Christ would follow someone other than the Lord's disciples? Indeed, following someone other than the Lord's called servants is a sign of apostasy.*

*As the Lord said clearly to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the 84th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, 'he that receiveth my servants receiveth me.' Furthermore in the 59th section we read 'And let them journey from thence preaching the word by the way, saying none other things than that which the prophets and apostles have written, and that which is taught them by the Comforter through the prayer of faith.'*

It is interesting how Turley contradicts himself in the first few sentences. Oaks continued, "Thank you brother Turley. Brethren and Sisters we come now to the conclusion of our presentation. When you follow false prophets, when you start toward apostasy, you are on the wrong side.... Brothers and Sisters, don't get on the wrong side."<sup>51</sup> The counsel is sound, that following false prophets leads to apostasy from the Lord. Yet the application is flawed because none of the men who lead the church have successfully demonstrated the defining characteristic of a prophet by prophesying. So as Oaks counsels members of the church to be careful about following false prophets but to follow the leaders of the church, he is claiming to be a prophet that one should follow. If that is the case, where are the prophesies of that man? Where is the message from God? Oaks spoke about false prophets in the same conference stating the following:

*Throughout our recorded religious history, we see a pattern of apostasy and restoration. The great prophets we learn about in the scriptures were often individuals who restored gospel truths that had been corrupted by apostasy. Noah, Enoch, Abraham, and Moses, to mention only a few. There are two main causes, or manifestations of apostasy, mentioned in the scriptures. The first is disobedience to the commandments of God. Thus, through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord declared: 'The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinances, broken the everlasting covenant.'*

*The scriptures are filled with similar statements. We will say little about this kind of apostasy, but concentrate our remarks on the second cause, or manifestation. The scriptures, ancient and modern, have many warnings about false prophets. This is the second cause,*

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<sup>51</sup> Dallin Oaks and Richard Turley. "Full Transcript of Boise Meeting with Dallin H. Oaks." *John's LDS Stuff*. Accessed 23 March 2022 at <http://johnsllds.blogspot.com/2015/06/full-transcript-of-boise-meeting-with.html>.

*or manifestation, of apostasy. Here is our Savior's teaching on this subject. Note that these teachings are addressed to his disciples, not to unbelievers. False prophets can be most threatening to those who already believe in prophets.*

*'And Jesus answered and said unto them, take heed that no man deceive you, for many shall come in my name, saying, 'I am Christ,' and deceive many.' He continued as follows: 'And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.'*

*Now, I switch to the Joseph Smith translation of these passages, which give a significant additional warning and an important way to avoid being deceived.*

*'For in those days there shall also arise false Christ's and false prophets and shall show great signs and wonders insomuch that if possible they shall deceive the very elect who are the elect according to the covenant. Whoso treasureth up my word shall not be deceived.'*

And therein is the key to avoiding deception and also the conflicting counsel given by Oaks: "Whoso treasureth up my word shall not be deceived." Turley quoted the 84<sup>th</sup> section of the Doctrine and Covenants stating that those who receive God's servants receive him. Yet in that same section, the Lord also states, "For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God." The Lord continues, "For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ; and the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world: and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit; and every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit, cometh unto God, even the father; and the father teacheth him of the covenant which he has renewed and confirmed upon you" (D&C 4:7 [84:44-48]). Notice that it is the Father who teaches us about the covenants and we should listen to the Lord's voice.

His voice can come through his servants, but just because a man says he is a servant of God does not mean that he truly is. This was a big problem among the Israelites in Judea. Ezekiel confronted many false prophets in his day.

#### SIGNS OF FALSE PROPHETS

During the fall of Jerusalem in the Babylonian captivity, the Lord came to Ezekiel saying to "prophesy against the prophets of Israel." There was an interesting dynamic during the time of Ezekiel in which many people, both male and female, arose speaking "vanity" and "lies" saying they were inspired of the Lord but were not. The consistent message of these false prophets was professing "peace; and there was no peace." That sounds reminiscent of our day. Here are the words the Lord spoke to Ezekiel:

*And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord God; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The Lord saith; and the Lord hath not sent them; and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word.*

*Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The Lord saith it; albeit I have not spoken? Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord God. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies; they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord God. Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace.... To wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord God.*

*Ezekiel 13:1-10, 16*

Ezekiel's message from the Lord is similar to a similar prophecy Isaiah saw regarding our day. Concerning the covenant house of Israel in our day, Isaiah predicted that in our day the people would ask their prophets to speak peace to their hearts and minds. "Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come forever and ever; that this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord; which say to

the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits; get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us” (Isaiah 30:8-11).

Those words reflect what Nephi also predicted we would say in our day. “All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well; and thus the Devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.... Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion. Wo be unto him that crieth, All is well; yea, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Yea, wo be unto him that saith, We have received, and we need no more. And in fine, wo unto all they that tremble, and are angry because of the truth of God” (2 Nephi 12 [28:21, 24-27]).

In 1980, the leadership of the church led by Wilford Woodruff published the Manifesto renouncing the principle of polygamy at the very time they were facing significant legal pressures individually and as a church. Was that God’s modification or man’s manipulation? Close to the end of the civil rights movement, the church made a declaration that all worthy males, of any race, were able to receive priesthood and temple blessings changing Brigham’s adamant declaration that no blacks could hold priesthood. Was that an inspired coincidence or perspired deliberation? In the 1988, the church sent out a survey to 3400 members in Canada and the US on temple endowment. Two years later several significant changes were made the temple endowment. Was that divine revelation or popular appeasement? Within the last year, leaders of the church led by Russell Nelson encouraged the COVID vaccination and told members of the church it was both safe and effective, despite contradictory scientific evidence, while at the same time organizations nationally were receiving excessive pressure to comply to maintain their non-profit statuses. Was that a powerful prophetic priority or convenient capitulation?

False prophets preach to popularity and popular consensus, or to maintain their own beliefs, agendas, or profits. A true prophet will never preach toward what the people want to hear, but will declare what the Lord puts into his heart and mind. This is a critical point related to the seventh fundamental principle. A prophet will say what God wants him to say. Unlike men, God will not yield to the trends of the day or make concessions for the desired beliefs of mankind.

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## EIGHTH FUNDAMENTAL

### THE PROPHET IS NOT LIMITED BY MEN’S REASONING.

True. A slight modification to the eighth fundamental could say:

### THE WORDS OF GOD SPOKEN BY A PROPHET ARE NOT LIMITED BY MEN’S REASONING.

When a true prophet of God speaks the words of God, they will transcend our mortal reasoning. The Lord was very clear that his wisdom is greater than our own. “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:6-9).

