

HOW DO WE TEST A PROPHET?

By Sandra Tanner

Frequently a person will say to me that the Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) missionaries have challenged them to pray about Joseph Smith's message and the Book of Mormon. But is this the proper way to determine if his message is truly from God? The Bible never says to test a prophet by prayer, but by his message. Deuteronomy 13 warns that a prophet must teach correctly about God. Chapter 18 tells us the prophet's prophecies must come to pass. Paul tells us in Galatians 1:8-9 that even angels can appear with a wrong message. We are to compare the message with the teachings of the apostles. In Acts 17:10-12, when Paul went to Berea to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah to the Jews, we read "these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed . . ." Note, Paul did not tell them to go home and pray about it. They were praised for searching the scriptures, in other words, testing the message to see if it agreed with the prophecies of the Messiah.

Note that John made an appeal to fact, not feeling, when he declared "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; . . . that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us . . ." (1 John 1:1-3) He continued in the next chapter, verse 21, "I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth . . . let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. . . ." Chapter 4, verse 1, "beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

Peter wrote specifically to warn about false teachers: (2 Peter 1:15-16) "Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. . . ." In Chapter 2, verse 1, he continues "but there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, . . . and many shall follow their pernicious ways . . ." Then

in Chapter 3 he continues "this second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers . . ." Notice, he refers them to past teachings and facts, not to feelings or prayer.

The Mormons misuse James 1:5. That verse is for wisdom during times of temptation and persecution, not for knowledge or testing a prophet. He goes on to warn in Chapter 4, verse 3, about those who pray (and we assume it was in Jesus name) for the wrong things—"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss . . ." This verse shows our own desires or misdirected ideas can play a part in the answer. If someone claimed God said we should rob a bank and give the money to the poor, would we need to pray about it? God has already spoken on the issue in the Ten Commandments. So why should we pray to know if God and Jesus appeared to Joseph Smith to show him that they are two totally separated gods with resurrected bodies? Or that there were gods BEFORE our heavenly father. (See Smith's sermons in the *LDS History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 305-312, 474-476) Compare his sermons with Isaiah 43:10-11, 44:6-8, 24-25, 45:5-6, 18-24, 46:5-10. Joseph Smith contradicts Isaiah—which one should we believe? Christians test prophets, pastors, and teachers by the Bible. LDS test the Bible by their prophets. They go about testing the message backwards. The Bible was here first, therefore Joseph Smith must be tested by it, not the other way around.

Certainly a decision regarding our eternal life is the most important one we will ever make and deserves careful examination. Anyone meeting with the LDS missionaries should know both sides of the issue. There are plenty of facts from LDS sources to show that Joseph Smith taught false doctrine, lied about polygamy (even to his own wife), changed his revelations, gave false prophecies, etc. He hardly meets the test of a prophet. Truth will stand up to investigation.

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