

# Are Prophets Needed Today?

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One of the fundamental claims of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the LDS Church or the Mormon Church is that it has a living prophet, president of the LDS Church, on the earth today (*The Articles of Faith* 9, *Teachings of the Living Prophets*, Chapter 1, 2).<sup>1</sup> It claims that “the Lord reveals His will to living prophets now as He did in the past” (*Teachings of the Living Prophets*, p 5). As a proof text, it cites Amos 3:7, which says, “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.” Some Latter-day Saints implied that evangelical Christians are to be pitied, as they only have the Bible, therefore have only some of the truth. These are extraordinary claims. James D. Harmstone, the late president of *The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of the Last Days* in Manti, Utah also claimed to be a prophet of God. This fundamentalist group believes in the Law of Celestial Plural Marriage. Was Mr. Harmstone a prophet? Latter-day Saints will say, no! All who claim to be prophets of God cannot be true prophets, otherwise the same God would give people contradictory messages.

Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. Let us compare the LDS official teachings on prophets with prophets taught by the Bible. This paper has four parts: (1) Prophets in the Old Testament. (2) Amos 3:7 –the promise of living prophets? (3) Prophets in the New Testament. (4) Prophecy today. We use the King James Version, the Bible version preferred by the LDS Church. We also use some of the LDS scriptures – *The Book of Mormon* and *The Pearl of Great Price* (2013), official teaching manuals: *Gospel Principles* (2009) and “*Teachings of the Living Prophets*” (Religion 333) (2010).

## 1 Prophets in the Old Testament.

**Moses was a standard of comparison for all future prophets** (Deuteronomy 18:15ff, 34:10). The prophets were raised up by God to call God’s people back to obedience to the God’s commands and live out His standards. True prophets faced challenges from false ones (1 Kings 13, Jeremiah 28). In the Old Testament two methods of discerning false prophets from true ones can be found: theological integrity and accuracy of the prophecies.

**(a) A theological integrity:** A true prophets will not teach error or lead the people to other gods other than the one true God (Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 18:20). God will never contradict himself. If someone says something contrary to the Bible, we can know that this is not God’s Word.

**(b) Accuracy of the prophecies:** prophecies must come to pass (Deuteronomy 18:20- 22). “*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*” (Deuteronomy 18:20).

Today we see many self-proclaimed prophets who prophesy in Lord’s name. Jesus said, “*Many false prophets shall rise, shall deceive many.*” (Matthew 24:11) So above methods of evaluating alleged prophets are still valid. Many Christians have examined LDS prophets’ prophecies to see if they really happened. In this paper, however, I will focus on *whether or not prophets are needed today, whether or not new revelations are to be added to the canon* which is “an authoritative list of books accepted as Holy Scripture” (Merriam- Webster Dictionary). Both issues are connected, so we should clarify LDS teachings on living prophets and new revelation, then we will see what the Bible says about LDS claims. Before, we should read Amos 3:8 from the context.

## 2 Amos 3:7 “Surely the Lord will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets”.

**The immediate context of Amos 3:7 teaches that God, out of mercy, revealed the secrets of His plan - the judgment was coming- to and through the prophets.** Verse 1 starts with solemn command, “*Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt.*” Israel has broken the covenant - agreement with God and she must suffer God’s punishment. It is simple cause and effect. God has spoken and he will act. But out of love God gave revelation to the prophet before the judgment happened. God said, “*Surely the Lord will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.*” Amos 3:7 does not teach that God reveals his secrets to LDS prophets.

## 3 Prophets in the New Testament.

**There was continuity with the Old Testament. John the Baptist was the last prophet to minister under the law given to Moses** (Luke 16:16, Matthew 11:12-13). “*For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.*” (Luke 16:16) The ministry of John the Baptist was the dividing line between the Old and the New Testaments.

**Second, Jesus himself declared that he came to fulfil the law and the prophets** (Matt. 5:17-20). Jesus says, “*Think not I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not to come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled*” (Matthew 5:17-18). The law and the prophets point forwards to Christ.

**Third, Jesus is the greatest prophet and more** (Deuteronomy 18:15ff, Acts 3:22-26, 7:37, John 1:1-14, Revelation 19:13- He is the Word of God)<sup>2</sup> **He is the finality of the revelation of God in Christ** (Hebrews 1:1-2), **and once this revelation has been completed, no more revelations are to be included in the canon.** The opening verse in Hebrews flatly denies any more writings to be added to the canon. “*GOD, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets. Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.*” (Hebrews 1:1,2)

God has spoken. God revealed himself in diverse ways in the OT times. He spoke in a storm and thunder to Moses (Exodus 19:19, Deuteronomy 5:22f) in a small voice to Elijah (1 Kings 19:12). He spoke to Isaiah in a vision (Isaiah 6). But all successive acts and diverse ways of revelation did not live up to the fullness of what the Son had to say.<sup>3</sup> Divine revelation was progressive but partial, leading up to its

consummation in the revelation of Christ.<sup>4</sup> What do we understand of prophecy today? Now we should compare LDS teachings on prophets with teachings on prophets taught by the Bible.