Benson stated, “There will be times when you will have to choose between the revelations of God and the reasoning of men—between the prophet and the politician or professor. Said the Prophet Joseph Smith, ‘Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof until long after the events transpire’ (Scrapbook of Mormon Literature, vol. 2, p. 173).”<sup>52</sup>

This statement should be modified slightly from Benson’s original writing. Perhaps the statement should say, “There will be a time when we will have to choose between the revelations of God and the reasoning of men—between the words of true prophet and the philosophies of politician, professor, or ecclesiastical leaders.” There is an often repeated phrase among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that stems from the temple endowment. In the endowment, a false preacher was asked what he was teaching, to which he responded, “The philosophies of men, mingled with scripture.” Unfortunately, what we see quite often in our world, within and without the church, are philosophies that ring across the pulpit mingled with the scriptures of God.

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<sup>52</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet.” Address given Tuesday, February 26, 1980, at Brigham Young University.

Isaiah predicted such a scenario. In symbolic reference to the doctrines of God verses the doctrines of men, Isaiah declared, “Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water” (Isaiah 1:22). Later, speaking of the proud people of Ephraim, a symbolic representation of our proud nation and people, Isaiah lamented, “But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean” (Isaiah 28:7-8).

The grotesque imagery of tables full of vomit brings to mind not only the retching of doctrines of drunken prophets and priests, but the sup upon which their followers dine. They consume half-digested doctrines and philosophies, deprived of the fresh and pure wine or water.

The message of a prophet that speaks in the name of the Lord in truth and holiness will not always resonate with the philosophies and ideologies of men, and may not make sense to our understanding. The Lord sees much more than we can see, and sees into the hearts of men. But let us not be diluted to believe that the words and actions of the president of the church, whom the church sustains as a prophet, is divinely inspired by God. Just because a man claims to be called of God, or is even truly called of God, does not imply that all their words or actions are inspired.

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## NINTH FUNDAMENTAL

### THE PROPHET CAN RECEIVE REVELATION ON ANY MATTER, TEMPORAL OR SPIRITUAL.

True, and so can everyone else. Perhaps the ninth fundamental should say:

### YOU CAN RECEIVE REVELATION ON ANY MATTER, TEMPORAL OR SPIRITUAL, WHETHER YOU ARE A PROPHET OR NOT.

I’m certain this particular fundamental was introduced because of concerns among members of the church that the presidents of the church were dabbling in temporal matters as well as spiritual. In fact, Benson quoted Brigham Young in stating the following:

*Some of the leading men in Kirtland were much opposed to Joseph the Prophet, meddling with temporal affairs. . . .*

*In a public meeting of the Saints, I said, “Ye Elders of Israel, . . . will some of you draw the line of demarcation, between the spiritual and temporal in the Kingdom of God, so that I may understand it?” Not one of them could do it. . . .*

*I defy any man on earth to point out the path a Prophet of God should walk in, or point out his duty, and just how far he must go, in dictating temporal or spiritual things. Temporal and spiritual things are inseparably connected, and ever will be.<sup>53</sup>*

Depending on the assignment of a prophet, they may work in temporal and/or spiritual matters. Joseph Smith was an excellent example of a prophet of God who “meddled with temporal affairs” as he tried to build a Zion people. I’m sure Enoch did the same. In the mind of the Lord, there is not a separation between temporal things and spiritual things. Both are the same. To Joseph, the Lord said, “Wherefore, verily I say unto you, that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal, neither any man, nor the children of men: neither Adam your father, whom I created: behold I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself; and I gave unto him commandment, but no temporal commandment gave I unto him; for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural, nor temporal, neither carnal nor sensual” (D&C 10:9 [29:34-35]).

The misleading aspect to this fundamental is that it suggests that the directives of the president of the church on temporal or spiritual matters may trump your own. Though a prophet does receive revelation, the receiving of revelation does not make a prophet a prophet. And simply because a prophet receives revelation does not mean that it is greater or more important than anyone else’s revelations. A prophet is just a regular man or woman to whom future events are revealed and who prophesies of things to come. Rest assured that if a prophet can receive revelation on any matter, either temporal or spiritual, then so can you.

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<sup>53</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 10:363-364.

Joseph taught that “God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them.”<sup>54</sup> You want to know all things about heaven or earth, go learn how to hear the Lord’s voice and ask God, and he will answer you. You do not need to be a high-ranking leader in the church or even a member of the church to receive this blessing.

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## TENTH FUNDAMENTAL

### THE PROPHET MAY BE INVOLVED IN CIVIC MATTERS.

This fundamental was changed when it was published in the Ensign to “*The prophet may well advise on civic matters.*”

Yes, he may, I suppose, if he wants to, but that will not likely be the priority of his ministry. Perhaps the tenth fundamental should say:

### A PROPHET WILL SEEK TO BUILD GOD’S KINGDOM UPON THE EARTH.

Joseph Smith was a great example of involvement in civic matters. In fact, all prophets probably engage in civic matters to some degree, though interestingly it is not historically accurate to suggest that a prophet is a civic as well as a spiritual leader. In fact, it is more often the case that prophets will leave civic concerns behind and engage in more spiritually-centered actions. God is more interested in building his kingdom, not the kingdom of Mammon or Babylon. No amount of civic involvement will bring us closer to Zion unless it is the civic matters specifically related to Zion. The Lord said to flee from the Chaldeans and from Babylon. We have to be in the world, but do not have to be of it.

Benson argues that the presidents of the church represent the best leaders in government. He stated, “When a people are righteous they want the best to lead them in government. Alma was the head of the Church and of the government in the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith was mayor of Nauvoo, and Brigham Young was governor of Utah. Isaiah was deeply involved in giving counsel on political matters and of his words the Lord Himself said, ‘Great are the words of Isaiah’ (3 Nephi 23:1). Those who would remove prophets from politics would take God out of government.”<sup>55</sup>

There are a couple misleading statements in Benson’s reasoning. First, he stages his statement to suggest that those who prophesy are “the best,” as if they are more holy and pure than other people. That is flatly untrue. A true prophet receives a divine calling from God, and this is because of his or her righteousness and obedience, but that does not imply that they are more righteous or obedient than anyone else. It means that God has a calling for them to function in that role, and not for others. Most of us would agree that we do want the best to lead us in government, but by no means does that indicate those who are prophets are the best, and particularly the president of the church. Remember how Moses counseled that all men should be prophets (see numbers 11:29)? If those in civic leadership had the spirit of prophecy, we would live in a better world, but the same goes for those in every other aspect of society. All could and should be prophets.

