

"We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet"

Lesson 37

*Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual,
Published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Lesson 37, pp 213-219*

Purpose: To help class members recognize the need for our living prophet, understand his roles, and more faithfully obey his counsel.

Preparation: 1. Heritage, page 131.
2. Prepare to have class members sing "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet" (Hymns, no. 19) if you plan to use it at the conclusion of the lesson. Or ask a class member or a group of class members to prepare to sing it.

Attention Activity: Share the following story, told by President Hugh B. Brown of the First Presidency:

Before President Brown was called as a General Authority, he spent some time in England working as a barrister, or attorney. He befriended a prominent Englishman who was a member of the House of Commons and a former justice of the supreme court of Britain. The two men often discussed various subjects, including religion.

In 1939, when it appeared that World War II would soon break out, the English gentleman called Brother Brown into his office. He asked Brother Brown to defend his religious beliefs in the same way he would discuss a legal problem. In a general conference address, President Brown recalled part of their conversation:

"I began by asking, 'May I proceed, sir, on the assumption that you are a Christian?'"

"I am."

"I assume that you believe in the Bible-the Old and New Testaments?" "I do!"

The English gentleman said that he believed the biblical accounts of the Lord speaking to prophets. However, he maintained that such communication had stopped soon after the Resurrection of Christ. The conversation continued with another question from Brother Brown: "Why do you think it stopped?"

"I can't say."

"Not to my knowledge."

"May I suggest some possible reasons why he has not spoken. Perhaps it is because he cannot. He has lost the power."

"He said, 'Of course that would be blasphemous.'"

"Well, then, if you don't accept that, perhaps he doesn't speak to men because he doesn't love us anymore. He is no longer interested in the affairs of men."

."No," he said, 'God loves all men, and he is no respecter of persons.'"

"Well, then, . . . the only other possible answer as I see it is that we don't need him. We have made such rapid strides in education and science that we don't need God any more."

"And then he said, and his voice trembled as he thought of impending war, 'Mr. Brown, there never was a time in the history of the world when the voice of God was needed as it is needed now. Perhaps you can tell me why he doesn't speak.'"

"My answer was, 'He does speak, he has spoken; but men need faith to hear him'" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1967, 117-18; or Improvement Era, Dec. 1967, 36-37).

The Lord continues to speak today through a living prophet. This lesson discusses the blessings of being led by a living prophet and our responsibility to follow his counsel.

1. Our need for a living prophet

•Why do we need a living prophet today? (The counsel of the living prophet helps us respond to all the major problems and needs of our day.)

While serving as President of the Quorum of the Twelve, **President Ezra Taft Benson** said: *"The most important prophet, so far as we are concerned, is the one who is living in our day and age. This is the prophet who has today's instructions from God to us today. God's revelation to Adam did not instruct Noah how to build the ark. Every generation has need of the ancient scripture plus the current scripture from the living prophet. Therefore, the most crucial reading and pondering which you should do is of the latest inspired words from the Lord's mouthpiece"* (in Conference Report, Korea Area Conference 1975, 52).

•How have you been blessed because there is a living prophet on earth today?

2. The roles of our living prophet

The members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are all prophets, seers, and revelators. However, only the President of the Church is authorized to receive revelation for the entire Church and to exercise all the priesthood keys necessary to govern the Church.

The Doctrine and Covenants provides important information about the roles of our living prophet. Have class members read the following italicized scripture references. Then have them identify what those scriptures teach about the roles of our living prophet. Summarize responses on the chalkboard. Then discuss the responses.

A. Doctrine and Covenants 1:38; 21:4-5; 43:2; 68:3-4. (The prophet speaks for the Lord and reveals the Lord's will.)

•What are some subjects on which we have received guidance from recent prophets? (building strong families, doing temple work, helping new members of the Church, staying out of debt, and reading the Book of Mormon.)

B. Doctrine and Covenants 20:21-26; Mosiah 13:33. (The prophet testifies of Jesus Christ and teaches the gospel.)

•How has your testimony of the Savior been strengthened by the words of our living prophet?

C. Doctrine and Covenants 21:1; Mosiah 8:13-18. (The prophet is a seer.)

•What is a seer? (A seer is a prophet upon whom God bestows great power to know the past and the future. He can know of things that are not known or are hidden. He also can have the power to translate ancient records.)