#### 4 Prophecy today

The LDS Church claims to have four books as scripture: the *Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price* (the “standard works”) and it teaches that “the inspired words of our living prophets are accepted as scripture” (*Gospel Principles*, p.45, 48).

The “*Teachings of the Living Prophets*” quotes from the “*Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet*” by Ezra Taft Benson - the prophet of the LDS Church from 1985 to 1994 (pp.22-27). The following three points are to be reckoned with.

- \* “The living prophet is more vital to us than the standard works.”
- \* “The living prophet is more important to us than a dead prophet....Beware of those who would pit the dead prophets against the living prophets, for the living prophets always take precedence.”
- \* “The Prophet will never lead the Church astray.”

**The Road Map to where?** : The current revelation from God supersedes teachings of former prophets including Joseph Smith. In 1890, the fourth LDS President Wilford Woodruff commanded the church to “refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the law of the land” (Official Declaration-1, at the end of the *Doctrine and Covenants* ) thus abolishing the practice of plural marriage which Joseph Smith had taught. It, however, is right to say that plural marriage has been put on the shelf since 1890, as Joseph Smith’s teaching on plural marriage in the Doctrine & Covenant 132 has not been denounced and is still in LDS scripture.

Second, the late LDS President Spencer Kimball’s 1978 declaration allowed worthy black males to enter the priesthood. Mr. Kimball stated that they had pled long and earnestly on behalf of those who had been withheld from the priesthood, and a new revelation had been granted (*Official Declaration-2*). This new teaching contradicts racial statements in *The Book of Mormon* (1 Nephi 12:23, *Mormons* 5:15), *The Pearl of Great Price* (Moses 7:8,12,22, Abraham 1:21,27) as well as the teachings of their first prophet, Joseph Smith. “If any current prophet can change what was accepted truth or practice in the past, where does that leave a Latter-day Saint in terms of security of faith?” (John L. Bracht<sup>5</sup>)

**Evangelicals may “agree that there is no new revelation to be expected concerning God in Christ, the plan of salvation and the principles of Christian life, etc”.**<sup>6</sup> There is a noticeable shift in the role of prophecy in the New Testament. In Acts 21:4 Paul was urged not to go to Jerusalem by believers in Tyre, but Paul did not heed their advice. Agabus appeared and said, “Thus saith The Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews of Jerusalem bind the man that oweneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles”(Acts 21:11). Paul was not daunted by it and went to Jerusalem. What do we make of it? Paul accepted Agabus’ prophecy as *descriptively accurate, but not personally directive* (Acts 21:12-14).<sup>7</sup> Even if God gives prophecies today, we must not treat them on a par with the Bible. Testing and weighing prophetic utterance is required (1 Corinthians 14:29) so that false prophecy may not be used by Satan to lead people astray (Matthew 7:15, 24:11, 2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 4:1ff).

The risen Christ gave a Bible study to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. He started with Moses and all the prophets and expounded all scriptures. Let’s listen to what Jesus said to the disciples. Jesus called “fools” those who failed to accept what is taught in the Bible.

<sup>25</sup>Then he said unto them. O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: <sup>26</sup>Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? <sup>27</sup>And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:25-27)

<sup>44</sup>And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. <sup>45</sup>Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup>And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: <sup>47</sup>And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning continuity in terms of their out-working in Jesus. The detailed prescriptions of the Old Testament *Jerusalem*.” (Luke 24:44-47)

There is no part in the Bible that does not bear witness to Jesus, as *the law of Moses, the prophets, and psalms* are three divisions of the Hebrew Bible (v44)<sup>8</sup> The entire OT points to the Messiah. Jesus explained how prophecy was fulfilled in his passion and resurrection (Luke 24:44-47). Once prophecy was fulfilled in his passion and resurrection, there is no need of further revelation. The Bible contains all that necessary for salvation (living eternity with the Heavenly Father) and the right living (2 Timothy 3:16). Admitting any further revelation means diminishing Christ and his work on the cross.

**Conclusion:** Admitting any further revelation means diminishing Christ and his work on the cross. The teaching of the Bible remains true and will not be superseded. Even if God gives prophecies today, we must not treat them on a par with the Bible, nor will they contradict the biblical revelation. But teachings of the LDS Church may become things of the past if a future living prophet claims a new revelation. Where does the living prophet lead you? Away from knowing and serving the true God of the Bible.

1 *The Articles of Faith* 9 in “*The Pearl of Great Price* says: “We believe all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and we believe that he will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God

2 J.A. Motyer, “Prophecy, Prophets” in “*The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*”(Leicester, IVP, 1994) p.1265

3 F.F Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1994) p.45

4 Craig Blomberg & Stephen Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon & an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IVP, 199) p.45

5 John L.Bracht, “*Mormonism-Magnificent Illusion*” ( Sydney, 1998) p.12

6 J.A. Motyer Ibid p.1287

7 Ibid

8 Leon Morris, *Luke, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Leicester, IVP, 1992) p.373