The second misleading statement is Benson’s comparison of ancient prophets who were also leaders to the modern-day presidents of the church. There are only sparse examples of prophet leaders in the scriptures. David, Nephi, King Benjamin, Alma, and Joseph Smith are some of them. Isaiah was an aristocrat and involved in political matters, but not a political leader. Just because some of these ancient prophets led their people does not mean that all prophets should dabble in politics. Benson’s argument simply provides justification to allow leeway for presidents of the church to become involved or “advise” on political matters.

The third misleading statement is that removing a prophet from politics or leadership removes God from government. That is presumptuous, as if stating that only prophets can access God. God is removed from our government--civic, secular, and ecclesiastical--because of wickedness on the part of the people and leaders. Isaiah saw our day and spoke unfavorably about our “prophets” stating, “His watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber” (Isaiah 56:10). “For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered” (Isaiah 29:10).

Notice the flow of the fundamental statements and how they appear to create an agenda.

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<sup>54</sup> *History of the Church*, 3:380.

<sup>55</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet.” Address given Tuesday, February 26, 1980, at Brigham Young University.

- First: The prophet is the only man who speaks for the Lord in everything.
- Fourth: The prophet will never lead the Church astray.
- Fifth: The prophet is not required to have any particular earthly training or credentials to speak on any subject or act on any matter at any time.
- Eighth: The prophet is not limited by men’s reasoning.
- Ninth: The prophet can receive revelation on any matter, temporal or spiritual.
- Tenth: The prophet may be involved in civic matters.
- Twelfth: The Prophet Will Not Necessarily Be Popular With the World or the Worldly
- Fourteenth: The Prophet and the Presidency—the Living Prophet and the First Presidency—Follow Them and Be Blessed; Reject Them and Suffer

Essentially, Benson is laying the groundwork for indisputable authority for the presidents of the church without accountability to their members. If they speak for the Lord in everything and cannot lead the church astray, and don’t have to have any specific credentials nor have to fit within the rational reasoning of men, but can speak on any matter, even civic matters, and always be right, whether you like it or not, then they are infallible, and to question their judgment would be akin to questioning God’s will, and therefore is heresy. After all, Benson stated, “The Prophet and the Presidency—the Living Prophet and the First Presidency—Follow Them and Be Blessed; Reject Them and Suffer.”

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## ELEVENTH FUNDAMENTAL

### THE TWO GROUPS WHO HAVE THE GREATEST DIFFICULTY IN FOLLOWING THE PROPHET ARE THE PROUD WHO ARE LEARNED AND THE PROUD WHO ARE RICH.

Likely true. Perhaps the eleventh fundamental could be simplified:

### THOSE WHO HAVE THE GREATEST DIFFICULTY IN FOLLOWING THE WORDS OF GOD GIVEN THROUGH A PROPHET ARE THE PROUD.

Let’s take a quick tangent and address one point: following a prophet. The counsel from the Lord is to not put our trust in the arms of flesh, meaning that we should not rely upon man, but must seek to obtain direct counsel from God. Why do prophets come? Because people are not listening to God. When people listen to God, then they all can become prophets. So the idea of following a prophet is an odd concept, because a true prophet would direct you toward Christ. So follow a prophet’s counsel and his or her guidance as far as it leads you to Jesus Christ, but do not become an acolyte or servant of another man or woman.

With that said, whether learned and rich or not, those who have difficulty following a prophet’s counsel are the proud. It is a little ironic that those who call themselves prophets today are both learned and rich, or at least well-to-do. It is also ironic that these are the people telling us that God will not allow them to lead us astray, but that if we follow these learned and wealthy men, we will be saved.

Benson quotes the prophet Jacob speaking about the rich and learned. Interestingly, this prophetic statement from that ancient prophet incriminates all who lean upon their own learning, even those ecclesiastical leaders in the highest quorums of the church. Let us all be forewarned by Jacob’s words!

*O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.*

*But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.*

*And whoso knocketh, to him will be open; and the wise, and the learned, and they that are rich, who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches—yea, they are they whom he despiseth; and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them.*

2 Nephi 6 [9:28-29, 42]

## ACCEPTING A PROPHET

Let's take a hypothetical situation and ask how the wise and learned men who lead the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would react. Let's imagine that an average middle-aged man within the church has a basic understanding of the scriptures and becomes concerned about the welfare of the people within the church. Let's imagine that he was a salesman in Salt Lake who owns his own business. While driving to his next appointment, stopped in traffic on the freeway, let's say he has a vision where he sees foreign troops marching in to the valley and decimating the city. Imagine that he is so shaken and fatigued by what he sees that he cancels his next appointment and goes home, falling on the couch and falls asleep.

While sleeping, let's imagine this man has a vision in which he sees God on his throne and hears a whole bunch of stuff from God regarding the imminent judgement and destruction of the people in the Salt Lake area. When he wakes, he is so disturbed by what he saw that he stops working and goes out in the streets trying to convince people about what he saw. When he goes to church, he grabs anyone who can listen to forewarn them that God is ready to cast judgment, and if they only repent and change their hearts they can be saved.

What do you believe the reaction of his bishop or stake president may be? How do you believe the general leaders of the church would respond? What do you believe would be the response of Russell Nelson or the apostles of the church? Do you believe that they would quickly recognize the truth of his words and accept him as a prophet of God? Would they heed his counsel?

As outlandish as this story may sound, it is based off a true story. Nephi told the following story about his merchant father, Lehi:

*It came to pass, that my father Lehi, as he went forth, prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people. And it came to pass, as he prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard, he did quake and tremble exceedingly.*

*And it came to pass that he returned to his own house at Jerusalem; and he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the spirit and the things which he had seen; and being thus overcome with the spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the Heavens open; and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.*

*And it came to pass that he saw one descending out of the midst of Heaven, and he beheld that his lustre was above that of the sun at noon-day; and he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament; and they came down and went forth upon the face of the earth; and the first came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a Book, and bade him that he should read.*

*And it came to pass as he read, he was filled with the spirit of the Lord, and he read saying, Wo, wo unto Jerusalem! for I have seen thine abominations; yea, and many things did my father read concerning Jerusalem -- that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof, many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon.... I would that ye should know that after the Lord had shewn marvellous things unto my father Lehi, yea, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, behold he went forth among the people and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard.*

*And it came to pass that the Jews did not mock him because of the things which he testified of them; for he truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations; and he testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the Book, manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world.*

*And when the Jews heard these things, they were angry with him; yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out and stoned and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away.*

*1 Nephi 1 [1:5-20]*

Based on the current culture and temperament of the church, the response to our hypothetical prophet may likely be similar to how the Jews treated Lehi. In fact, similar situations have happened in our day to some degree. Men and women seeing the current state of our deprivation as a people and church have spoken out, many of whom have been inspired by God. Isaiah declares that we today are in a similar state of apostasy as ancient Israel, though we as a church and people

outright reject that idea. It is uncomfortable for us to believe that we can be sideward with God, after all, we have a man or men at the head of the church who speak with God daily and are prophets, seers, and revelators, right?

