

We Believe in Prophecy

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After an introduction like that and the beautiful song we just heard, I ought to be able to say something even if I am nearly a hundred years old. I greet you all this morning; I feel highly honored in having been invited to come and occupy this place to speak to you, particularly since I have learned that you have two thousand Mormon missionaries sitting over here on the right-hand side. I greet all of you and tell you how happy I am and how much I love this institution and its officers and its faculty and you students who are here today.

During the past week we have celebrated Thanksgiving Day, and I suppose all of you have counted your blessings. I counted mine, and after doing so I figured that I was about the most blessed man in the world—but I shall not take time to tell you why, because it would take too long. Then I thought of having to speak to you here this morning. I assume that all of you have reasons to be grateful, and one of them is that you are privileged to be students at this great institution. Not all of our youth have the privilege of attending a Church institution like this, where you sit in classes with men of God who have faith and testimony and who not only teach you the words of your lessons but inspire you to want to live to be

something worthwhile in the world. There are those who have opposite opportunities. I thought, as I tried to decide what to talk about today, that I would use for a text a couple of little experiences that are opposite to your experience here.

A few years ago I attended a conference in Ogden. One of the presidents of the Young Men's organization of the entire Church also attended that meeting, and I had him speak. In his talk he said that a professor in one of our non-Mormon universities threw out a question like this in his class: "Is there anyone in this class who believes that there is any way in the world that one can know a thing is going to happen before it happens?" Nobody answered. Then he said, "I am glad to know that none of you believes in that silly idea of your parents that one can know a thing by prophecy."

The speaker did not say any more about it, but when my turn came to speak I said, "If one of my children had been in that class they

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might not have said anything but they would have thought, "The poor man; I feel sorry for him. He did not get his training out of the right books, or he would have known better than that."

Then I had another experience. One of our secretaries in the Church office building had a daughter attending a non-Mormon university. She had been in charge of the Junior Sunday School in her ward and had prayed with our people and so forth, but her professor had so destroyed her faith that she resigned from the Sunday School and refused even to kneel in prayer with her own family. Her mother came to me broken-hearted to see if she could get some help, and I said, "Well, I can't help her because I'm not a college graduate, but I know how I can get you some help. I can make an appointment with a man who can get her back on the track, I'm sure, if she is willing to fill the appointment." She was, so I made the appointment with Brother Henry Eyring, and he got her back to her place in the Church. A few years after that I was down in Los Angeles attending a conference; after the conference I ordained a young man a bishop, and I learned that he was the husband of this girl that I mentioned to you who had lost her faith temporarily in that university.

The teacher in the first story said that there is no way we can know a thing before it has transpired, but I like the statement of Isaiah that tells of the Lord "declaring the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). That is prophecy. The Lord had a definite program and he was able to declare it, and the way he declared it was through his holy prophets. Isaiah said, "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isaiah 40:8). Peter said,

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. [2 Peter 1:19–21]

That makes prophecy the word of the Lord, and we have many prophecies to that effect.

Jesus said, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). And truly the prophets did testify of him and his coming. They outlined his life and ministry almost in detail—how he should be born of a virgin, how he should be persecuted, how he should finally be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, and how men would cast lots for his clothing at the time of his crucifixion.

Not only did the prophets foretell his coming in the meridian of times, but when he would come again in the latter days. Following his resurrection, as he walked along the way by two of his disciples on the way to Emmaus—and we are told that "their eyes were holden" that they did not recognize him—and as he heard what they had to say about him and his life, his ministry, his crucifixion, and his resurrection, he realized that they did not understand what he had been trying to teach them. So he said, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken," and commencing with Moses and the prophets, he showed them how in all things the prophets had testified of him (see Luke 24:13–27). Luke tells us that he "opened [the apostles'] understanding that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45). That is what the Lord has done in this, the dispensation of the fullness of times: he has opened the understanding of his prophets so that they understand the holy scriptures as no other people in the world really do.

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like to study the prophecies of Isaiah. It seems to me that he lived almost more in our day than when he was actually here upon the earth, for he saw so much of what would transpire in our day.

One of the prophecies of Isaiah that has impressed me ever since I was a boy was his prediction of the destruction of the great city of Babylon. At that time, Babylon was the greatest city in the entire world; yet Isaiah said that it would be destroyed, that it should become the abode of reptiles and wild animals, that the Arab would no more pitch his tent there, and he added that it shall never be rebuilt (see Isaiah 13:19–22). Can you imagine anyone today speaking of one of our great cities and saying that it would be destroyed and never be rebuilt? A few years ago President Kimball and Brother Hunter of the Twelve spent their holiday time over in the Holy Land, and when they returned I asked Brother Hunter, “Did you see Babylon?”

He said, “We saw what there was left of it.” It has never been rebuilt to this day, and that is what the word of prophecy is when it comes inspired of the Lord.

As I said, we are told in three places to study Isaiah’s prophecies because they would all be fulfilled. Then the Lord, when he taught the Nephites, said that in the day of their fulfillment it would be given to the people to understand them. There is no time to go into a lot of detail, but I would like to mention briefly a few of Isaiah’s prophecies.

He saw the desert made to blossom as the rose; he saw us Mormons settle here in these valleys of the mountains and make it like a garden place; he saw the rivers flow in the desert where we have built these great irrigation canals, some of them larger than rivers, in order to water this arid land; he saw the rivers flow down from high places, where we have reservoired it in these mountain lakes to take care of our summer needs.

He saw the daughters of Zion come up and sing in the heights of Zion; and where in the history of the world can you find anything to fulfill that prophecy like the singing of the Tabernacle Choir, broadcast for over fifty years now without a break? And now, with the telstar, they sing to the entire world.

