

The Prophets and the Scriptures

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Brethren and sisters, I'm thrilled as I look at this great audience, and I'm highly honored at having been invited to occupy this position here this morning. Considering my age, I doubt if I'll ever get another invitation to come back, but I'll treasure as long as I live the opportunities that I've enjoyed over the years to attend this institution and the devotionals and so forth. I think it's wonderful to come here. This is a wonderful campus, wonderful buildings, wonderful faculty, and wonderful young people—nothing else like them in all this world. And I thank the Lord for each one of you and for your faith and for your presence here today.

In thinking what I might say to you today, I thought of what President Kimball has written in the editorial in the September issue of the *Ensign*. In that article there are three full pages, six columns, where he's exhorting us to study the scriptures. I like that thinking. I love the scriptures, and I love President Kimball. I thank the Lord for him and his great leadership ability and for his life because we need men of his stature to guide us in these latter days. You remember the song that we all sing with such fervor: "We thank thee, O God, for a prophet to guide us in these latter days." And we do thank him, and we want to follow his counsel and his advice.

The More Sure Word of Prophecy

In thinking of what I might say about the scriptures, I thought of an experience that I had in Ogden a few years back when I attended a conference there and had as my companion one of the counselors in the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association of the Church. In his talk he made this statement which I want to present to you here today. He said that a university professor once said to his class, "Is there anyone in this class who believes that there's any way we can know a thing before it transpires?" Nobody answered. Then the teacher commented, "I'm happy to know that none of you believes in those silly ideas of your parents that you can know things by prophecy, know in advance." That's all this man said about it. When my turn came to speak, I said, "Listening to what my companion has said, I thought, if one of my children had been in that class, they might not have said anything, but in their hearts they would have said, 'Well if he doesn't know any better

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than that, let him think what he wants to.” Now, that’s my idea of prophecy.

You remember, following the resurrection of the Savior, he walked along the way by two of his disciples on the way to Emmaus. (We’re told that “their eyes were holden” that they didn’t recognize him.) When he heard what they had to say about him and his ministry and his crucifixion, he realized that they didn’t comprehend what the prophets had said and predicted about him. 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 that in all things the prophets had testified of him (see Luke 24:13–27). That would be a nice lesson in itself—just to consider those prophecies—because the prophets foretold his life and ministry in such minute detail that they even declared men would cast lots for his clothing at the time of his crucifixion—and that they did. Then we’re told by Peter that he opened the understanding of his apostles that they might understand the scriptures. And that’s what the Lord has done in the restoration of his truth to the earth. In our day, he has opened our understanding that we might understand the scriptures.

I like the statement by the apostle Peter:

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 daystar 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]

Now according to Peter, prophecy is more sure than anything else in the world because, when prophets speak under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord, their prophecies will surely come to pass.

Prophecies about the Growth of the Church

I would like to give you an illustration of prophecy in our day. In the general conference of the Church in 1898, President Wilford Woodruff told about when he first met the Prophet Joseph Smith. He said he met the Prophet for the first time when he attended a meeting where many of the brethren bore testimony of the Restoration. When they got 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 concerning the destiny of this church and kingdom than a babe upon his mother’s lap.” It is only a little handful of priesthood you see here, and yet our last priesthood meeting during April conference was broadcast in 1,050 different buildings all over the land. Is there anything else like it in this world? Has there ever been anything like it in the world, as far as the priesthood of God is concerned? The Prophet Joseph understood all of this, and he said, “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.” (This was fourteen years before our people came to the Rocky Mountains.) As our Brethren used to say, they came willingly because they *had* to. They were driven out, but the Prophet Joseph knew all of that in vision before ever they came: “There will be tens of thousands of Latter-day Saints who will be gathered in the Rocky Mountains, and there they will open the door for the establishment of the gospel among the Lamanites.”

You know what’s going on down in Mexico and South America, the great multitudes of Lamanites that are being brought into the Church. Now the Brethren have planned eight area conferences down in those lands, and the people are coming in by the thousands. We had a report from one mission President who reported his mission recently. He said, during the three years he presided, they had had

seventeen thousand new converts come into the Church in that mission. Well, the Prophet Joseph saw all of that. Prophecy, Peter says, is the most sure thing that we have in the world.

Isaiah's Prophecies

Now, in the Book of Mormon, we're told in three places that we should study the prophecies of Isaiah because they would all be fulfilled. Let me just read you what the Savior said when he visited the Nephites here in this land of America:

Ye remember that I spake unto you, and said that when the words of Isaiah should be fulfilled— behold they are written, ye have them before you, therefore search them—

And verily, verily, I say unto you, that when they shall be fulfilled, then is the fulfilling of the covenant which the Father hath made unto his people, O house of Israel. [3 Nephi 20:11–12]

The Lord decreed through Jeremiah that he would make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, and we have that new covenant that he has made with the house of Israel. The Savior also said that at the time when these things—the words of Isaiah—should come to pass he would make this covenant. Then he added:

And then shall the remnants which shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth, be gathered in from the east and from the west, and from the south and from the north; and they shall be brought to the knowledge of the Lord their God, who hath redeemed them. [3 Nephi 20:13]

It was a long while ago that he made that statement, but you and I are living to see the literal fulfillment of it today.