Yet those who come out in earnest to preach and prophesy against sin, and urge members of the church and people throughout the nation and world to turn to Christ are persecuted by the very same leaders who say to follow the prophet. What they truly mean is follow the leaders of the church, not the prophets of God. If we followed the prophets of God, we would follow Isaiah's words. We would know that we are a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters; [we] have forsaken the Lord, [we] have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, [we] are gone away backward" (Isaiah 1:4). We would know that we are a people who are "called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness" (Isaiah 48:1).

That may sound dramatic, yet when an individual is inspired, the leadership of the wards and stakes and general councils get very antsy. Dallin Oaks said, "In determining on who's on the Lord's side on these latter-days, there are two major questions. First, for most non-Mormons, and for some Mormons, the key question is how they feel about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. For most Mormons, the key question on who's on the Lord's side is how they feel about the church's current prophetic leadership. If those feelings are sufficiently negative, they take members into what we call apostasy."<sup>56</sup> As you see, it is not about following counsel of a prophet, but about follow the dictates of a leader. And that is exactly what happens to those individuals who attempt to prophesy or even come close to what looks like prophecy. They are labeled as apostates and excommunicated from the church. Some of those excommunicated members truly do speak the words of God, though some of them do not.

The condemnation of the Lord may fall upon us if we are not careful. The Lord declared, "Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country." To modify that idea to our present day, perhaps we can extrapolate that to say no prophet is accepted in his own ward or stake, or even his own church. Jesus continued, "But I tell you the truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, of Sidon, unto a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel, in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them were cleansed, save Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:24-26).

Let us be forewarned that God will do the same for us as he did in ancient Israel if we reject the prophets. This fundamental from Benson appears to reflect our own state of mind as members of the church in general when it comes to prophets. Are we so proud as to believe that only the presiding official of the church has the right to speak for the Lord when such a doctrine is nowhere substantiated in scripture? If a true prophet speaks, let's not fall into one of these two groups, but let us have hearts open wide to receive what we can and discern truth from error. The opposite of a proud individual is a teachable one.

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## TWELFTH FUNDAMENTAL

### THE PROPHET WILL NOT NECESSARILY BE POPULAR WITH THE WORLD OR THE WORLDLY.

Almost true: Perhaps the twelfth fundamental should clarify:

### A PROPHET WILL NEVER BE POPULAR WITH THE WORLD OR THE WORLDLY.

Benson declared, "As a prophet reveals the truth it divides the people. The honest in heart heed his words, but the unrighteous either ignore the prophet or fight him. When the prophet points out the sins of the world, the worldly either want to close the mouth of the prophet, or else act as if the prophet didn't exist, rather than repent of their sins. Popularity is never a test of truth. Many a prophet has been killed or cast out. As we come closer to the Lord's second coming, you can expect that as the people of the world become more wicked, the prophet will be less popular with them."<sup>57</sup>

Never have truer words been said about prophets. The confusion does not come from this clarifying point about a prophet's words, but the confusion arises in who is or is not a prophet. Throughout Benson's speech, he has been laying a

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<sup>56</sup> "Full Transcription of Boise Meeting with Dallin H. Oaks." Address given Sunday, June 21, 2015, at Boise Idaho. Transcript obtained 28 March 2022 from <http://johnslsds.blogspot.com/2015/06/full-transcript-of-boise-meeting-with.html>.

<sup>57</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, "Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet." Address given Tuesday, February 26, 1980, at Brigham Young University.



foundation that the only prophet that people should listen to is the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. So, even though he spoke very plainly about the popularity--or lack thereof--of a prophet, his intent in this article is to portray the idea that the president of the church and the other 14 highest leaders in the church do not have to have your permission or consent to do whatever they want to do.

If we take the hypothetical scenario shared in the eleventh fundamental, about a man being called of God and prophesying in his ward and stake, we would predict that he would quickly become very unpopular, and the words Benson stated about division would be verified and before long that prophet would be excommunicated from the church. It has happened before and it will happen again. Fortunately, stonings are not legally permitted.

## WORLD POPULARITY

Though Benson declares a prophet will not be popular with the world or the worldly, we see an effort for the church and its leaders to become more accepted within the world. The church reaches out to organizations, churches, and governments around the world in an attempt to draw ties and build relationships. This is a wonderful act of trying to bridge shared beliefs. Yet we also see trends that the church is integrating into the world and becoming more conforming to worldly policies, principles, guidelines, and beliefs. Over the years, policy changes have conformed church doctrines to worldly views or pressures. Temple-related processes have been altered to accommodate changes in the church population. The public image of the church is highly protected. Interestingly, when someone is excommunicated from the church for apostasy, it is often stated that it is to protect the name and integrity of the church.

Over the past several years, the leadership of the church has been encouraging the idea of members showing global citizenry. Sharon Eubank, a member of the Relief Society general presidency, speaking about being parts of global organizations encouraged the women of the church to become global citizens. "I like this topic because we're talking about becoming global citizens."<sup>58</sup>

The presidency of the church sent out a similar message, stating the following:

*In times of pandemic or natural disaster the Church will respond to official orders to take needed actions such as cancelling or postponing meetings or other gatherings. The Church and its members are committed to being good citizens and good neighbors. The Church has a long history of reaching out and providing assistance to those in need.*

*Along with our commitment to be good global citizens, we respectfully assert that reasonable accommodations be extended to all people of faith as they strive to participate in rites, that are foundational to their faith.<sup>59</sup>*

This magnanimous statement by the church leaders limited the abilities of members to worship and conformed to illegal government edicts. This statement was followed up by an official statement from the same church presidency urging members to get the COVID vaccine. "To limit exposure to these viruses, we urge the use of face masks in public meetings whenever social distancing is not possible. To provide personal protection from such severe infections, we urge individuals to be vaccinated. Available vaccines have proven to be both safe and effective."<sup>60</sup> These statements were published to conform to government and state pressures rather than for the benefit of the members.

