

Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet

By

Elder Ezra Taft Benson

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My beloved brothers and sisters, I am honored to be in your presence today. You students are a part of a choice young generation--a generation which might well witness the return of our Lord. Not only is the Church growing in numbers today, it is growing in faithfulness and, even more important, our young generation, as a group, is even more faithful than the older generation. God has reserved you for the eleventh hour--the great and dreadful day of the Lord. It will be your responsibility not only to help bear off the kingdom of God triumphantly but to save your own soul and strive to save those of your family and to honor the principles of our inspired constitution.

To help you pass the crucial tests which lie ahead I am going to give you today several facets of a grand key which, if you will honor them, will crown you with God's glory and bring you out victorious in spite of Satan's fury. Soon we will be honoring our prophet on his eighty-fifth birthday. As a Church we sing the song, "We Thank Thee, O God, For a Prophet." Here then is the grand key: follow the prophet. And here now are fourteen fundamentals in following the prophet, the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

First: *The prophet is the only man who speaks for the Lord in everything.*

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 his 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."

Second: *The living prophet is more vital to us than the standard works.*

President Wilford Woodruff tells of an interesting incident that occurred in the days of the Prophet Joseph Smith:

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; 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." [in Conference Report, October 1897, pp. 18-19]

Third: *The living prophet is more important to us than a dead prophet.*

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The living prophet has the power of TNT. By that I mean "Today's News Today." God's revelations to Adam did not instruct Noah how to build the ark. Noah needed his own revelation. 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 week in the Church Section of the Deseret News, and any words of the prophet contained each month in our Church magazines. Our marching orders for each six months are found in the general conference addresses, which are printed in the Ensign magazine.

I am so grateful that the current conference report is studied as part of one of your religion classes--the course entitled "Teachings of the Living Prophets," number 333. May I commend that class to you, and suggest that you get a copy of the class manual at your bookstore, whether you're able to take the class or not. The manual is entitled "Living Prophets for a Living Church."

Beware of those who would pit the dead prophets against the living prophets, for the living prophets always take precedence.

Fourth: *The prophet will never lead the Church astray.*

President Wilford Woodruff 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 mind of God." (The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, selected by G. Homer Durham [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946], pp. 212-213.)

President Marion G. Romney tells of this incident, which happened to him:

I remember years ago when I was a Bishop I had President [Heber J.] 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." [In Conference Report, October 1), p. 78]

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.*

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. They feel the prophet must have the same earthly credentials or training which they have had before they will accept anything the prophet has to say that might contradict their earthly schooling. How much earthly schooling did Joseph Smith have? Yet he gave revelations on all kinds of subjects. We haven't yet had a prophet who earned a doctorate in any subject, but as someone said, "A prophet may not have his Ph.D. but he certainly has his LDS." 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.

Sixth: *The prophet does not have to say "Thus saith the Lord" to give us scripture.*

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).

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".

Said Brigham Young, "I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call scripture" (Journal of Discourses, 26 vols. [London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot], 13:95).

Seventh: *The prophet tells us what we need to know, not always what we want to know.*

"Thou hast declared unto us hard things, more than we are able to bear," complained Nephi's brethren. But Nephi answered by saying, "the guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center" (1 Nephi 16:1, 3). Or, to put it in another prophet's words, "Hit pigeons flutter."

Said President Harold B. Lee:

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You may not like what comes from the authority of the Church. It may contradict your political views. It may contradict your social views. It may interfere with some of your social life.... Your safety and ours depends upon whether or not we follow.... Let's keep our eye on the President of the Church. [in Conference Report, October 1970, p. 152-153]

But it is the living prophet who really upsets the world. "Even in the Church," said President Kimball, "many are prone to garnish the sepulchres of yesterday's prophets and mentally stone the living ones" (Instructor, 95:257).

Why? Because the living prophet gets at what we need to know now, and the world prefers that prophets either be dead or mind their own business. Some so-called experts of political science want the prophet to keep still on politics. Some would-be authorities on evolution want the prophet to keep still on evolution. And so the list goes on and on.

How we respond to the words of a living prophet when he tells us what we need to know, but would rather not hear, is a test of our faithfulness.

Said President Marion G. Romney, "It is an easy thing to believe in the dead prophets." And then he gives this illustration:

One day when President Grant was living, I sat in my office across the street following a general conference. A man came over to see me, an elderly man. He was very upset about what had been said in this conference by some of the Brethren, including myself. I could tell from his speech that he came from a foreign land. After I had quieted him enough so he would listen, I said, "Why did you come to America?" "I am here because a prophet of God told me to come." "Who was the prophet;" I continued. "Wilford Woodruff." "Do you believe Wilford Woodruff was a prophet of God?" "Yes, I do." "Do you believe that President Joseph F. Smith was a prophet of God?" "Yes, sir."

Then came the sixty-four dollar question. "Do you believe that Heber J. Grant is a prophet of God?" His answer, "I think he ought to keep his mouth shut about old age assistance."