Moroni, speaking of the words of Isaiah, said, "For the eternal purposes of the Lord shall roll on, until all his promises shall be fulfilled" (Mormon 8:22). We don't need to

worry about that. As Isaiah said, the Lord hath declared the end from the beginning (see Isaiah 46:10). He said, "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8). Moroni said that all of Isaiah's promises shall be fulfilled. We should search the prophecies of Isaiah.

Then Nephi made this statement regarding the prophecies of Isaiah: "But behold, I proceed with mine own prophecy, according to my plainness; in the which I know that no man can err; nevertheless, in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled men shall know of a surety, at the times when they shall come to pass" (2 Nephi 25:7). Now, as I study the prophecies of Isaiah, it seems to me that he almost lived more in our day than in the time when he was actually upon the earth. He saw so much of what would transpire in this dispensation.

Then Nephi continues, "Wherefore, they [the prophecies of Isaiah] are of worth unto the children of men, and he that supposeth that they are not, unto them will I speak particularly, and confine the words unto mine own people; for I know that they shall be of great worth unto them in the last days; for in that day shall they understand them; wherefore, for their good have I written them" (2 Nephi 25:8). That's why our prophet and seer and revelator advises us to study the scriptures—because, as Nephi said, they shall be of great worth to us in the latter days. That's a marvelous statement about the prophecies of Isaiah.

I'd like to give you a few of these prophecies and refer to them because I think that Isaiah lived more, as I tell you, in our day. He saw the day when the desert should blossom as a rose. If this wasn't a desert when our people first came here over a thousand miles from transportation, I don't know what you'd call a desert. Isaiah said:

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon [those great ancient cities]; They shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. [Isaiah 35:1–2]

When I was in the real estate business years ago, I attended a real estate board convention back in Kansas City. The president of the national organization (this was before we had planes to fly around in, and we had to go by train) said he'd visited nearly every large city in the United States during his presidency. He said cities were like people. They had personality. He said, "And after visiting most of these cities, as I left, I never thought of them again. But there were a few cities that stood out as I visited them, that were above all others. When I left, I wanted to return again." He named about six of the cities, and one of them was Salt Lake City. This is a beautiful country in which we live, and in the words of the Book of Mormon, the Lord hid it away from the eyes of the world that it should not be overrun, that it might be the gathering place of his people in the latter days. I thank the Lord for this beautiful city.

Isaiah said, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened" (Isaiah 35:5). I don't know how you'd fulfill that except, in our day, we have the Braille system. They never had anything like that when this statement was made by Isaiah; now the blind can read. Isaiah also said, "And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped" (Isaiah 35:5). I don't know if they had any books in those days or not, but not very many. You remember, even in the days of Lincoln, how he borrowed books from all around the neighborhood and read at the fireside. Then think of what we have today. The ears of the deaf are opened because they can read

everything due to the multitude of books that have been written. And then Isaiah added, "And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes" (Isaiah 35:7). Think of what's happened here in this country since the pioneers arrived here. And then he added, "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:10). They came here in sorrow, but their sorrow has been turned to gladness.

Speaking of singing, we'll find another statement where they shall come and sing in the heights of Zion. Where can you find anything in the history of the world to fulfill that prophecy like the singing of the Tabernacle Choir for over forty-five years without missing? And now through the telstar they are singing to the entire world.

Well, then the ransomed of the Lord shall return—that's the gathering to this latter-day Israel. Then Isaiah saw the gathering and how swiftly they'd be gathered. Remember that in his day their method of travel was with camels and donkeys and so forth; yet he saw the railroad train, the airplane. He couldn't name them in those terms but he described them in an unmistakable manner so that we could know he was speaking of the trains and the airplanes. He said this:

And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far [this great institution is part of that ensign], and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth [via the great missionary force]: and behold, they shall come with speed swiftly [in his day they couldn't come swiftly]:

None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep [he knew they wouldn't need to slumber or sleep by plane

or train]; *Neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken;*

Whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint. . . .

Their [the trains'] roaring shall be like a lion, they [the planes] shall roar like young lions; yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey [their passengers], and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it. [Isaiah 6:26–29]

That was a statement made way back in Isaiah's time, when they had no more means of travel than they had at that time.

A few years back President McKay went over to Wales for the dedication of the first chapel built in the city where his mother was raised and spent her youth. On his return, in reporting to us Brethren of the Twelve, he said that he had 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 here in Salt Lake. Then he compared his trip to when his people came to Zion in the early days, when they were forty-three days on the water with a sail vessel and then weeks getting across the plains. See what's happened just in the period of our lifetime? No wonder Isaiah said that when these things should happen, it should be given to us to understand them. Well, so much for the airplanes.

Now, Isaiah saw the rivers in the desert, and I quote you this little statement:

I will open rivers in high places [we've reser-voired the water in these mountain vastnesses for summer's use], and fountains [these flowing wells] in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together. [Isaiah 41:18–19]

If you'd look through these valleys now where they're watered and think of what they were when the Saints first landed here in this wilderness, you'd see a miracle.