The positioning of the church and its members become good global citizens is an effort to expand into the world. It is not necessarily to become part of the world, but if nothing else to position themselves to be more accepted and recognized throughout the world. In efforts to obtain access to different areas of the world for proselyting, the church leadership has gone to great extents to build bridges with leaders and administrators around the world. In doing so, we see behaviors of church leaders and policy and practices change to more closely conform. In 2019, Russell Nelson visited Pope Francis in

<sup>58</sup> "Sister Eubank Encourages Women to Become Global Citizens." *LDS Newsroom*, 20 February 2020. Accessed 29 March 2022 from <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/sister-eubank-encourages-women-global-citizens>.

<sup>59</sup> Sarah Jane Weaver, "In response to COVID-19, First Presidency releases new administrative principles for the Church." *Church News*, 17 April 2020. Accessed 29 March 2022 from <https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders-and-ministry/2020-04-17/coronavirus-covid-19-first-presidency-letter-administering-church-challenging-times-181552>.

<sup>60</sup> "The First Presidency Urges Latter-day Saints to Wear Face Masks When Needed and Get Vaccinated Against COVID-19." *LDS Newsroom*, 12 August 2021. Accessed 29 March 2022 from <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/first-presidency-message-covid-19-august-2021>.

Rome. “We had a most cordial, unforgettable experience with His Holiness,” Nelson stated afterward. Russell Ballard, who accompanied Nelson on the trip, reported, “The connection that the president made with His Holiness was a wonderful thing.... They were friends from the first words.”<sup>61</sup> Though this appears to be a faith-building effort to connect to other world and religious leaders to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is very different from the methods used by Jesus himself and his disciples. I have a hard time believing that the Savior would condescend to call the pope “His Holiness.”

## CHURCH POPULARITY

Though the church leaders may not be as well accepted in the world and among world leaders as they hope, they are definitely popular within the church. The majority of church membership idolizes the church leaders, particularly the leading 15 men of the church. In many homes, you find pictures of these men in their homes. They dangle upon every word and are almost beside themselves when one visits locally. Isaiah predicted that we would worship and idolize our political and ecclesiastical leaders.

The rhetoric we often hear from the pulpit creates a hero worship of the apostles and presidencies of the church. Ronald Rasband, an apostle in the church, was asked to share a spiritual experience in a devotional in Portland, Oregon. He responded with a story that portrays the current president of the church, Russell Nelson, as the savior of the people as he prayed for the development of the COVID vaccine. “I sat at the knees of President Nelson as he has prayed to the Lord for a vaccine,” Rasband said. “For a vaccine that can bless the nations and the people of the world, because the gathering of Israel cannot proceed if we are all locked down, and right now much of the world is still locked down.”<sup>62</sup>

This story invokes a comparison of Nelson to a god-like status. First, Rasband says he sits at the knees of Nelson, almost like John rested his head on the breast of Jesus at the last supper. It gives an elevated exaggeration of the president of the church, as if he is holier than any other man. Not only do members throughout the world idolize “the prophet,” but even the apostles worship at his feet and sit at his knees as if learning from a master. Then Rasband gives the impression that the prayers of “the prophet” instigated that creation of the vaccine. Not only does this manipulate members into believing that the vaccine is sent from God, but it also further encourages them to idolize Nelsons for his powerful faith and prayers.

In the closing of the devotional, Rasband had the audience raise their hands to the air and consider that a shaking of his hand. He stated that because of COVID regulations, they could not physically shake hands. “This is what we’ll do tonight,” he concluded. “I want you to record in your journals that you shook the hand of an apostle of the Lord, and that’s what we just did.”<sup>63</sup> It is intriguing to compare this projection of importance to Jesus’ behavior and the apostles that followed him. Instead of creating a hero worship, the Savior told people to not tell others about the miracles he did.

Compare Rasband’s comments to Peter’s. “And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshiped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man” (Acts 10:25-26). Peter did not tolerate being idolized or worshiped, but turned people to God. Rasband, in contrast, encouraged the idolizing of an apostle as a life-altering experience and pointed people to following the prophet.

A true prophet will never be popular with the world or the worldly, and will never seek to aggrandize himself. Prophets speak against the worldly. More often than not, these prophets are persecuted by the world and even by those who are closest to them. Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country” (Luke 4:24). And to those who receive such persecution, the Lord offered hope and solace.

*Blessed are all they that are persecuted for my name's sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. For ye shall have great joy, and be exceeding glad; for great shall be your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

*Matthew 5:12-14*

<sup>61</sup> Sarah Jane Weaver, “President Nelson Meets with Pope Francis at the Vatican.” *Church Newsroom*, 9 March 2019. Accessed 31 March 2022 from <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/president-nelson-meets-with-pope-francis-at-the-vatican?lang=eng>.

<sup>62</sup> Ronald Rasband, audio recording of a devotional in the Portland, Oregon given on 21 August 2021. Accessed 29 March 2022 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAobUhmzj90>.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

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**THIRTEENTH FUNDAMENTAL**
**THE PROPHET AND HIS COUNSELORS MAKE UP THE FIRST PRESIDENCY—THE HIGHEST QUORUM IN THE CHURCH.**

False. Perhaps the thirteenth fundamental should say:

**A PROPHET DOES NOT NEED TO BE A MEMBER OF ANY CHURCH OR IN ANY LEADERSHIP POSITION OF ANY ORGANIZATION TO SPEAK IN THE NAME OF THE LORD.**

It is true that the president of the church and his counselors make up the highest quorum in the church. Benson quotes out of the Doctrine and Covenants to validate this point (see D&C 3: 35 [107:80]). Benson continues to support his statement by quoting another scripture in the Doctrine and Covenants, “Whosoever receiveth me, receiveth those, the First Presidency, whom I have sent” (D&C 112:20). This last scripture was a revelation given through Joseph Smith to Thomas Marsh. The first presidency at the time was Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Hyrum Smith. Can Benson take this scripture and apply it to the current presidency of the church? We have revelations that reveal the calling of Joseph and Hyrum as prophets of God. Where is the revelation that reveals the same to any one of the leadership of the church today?

In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, only those selected by the governing body of the church are allowed to become leaders within the church, and by church doctrine, only those who serve as the highest leaders in the church are able to be prophets of God. No one else can or will be a prophet unless ascending through that filtered channel. The leadership of the church has full control of every individual that is introduced into their brotherhood. Who can be a prophet of God? According to the church, only those who the leadership of the church decide.