He saw the house of the God of Jacob established in the top of the mountains in the latter days, that all nations would flow unto it; and they would say, “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths” (see Isaiah 2:2–3). I think that the temple in Salt Lake is the very house of the God of Jacob. When I think of the Saints attempting to build an edifice like that with nothing but their hands to build it with, a thousand miles from transportation, I feel that nobody except those who are inspired to righteous desires, such as our pioneer fathers and mothers were, could have undertaken a work like that.

Isaiah saw that people in all nations would say, “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob.” I fulfilled my first mission over in Holland before there were temples anywhere but here in the west, and when our people joined the Church the first thing they wanted to do was to come to America. They were willing to sacrifice everything—leave their homes and sell their furniture and give up their employment—just to come to Zion; and it was that temple that drew them here.

I had a very earnest investigator, a businessman, who said, “I’ll never join your church.”

I asked, “Why?”

He said, “I don’t want to go to America.”

“Good for you!” I said. “You just join the Church and stay right here and help to take care of these branches.”

He had only been a member a few months when he came into my office one day and said,

“Brother Richards, I have a chance to sell my business.”

I asked, “What do you want to sell your business for?”

“Oh, I want to go to Zion,” he said—and he came to that temple that Isaiah saw over three thousand years ago that would be built in the tops of the mountains and unto which all nations would flow, saying, “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,” that they might walk in his ways and learn of his paths.

Isaiah saw the gathering of latter-day Israel. He saw the railroad train and the airplane. He said, “Who are these that fly . . . as the doves to their windows?” (Isaiah 60:80). He was not talking about birds, but about people. He told how their means of transportation would roar like the lion and would pick them up and bring them swiftly that they would not even have time to loosen the latches of their shoes or to slumber or sleep.

This was illustrated when President McKay went to Europe a few years ago for the dedication of a chapel in the little town where his mother had been raised. Upon his return, he reported to us Brethren of the Twelve that he left London at two o’clock in the afternoon, spent a little time with the brethren in Chicago, and was in his own bed that night in Salt Lake. He did not have time to slumber or sleep, just as Isaiah saw all those thousands of years ago when the only means of travel were camels, oxen, donkeys, and so forth. President McKay then compared it with his parents’ journey to Zion in the early days; they spent forty-three days on the water in a sailing vessel and then weeks getting across the plains. See what has happened just in this day when the Lord was to bring forth his work upon the earth!

These are just some of the visions of prophecy that Isaiah saw. He saw also the day when people would draw near him with their mouths and with their lips would honor him, yet their hearts would be far removed from

him and they would teach for doctrine the precepts of men. Therefore, he said that the Lord would “proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid” (Isaiah 29:14). We have that “marvelous work and a wonder.” It is a great thing the Lord has done in opening the heavens and sending holy messengers back to this earth to restore the keys of his gospel and the various responsibilities in his Church to prepare the way for his Second Coming.

There are many more prophecies, such as those of John when he was banished upon the Isle of Patmos. He saw the power that would be given to Satan to make war with the saints and to overcome them and to reign over every nation; then he “saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (see Revelation 13:7; 14:6). The everlasting gospel is the only gospel that can save us, and that we learn through revelation; for John told us that the Lord would bring it forth to be preached to every nation.

Then we have the testimony of Jesus himself of the signs of his Second Coming. There is no time to go into the details, but he told about the wars, the rumors of wars, the pestilence, the earthquakes, the famine, and so forth; then he said, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:14; see also Joseph Smith 1:31).

We honor not only the dead prophets today, but we honor the living prophets. Before I close I would like to read you one statement uttered by President Wilford Woodruff in the general conference back in 1898. He told about the time he first met the Prophet Joseph Smith in a testimony meeting of the priesthood where many of the brethren bore testimony of the

Restoration. When they were through, the Prophet said,

Brethren, I have been very much edified and instructed in your testimonies here tonight, but I want to say to you before the Lord that you know no more about the future destiny of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother's lap. You don't comprehend it; it is only a little handful of priesthood you see here tonight, but this Church will fill North and South America, it will fill the world, it will fill the Rocky Mountains, [and this was fourteen years before our first pioneer group came here to the Rocky Mountains,] and there they will open the door for the establishment of the gospel among the Lamanites. [Relief Society Magazine, 50, no. 8 (August 1963): 619]

If you could realize just how much the Lamanites are responding to the Church today—they are converting by the thousands. He said that it would “fill North and South America”; if he were not a prophet, how could he make such a statement as that? We believe in the living prophets.

I want to read to you just one little excerpt from the *Time* magazine of August 1978, discussing “Mormonism: A Kingdom Apart.”

Just as the saints once made the desert bloom through honeybee-like enterprise, so have they made their church into the biggest, richest, strongest faith ever born on U.S. soil. It has grown fourfold since World War II to 4 million members including one million outside the United States. [Time, 7 August 1978, p. 54]

Is it not wonderful to talk about this marvelous work and wonder? (I've got to quit.)

I hope that you believe in living prophets today and that you will keep close to the Church. When Marion G. Romney was called to be an Assistant to the Twelve, President Grant said, “Marion, you keep your eye on the President of this Church and you'll never go astray.” I say that to each of you today. He is a great leader; and if we will follow him with all our hearts and souls and give him the strength of our abilities and our prayers, this kingdom will continue to roll forward and, as the Prophet Joseph said, it will fill not only North and South America but it will fill the world. That is my testimony to you, and I pray God to bless you all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.