Isaiah also asked "that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it" (Isaiah 41:20). No wonder President Brigham Young said that he didn't lead the people here; he said that the Lord led them here into this land. The Lord had it tucked away, as the Book of Mormon said, for the gathering of his people. No other people in this world has fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah as have the Latter-day Saints. Then Isaiah saw this gathering and said, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, . . . and all nations shall flow unto it. And 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" (Isaiah 2:2–3). I think that temple up in Salt Lake City is the very house of the God of Jacob that Isaiah was permitted to see.

He also saw the gathering from every land when we didn't have temples outside of Utah. When I filled my first mission in Holland, back in 1905–7, as soon as we'd bring new converts into the Church, the first thing they wanted to do was to come to Zion. I was the secretary of the mission, and on our mission books we had many accounts of our people, humble people there, saving their money by nickels and dimes till they could get enough to come to Zion. I had a very earnest investigator, a businessman, who said, "I'll never join your church."

I said, "Why?"

"I don't want to go to America."

I said, "Good for you. You just join the Church and stay right here and help strengthen these branches." He'd been a member only a few months when he came to me one day and

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

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

“Oh, I want to go to Zion.” And he came. They’d sell everything they had—their furniture and everything—and leave their loved ones and come to Zion. Isaiah saw all of this when he said that all nations should flow unto the mountain of the Lord.

Jeremiah’s Prophecies

Jeremiah saw that gathering, too: “The days come . . . that it should no longer be said, the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt. But, the Lord liveth that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them” (Jeremiah 16:14–15). Then he said that the Lord would call many fishers and many hunters, and they should fish them and hunt them from the hills and the mountains and the holes and the rocks (see Jeremiah 16:16). That’s what these missionaries are going out to do and have been doing all over the world. And then Jeremiah said, “Turn, O backsliding children, . . . for I am married unto you [what a covenant!] and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and with understanding” (Jeremiah 3:14–15). If you’d like to listen to some of those pastors that Jeremiah referred to, just tune in or attend the general conference that starts next Friday and continues through Saturday and Sunday. There you’ll find the leadership that God has ordained for the leading of his people. These holy prophets saw these things in days that were past.

I think I have time to give you one more prophecy on the gathering. This is from Jeremiah. He said, “For there shall be a day, that the watchman upon the mount Ephraim [not Judah, but Ephraim] shall cry, Arise ye,

and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God” (Jeremiah 31:6). Now, I think that this prophet wrote the history of the Latter-day Saints almost three thousand years ago just as plainly as we’ve written it in our Church history today. Then he continues:

For thus saith the Lord, Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations [what our missionaries have been doing]: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel [not the Jews].

Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. [Jeremiah 31:7–8]

Is there anything in the history of the world to fulfill that like the journeys of our people when they were driven out of Nauvoo?

Now this was said back in the Holy Land. Jeremiah didn’t say they shall return *hither*, but they shall return *thither*, which means to a far-distant point. He saw that in holy vision; and prophecy, as Peter tells us, is the most sure word of the Lord. Then the record says they were to come in a great multitude; nearly twenty thousand of them were driven out of their homes and came here to these valleys of the mountains:

They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them [because they were driven out of their homes, given only a few weeks in order to get out of the city of Nauvoo]: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way [they followed along the Platt River for some five hundred miles—nothing else like it in the history of the world], wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Hear the words of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say He that

scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock.

For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he.

Therefore they [the Tabernacle Choir] shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; And they shall not sorrow any more at all. [Jeremiah 31:9–12]

I'm old enough to remember the fast meetings we used to hold after coming here to these valleys of the mountains when the Saints would stand up and thank God that they had been delivered from the hands of their enemies and they'd come here into this land of safety. Surely the Lord turned their sorrow into rejoicing.

"Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together." We built our recreation halls when our people first arrived in Salt Lake Valley, before we built our chapels. Other churches criticize us for our dancing, but it was a marvelous thing. Jeremiah foresaw all of this, and he said, "For I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of their priests with fatness, and my people shall be

satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 31:13–14). These men are not being paid to go on their missions, and yet you couldn't persuade them not to go when they're called. Their souls are satiated with fatness, as the Lord decreed.

Now that's only a part of the prophecies. No wonder Brother Kimball has asked us to study the scriptures and to read them. And so I leave you my love and blessing, and I leave you my witness that these things are true: that the prophets *did* see our day and time, that we're living as the prophets said we should in the day of their fulfillment, and it does us well if we understand and comprehend and walk in the ways of the holy prophets.

In closing, I leave you this one thought: When Brother Marion G. Romney was called to be one of the Assistants to the Twelve, President Grant said, "Marion, if you'll follow the President of this Church, you'll never go astray." If we'll walk in the way of the Lord and follow his holy prophets, as Peter said, we'll have a more sure word of prophecy. We'll never go astray. God bless each one of you to achieve the righteous desires of your hearts, and this great institution, and all who have anything to do with it, I humbly pray. I leave you my blessing, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.