Russell Nelson stated, “All leaders in the Lord’s Church are called by proper authority. No prophet or any other leader in this Church, for that matter, has ever called himself or herself. No prophet has ever been elected.... You and I do not ‘vote’ on Church leaders at any level.”<sup>64</sup> Though this is true for regular members, it is very misleading. Though the membership does not vote in or choose the next presiding authority of the church, the current leadership of the church does. They claim it is by prophesy and revelation, yet members never see those prophesies or revelations. We are left to just trust and believe. Yet it is clear that there is a selective process that happens within those committees that choose new leaders to replace those who pass on.

D. Michael Quinn researched the hierarchy of church structure and leadership. He noted how closely tied each of the leaders of the church really are. “At a primary level were kinship ties. No less significant were marriage connections... Convolved relationships made the Mormon hierarchy an extended family, and extensive family connections persist among LDS general authorities today.”<sup>65</sup> He continued:

*Where kinship was involved, [Brigham] Young's successors appointed only men with close kinship relations to current or former general authorities. Aside from Wilford Woodruff, LDS presidents after Young also doubled his proportion of appointments with close kinship connections. Twentieth-century presidents Joseph F. Smith and Heber J. Grant more than doubled the founding prophet's proportion of appointments with close kinship to other members of the Mormon hierarchy.<sup>66</sup>*

This close kinship among the apostleship of the church has continued throughout the generations. As of 2004, Lane Thuet researched the connections of the leadership of the church at that time. He suggested strong signs of nepotism among the highest echelons of the church.

*How does the current Presidency and Quorum of Twelve Apostles measure up? 100% of them are related in some way to current or former general authorities of the LDS Church. In the top 2 leading quorums – consisting of 15 men (The First Presidency and the Quorum of Twelve Apostles), five of these men are directly related to each other. Four are related to each other by marriage. Four are directly related to former LDS Presidents. Five are directly related to former apostles. Two are married to wives who are direct descendants of former presidents. Five are married to wives who are directly related to former apostles. Seven are married to wives who are relatives of current general authorities or of their wives. The only apostle who has no blood ties to any other general authority is*

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<sup>64</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “Sustaining the Prophets.” *Ensign*, November 2014.

<sup>65</sup> D. Micheal Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, Signature Books, p.163.

<sup>66</sup> D. Micheal Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, Signature Books, pp.169-170.

*Apostle Richard G. Scott. But, true to form, his wife is related to several current general authorities and even descends from a former LDS apostle.<sup>67</sup>*

How the church teaches a prophet is called is a glaring difference to how the Lord has shown in the past that it has been done. There are a few scriptural examples of a passing of a mantle from one leader to another. Elijah passed the mantle on to Elisha as Elijah ascended into heaven by leaving his cloak (see 1 Kings 19:19-21). In the New Testament, Matthias was chosen by common consent after the death of Judas (see Acts 1:26). Yet the current way the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints practices succession is not a doctrine found within or supported by the scriptures.

The president of the church will not be a prophet until the Lord puts upon him that mantle, and the Lord does not have to put that mantle upon that man just because he occupies the presidency of the church. Yet that is how the church teaches the concept of modern prophets. What happens if more than one prophet is called by God? If you were called by God as a prophet, could you go to the church office building and knock on the door and take a seat next to the current president of the church? Benson's statement assumes that God will only ever call one man to be a prophet at a time, and it assumes that God will ratify all the men that become the president of the church as a prophet just because of the successive process.

God will call his prophets, not man. If, happily, the Lord calls the president of the church (as we hope) as a prophet (not THE only prophet), this thirteenth fundamental principle would certainly be true assuming that president continued to hold the prophetic mantle, and continued to prophesy. He would not necessarily be the only prophet. God can call whomever he pleases whenever he pleases. The power and priesthood of God is his to hold and distribute as he would.

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#### FOURTEENTH FUNDAMENTAL

**THE PROPHET AND THE PRESIDENCY—THE LIVING PROPHET AND THE FIRST PRESIDENCY—FOLLOW THEM AND BE BLESSED; REJECT THEM AND SUFFER.**

False and very misleading. Perhaps the fourteenth fundamental should say:

**CURSED IS THE MAN WHO PUTS HIS TRUST IN MAN. FOLLOW JESUS CHRIST AND BE BLESSED; REJECT HIM AND BE CURSED**

If the president of the church is a true prophet of God, then we would be blessed by following his counsel and prophetic advice, and it is true that we would suffer consequences for rejecting the prophets of the Lord. The biggest assumption throughout the entirety of Benson's article is that the president of the church is a prophet.

Benson quotes Harold Lee, stating, "The story is told in the early days of the Church—particularly, I think, at Kirtland—where some of the leading brethren in the presiding councils of the Church met secretly and tried to scheme as to how they could get rid of the Prophet Joseph's leadership. They made the mistake of inviting Brigham Young to one of these secret meetings. He rebuked them, after he had heard the purpose of their meeting. This is part of what he said: 'You cannot destroy the appointment of a prophet of God, but you can cut the thread that binds you to the prophet of God and sink yourselves to hell.'"<sup>68</sup>

Benson uses this quote to suggest that if you cut your thread from the current president of the church, the same would happen to you, which is not true. Brigham accurately stated that one "cannot destroy the appointment of a prophet of God." So also one cannot assume for themselves an appointment from God as a prophet. Who calls a prophet? God alone!

Benson quoted N. Eldon Tanner, saying,

*"The Prophet spoke out clearly on Friday morning, telling us what our responsibilities are. . . .*

*A man said to me after that, "You know, there are people in our state who believe in following the Prophet in everything they think is right, but when it is something they think isn't right, and it doesn't appeal to them, then that's different." He said, "Then they become their own prophet. They decide what the Lord wants and what the Lord doesn't want."*

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<sup>67</sup> Lane Thuet, "Nepotism and Church Leadership – It's All In The Family." *Mormonism Research Ministry*. Accessed 29 March 2022 from <https://www.mrm.org/nepotism>.

<sup>68</sup> Harold Lee, Conference Report, April 1963.