Now I tell you that a man in his position is on the way to apostasy. He is forfeiting his chances for eternal life. So is everyone who cannot follow the living Prophet of God." [in Conference Report, April 1953, p. 125]

Eighth: *The prophet is not limited by men's reasoning.*

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*).

Would it seem reasonable to an eye doctor to be told to heal a blind man by spitting in the dirt, making clay, and applying it to the man's eyes and then telling him to wash in a contaminated pool? Yet this is precisely the course that Jesus took with one man, and he was healed. (See John 9:6-7.) Does it seem reasonable to cure leprosy by telling a man to wash seven times in a particular river? Yet this is precisely what the prophet Elisha told a leper to do, and he was healed. (See 2 Kings 5.)

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 55:8,9]

Ninth: *The prophet can receive revelation on any matter--temporal or spiritual.*

Said Brigham Young:

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....

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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. [Journal of Discourses, 10:363-364]

Tenth: *The prophet may be involved in civic matters.*

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.

Eleventh: *The two groups who have the greatest difficulty in following the prophet are the proud who are learned and the proud who are rich.*

The learned may feel the prophet is only inspired when he agrees with them; otherwise, the prophet is just giving his opinion--speaking as a man. The rich may feel they have no need to take counsel of a lowly prophet.

In the Book of Mormon we read:

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 he 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 9:28,29,42]

Twelfth: *The prophet will not necessarily be popular with the world or the worldly.*

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.

Thirteenth: *The prophet and his counselors make up the First Presidency--the highest quorum in the Church.*

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord refers to the First Presidency as "the highest council of the Church" (107:80) and says, "whosoever receiveth me, receiveth those....the First Presidency, whom I have sent" (112:20).

Fourteenth: *The prophet and the presidency--the living prophet and the First Presidency--follow them and be blessed; reject them and suffer.*

President Harold B. Lee relates this incident from Church history:

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." [In Conference Report, April 1963, p. 81]

In a general conference of the Church President N. Eldon Tanner stated:

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

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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."

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 to follow the Prophet of God. No, we should never discriminate between these commandments, as to those we should and should not keep. [In Conference Report, October 1966, p. 98]

"Look to the Presidency and receive instruction," said the Prophet Joseph Smith (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, selected by Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 161). But Almon Babbitt didn't, and in the Doctrine and Covenants section 124, verse 84, the Lord states:

And with my servant Almon Babbitt, there are many things with which I am not pleased; behold, he aspireth to establish his counsel instead of the counsel which I have ordained, even that of the Presidency of my Church.

In conclusion, let us summarize this grand key, these "Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet," for our salvation hangs on them.

First:	The prophet is the only man who speaks for the Lord in everything.
Second:	The living prophet is more vital to us than the standard works.
Third:	The living prophet is more important to us than a dead prophet.
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.
Sixth:	The prophet does not have to say "Thus saith the Lord" to give us scripture.
Seventh:	The prophet tells us what we need to know, not always what we want to know.
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.
Eleventh:	The two groups who have the greatest difficulty in following the prophet are the proud who are learned and the proud who are rich.
Twelfth:	The prophet will not necessarily be popular with the world or the worldly.
Thirteenth:	The prophet and his counselors make up the First Presidency--the highest quorum in the Church.
Fourteenth:	The prophet and the presidency--the living prophet and the First Presidency--follow them and be blessed; reject them and suffer.

I testify that these fourteen fundamentals in following the living prophet are true. 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 closely do our lives harmonize with the words of the Lord's anointed--the living prophet, the President of the Church, and with the Quorum of the First Presidency?

May God bless us all to look to the prophet and the presidency in the critical and crucial days ahead, is my prayer. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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2. The living prophet is more vital to us than the standard works.
3. The living prophet is more important to us than a dead one.
4. The prophet will never lead the Church astray.
5. 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.
6. The prophet does not have to say "thus saith the Lord" to give us scripture. Scripture comes from the unified voice of the brethren.
7. The prophet tells us what we need to know, not always what we want to know.
8. The prophet is not limited by men's reasoning.
9. The prophet may be involved in civic matters.
11. The two groups who have the greatest difficulty in following the prophet are the proud who are learned and the proud who are rich.
12. The prophet will not necessarily be popular with the world or the worldly.
13. The prophet and his counselors make up the First Presidency-the highest Quorum in the Church.
14. His Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet were actually Fourteen Fundamentals in Falsifying the Prophet. And President Kimball was none too pleased about it. But other than his private vetting of concerns and complaints, President Kimball apparently took no action to publicly repudiate, clarify, or distance the Church from Elder Benson's fallacious statements. Because President Smith did not publicly contradict and clarify the false doctrine published in The Improvement Era, it gained currency in the Church and was repeated later by other leaders, including Young Women President Elaine Cannon who paraphrased it in October 1978 General Women's Meeting as, "When the prophet speaks, sisters, the debate is over."