*I thought how true, and how serious when we begin to choose which of the covenants, which of the commandments we will keep and follow. When we decide that there are some of them that we will not keep or follow, we are taking the law of the Lord into our own hands and become our own prophets, and believe me, we will be led astray, because we are false prophets to ourselves when we do not follow the Prophet of God. No, we should never discriminate between these commandments, as to those we should and should not keep.<sup>69</sup>*

Tanner's statement is intriguing and truly provides perspective of how the church leadership, and therefore the church membership, view prophets. Tanner's statement that "we are false prophets to ourselves when we do not follow the Prophet of God," further teaches the members that there is only one prophet and there will only ever be one prophet within the church. It also discourages members from seeking revelation and the gift of prophesy from God. It is a stark warning for any prophet called outside the general leadership of the church that the church will not accept them. It is also contradictory to the doctrines taught by Moses millennia ago. "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them," he said (Numbers 12:29).

Tanner also twists the truth to manipulate the audience to believe that disagreeing with the president of the church is akin to breaking the commandments of God. It is not true that deviating from the words of the president of the church implies disobedience to God. It is true that we cannot choose which commandments fit us and which do not, like we would choose what outfit to wear. "What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself, and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled," the Lord told the early church (D&C 1:8 [1:38]).

What are the commandments we must follow? The scriptures are replete with commandments of God, If the commandments seem a little daunting, remember that there are really only two commandments to follow. When Jesus was asked which of the commandments was most important, he responded, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22: 36-39 [22:37-40]). When we embody those commandments, additional commandments come from God himself into our own hearts. "And now I give unto you a commandment to beware concerning yourselves, to give diligent heed to the words of eternal life; for you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God" (D&C 4:7 [84:43-44]). Those are the commandments that we should keep above all others, despite what tradition says or despite what any other man believes or says.

What if we are wrong in what we hear from God? Then at least we followed to the best of our ability the pure intent of our heart to heed God's words. Joseph Smith said, "I believe all that God ever revealed, and I never hear of a man being damned for believing too much; but they are damned for unbelief."<sup>70</sup> If God is truly just, then he will look upon our hearts and direct us to good. Not that we are excused from wrongdoing, but he will direct us along a path back to him as long as we are teachable and sincere in our intent to be obedient. At night, I feel peace when I can look up to heaven and say that I have been true to the revelations and inspirations that God has put into my heart, and if I'm wrong, please teach me right. Too many people in this world are so afraid of being deceived that they are not able to take leaps of faith and believe.

Unfortunately, the continuous message that we hear from the leadership of the church is that we can have our own revelation as long as it is in line with the current teachings of the church leadership. "Follow the Prophet," the mantra states, "for he knows the way." There is a prophet that we should follow, whom if we do not follow we will be cut off from the Lord. The Lord spoke about this prophet to Moses:

*The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; according to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if*

<sup>69</sup> N. Eldon Tanner, Conference Report, October 1966.

<sup>70</sup> *History of the Church*, 6:477.

*thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously; thou shalt not be afraid of him.*

To the Nephites, Jesus said, “Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that prophet, shall be cut off from among the people” (3 Nephi 9 [20:23]). Jesus Christ is that prophet, and only he has the power and authority to truly cut someone off from God.

Nephi told us, “Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm” (2 Nephi 3 [4:34]). In the end, the only truly important thing in this life is whether we have come to hear the voice of the Lord and followed that voice. It is only the Redeemer who judges and who stands at the gate. “Remember that his paths are righteousness. Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him, and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel: and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way, save it be by the gate, for he cannot be deceived; for the Lord God is his name” (2 Nephi 6 [9:41]).

## SUMMARY

The 14 fundamental principles of following a prophet defined the doctrine of the church over the past 30 years. The fundamentals Benson uses are influenced by the beliefs of the church that the president of the church is the one man upon the earth who can act as a prophet. This skewed perspective 1) alters our beliefs of how the Lord truly calls prophets, 2) distorts our understanding of how true prophets function, and 3) prohibits our ability to discern who really is a true prophet and follow the counsel from true prophets of God. In order to more effectively define the roles of prophets and fundamentals of following prophets, here are modified fundamentals from Benson’s original speech.

	<b>Original Fundamentals</b>	<b>Modified Fundamentals</b>
1st	The Prophet Is the Only Man Who Speaks for the Lord in Everything.	Any Prophet Has Authority to Speak for the Lord About Anything.
2nd	The Living Prophet Is More Vital to Us than the Standard Works.	Get the Spirit of Prophecy So You Can Know the Will of the Lord for Yourself.
3rd	The Living Prophet Is More Important to Us Than a Dead Prophet.	You Are the Most Important Prophet for You.
4th	The Prophet Will Never Lead the Church Astray.	Trust Not upon the Arm of the Flesh.
5th	The Prophet Is Not Required to Have Any Particular Earthly Training or Credentials to Speak on Any Subject or Act on Any Matter at Any Time.	A True Prophet Is Not Required to Have Any Particular Earthly Training or Credentials to Speak on Any Subject or Act on Any Matter at Any Time.
6th	The Prophet Does Not Have to Say “Thus Saith the Lord” to Give Us Scripture.	A Prophet Will Speak the Words of God, and Will Be Transparent They Are God’s Words.
7th	The Prophet Tells Us What We Need to Know, Not Always What We Want to Know.	A Prophet Tells Us God’s Message, Not What We Want To Hear.
8th	The Prophet Is Not Limited by Men’s Reasoning.	The Words of God Spoken by a Prophet Are Not Limited by Men’s Reasoning.
9th	The Prophet Can Receive Revelation on Any Matter, Temporal or Spiritual.	You Can Receive Revelation on Any Matter, Temporal or Spiritual, Whether You Are a Prophet or Not.
10th	The Prophet May Be Involved in Civic Matters. Edited: <i>The prophet may well advise on civic matters.</i>	A Prophet Will Seek to Build God’s Kingdom Upon the Earth.

11th	The Two Groups Who Have the Greatest Difficulty in Following the Prophet Are the Proud Who Are Learned and the Proud Who Are Rich.	Those Who Have the Greatest Difficulty in Following the Words of God Given Through a Prophet Are the Proud.
12th	The Prophet Will Not Necessarily Be Popular With the World or the Worldly.	A Prophet Will Never Be Popular With the World or the Worldly.
13th	The Prophet and His Counselors Make Up the First Presidency—the Highest Quorum in the Church.	A Prophet Does Not Need To Be a Member of Any Church or in Any Leadership Position of Any Organization To Speak in the Name of the Lord.
14th	The Prophet and the Presidency—the Living Prophet and the First Presidency—Follow Them and Be Blessed; Reject Them and Suffer.	Cursed Is the Man Who Puts His Trust in Man. Follow Jesus Christ and Be Blessed; Reject Him and Be Cursed.

TRUTH IS CONSTANT

The doctrines of men change from time to time, modified often by the changes in perspectives or priorities. God’s truths are immutable and never change. There are aspects of truth that are still hidden and come to light. We call those the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Men’s ideas and understandings may change, but truth does not change. “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 82:4 [93:24]). We do not get to create or modify truth to fit our agendas or to satiate our own hopes, but truth exist independent of our philosophies and our ideologies.

The scriptures give us glimpses of that truth and guidelines of the doctrines of God. They give us historical precedent about how God interacts with his children. Since truth cannot and does not change, then we can ascertain from the scriptures many aspects of how God deals with his children. We can know for certain doctrines of Christ, or at least have a foundation upon which to build. Speaking about the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ found within the scriptures, the Lord said it proves “to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old, thereby showing that he is the same God yesterday, to-day, and forever” (D&C 2:2 [20:11-12]). The scriptures are true and the scriptures become a foundation upon which we can identify truth. They become the backdrop for knowing how God calls men anciently and in our day, to be his servants. We do not get to make up the rules. God designs the plans, and God often uses the weak and simple of the world to do his work.

*“The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are chosen; for God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.*

*1 Corinthians 1:25-27*

Joseph Smith was called by God as a prophet when he was just a young boy. He was only a young teenager when he had a vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ, God’s Son. Joseph fit well the description of Paul’s words about the weak and foolish things. In his own words, Joseph recounted, “We were deprived of the bennifit of an education suffice it to say I was nearly instructid in reading writing and the ground rules of Arithmetic which constuted my whole literary acquirements.”<sup>71</sup> The Smith family was very poor. “The poverty of the family meant that the older boys, Joseph included, hired themselves out as day-laborers to neighboring farmers.”<sup>72</sup>

Despite his humble upbringings, God called Joseph as a prophet of God to prepare the world for his coming.

<sup>71</sup> Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, pp. 1-6. Published in: Dean Jessee, Personal Writings of Joseph Smith.

<sup>72</sup> “Joseph Smith: An Overview.” *History of Mormonism*. Accessed 1 April 2022 at <https://historyofmormonism.com/joseph-smith/joseph-smith-early-life-martyrdom/>.

*Wherefore I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith Jr. and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments; and also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets: the weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh, but that every man might speak in the name of God, the Lord, even the Savior of the world; that faith also might increase in the earth; that mine everlasting covenant might be established; that the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple, unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers.*

Interestingly, God called Joseph as one of “the weak things of the world” to confound the wise “that man should not...trust in the arm of flesh, but that every man might speak in the name of God.” Joseph’s role was to teach people how to know the character of God and ascend to God just as he did. Contrast the calling of Joseph in his youth and insecurity to the learned and wealthy men who lead the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today. When asked about the age of the leadership of the church, Gordon Hinkley stated, “Isn't it wonderful to have a man of maturity at the head [of the church], a man of judgment who isn't blown about by every wind of doctrine.”<sup>73</sup> That is not what God thought 200 years ago when he first called Joseph Smith.

Joseph Smith did all he could to bring about the kingdom of God and live up to the mantle which the Lord had placed upon his shoulders. He created a church and established a doctrine of Christ that was lost for centuries. And then he was taken before his time, killed because he taught the true characteristics of Christ. Prior to his death, Joseph related the following dream.

*Joseph related the following dream which he had last night:*

*“I was back in Kirtland, Ohio, and thought I would take a walk out by myself, and view my old farm, which I found grown up with weeds and brambles, and altogether bearing evidence of neglect and want of culture. I went into the barn which I found without floor or doors, with the weather boarding off, and was altogether in keeping with the farm. While I viewed the desolation around me, and was contemplating how it might be recovered from the curse upon it, there came rushing into the barn a company of furious men, who commenced to pick a quarrel with me. The leader of the party ordered me to leave the barn and farm, stating it was none of mine, and that I must give up all hope of ever possessing it. I told him the farm was given me by the Church, and although I had not had any use of it for some time back, still I had not sold it, and according to righteous principles it belonged to me or the Church. He then grew furious, and began to rail upon me and threaten me, and said it never did belong to me nor the Church. I then told him that I did not think it worth contending about; that I had no desire to live upon it in its present state, and if he thought he had a better right I would not quarrel with him about it, but leave; but my assurance that I would not trouble him at present did not seem to satisfy him, as he seemed determined to quarrel with me, and threatened me with the destruction of my body. While he was thus engaged, pouring out his bitter words upon me, a rabble rushed in and nearly filled the barn, drew out their knives, and began to quarrel among themselves for the premises; and for a moment forgot me, at which time I took the opportunity to walk out of the barn about up to my ankles in mud. When I was a little distance from the barn I heard them screeching and screaming in a very distressed manner, as it appeared they had engaged in a general fight with their knives. While they were thus engaged the dream or vision ended”<sup>74</sup>*

Though the interpretation of the dream was never expounded by Joseph or the Lord, it is intriguing to surmise what that interpretation may be. If Joseph Smith were to enter a church building today, what would he think or say? Do you think he would recognize the doctrines he established? Would the policies and procedures of the church today look to him like a decaying and forlorn barn? If he were to teach the doctrines he taught when he was alive, do you believe that the members would listen with rapt attention, or would they behave like the men in his dream? I believe Joseph’s vision of the barn is a foreshadow of what he saw happening to the church and its leaders. We would not recognize the character of Joseph if he stepped foot in our church buildings today. Members today are very unfamiliar with the prophecies and teachings of Joseph from the early period of the church. We pick and choose what we believe from his teachings. If he came preaching today, he would be considered an apostate by the leaders of the church.

<sup>73</sup> “60 Minutes interview by Mike Wallace.” 7 April 1996, transcribed by Robert J. Woolley. Accessed 1 April 2022 from <http://lds-mormon.com/60min.shtml>.

<sup>74</sup> “History, 1838–1856, volume F-1 [1 May 1844–8 August 1844],” p. 177, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-f-1-1-may-1844-8-august-1844/183>.



All prophets--ancient and modern--are called of God. They come to warn and forewarn. If a man claims to be a prophet and is not called by God, he is a false prophet. True prophets come to teach the character and attributes of God, so that we can ascend to God. If a man does not lead you to Christ or stands in the way of accessing Christ, he is a false prophet. A prophet prophesies. If a man does not prophesy, he is not a prophet. God has called prophets in our day, but there are also many false prophets. They teach so close to the truth that it is hard to discern which is true and which is not. How do we discern correctly? Jesus tells us by their fruits we shall know them. May we accurately discern truth from error, right from wrong, true prophets from false. May we ascend together to God that when he comes we will recognize him for we will be like him.