•Read D&C 101:43-54 with class members. In this parable, which commandment did the servants fail to obey? (See D&C 101:46-50.) What could have been avoided if the servants had built the tower? (See D&C 101:51-54.) How does this apply to the attention we give the President of the Church?

•The President of the Church can see the enemy "while he [is] yet afar off" (D&C 101:54). What dangers have latter-day prophets seen and warned us about?

D. Doctrine and Covenants 107:91-92. (The prophet presides over the Church.)

•What blessings do we receive because the true Church is always led by a prophet who is chosen and guided by God?

•How can we sustain the prophet in his role as President of the Church? (See D&C 107:22.)

3. Heeding the words of our living prophet

•Read D&C 21:4-6. What do these verses teach about our responsibility to listen to the prophet? What does the Lord promise us if we obey the prophet's counsel?

President Harold B. Lee taught: *"The only safety we have as members of this church is to do exactly what the Lord said to the Church in that day when the*

Church was organized [see D&C 21:4-5].... There will be some things that take patience and faith. 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. But if you listen to these things, as if from the mouth of the Lord himself, with patience

and faith, the promise is that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against you' [D&C 21:6]" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1970, 152; or Improvement Era, Dec. 1970, 126).

•How can we learn of the prophet's inspired counsel? (By studying general conference talks, First Presidency Messages, and other articles in the Church magazines and by listening to letters from the First Presidency that are read in Church meetings.)

At the close of a general conference, President Ezra Taft Benson said, "For the next six months, your conference edition of the Ensign should stand next to your standard works and be referred to frequently" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1988, 97; or Ensign, May 1988, 84).

While serving in the Quorum of the Twelve, **Elder Harold B. Lee** made a similar statement during general conference. He said that the report of the conference should *"be the guide to [our] walk and talk during the next six months"* (in Conference Report, Apr. 1946, 68).

•How can we better study and use the prophet's general conference addresses individually and in our families?

•How have you been blessed as you have followed the counsel of the prophet? Share the following story related by **Elder Bruce D. Porter** of the Seventy:

"When my wife and I were a young married couple, we lived in the Boston area, where I attended school. Another young couple moved into our ward shortly after we did. They were converts of about two years.... I was concerned about how they would do.... so it was with pleasure that I accepted the calling to be their home teacher. I looked forward to helping strengthen their testimonies of the gospel.

"My companion and I arrived at their modest apartment one evening to home teach them. They had just completed a home evening with their little baby. I made a mental note that it would be a good idea for my wife and I to start holding home evenings so ... when a child arrived we would already have the habit. They then eagerly showed us their Book of Remembrance in which they had collected many names of ancestors from both sides of their family. I remembered that it had been a long time since I had looked at my Book of Remembrance.

"After our lesson they took us out to the screened back porch where were stacked ice cream buckets filled with wheat, sugar, flour, and other food—a complete year's supply of food. I had supposed, somehow, that as students that counsel didn't apply

to us! By now I was feeling very humble. I had come to teach them, but they were teaching me in every point. As we left their little apartment I noticed a picture of the temple hanging near their door. I remembered that President Spencer W. Kimball said that every Latter-day Saint family should have a picture of the temple prominently displayed in their home, and I remembered that we didn't have one....

"I went home, filled with a spirit of repentance, and found a small picture of the Swiss Temple in a mission brochure. I cut it out and taped it on our wall. Since that time we have always had a picture of the temple in our home. Every

time I look at it, it reminds me of a young convert couple who taught us what it meant to 'follow the prophet'" (address given in the Bountiful Mueller Park Stake conference, 17 Jan. 1999).

4. Latter-day prophets' example of Christlike love

The Presidents of the Church have served others selflessly and with great love. We can learn much from their example.

Relate the following account from the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith:

John Lyman Smith and his family came to Nauvoo when it was first being settled by the Saints. The only place the family could find to live at first was a stable made of logs. Everyone in the family except the mother soon came down with fevers as a result of living in the swampy area. **John Lyman Smith** said of the experience:

"The Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum visited us and administered to all of us, father being delirious from the effects of the fever. Their words comforted us greatly, as they said in the name of the Lord 'you all shall be well again.' Upon leaving the hovel, Joseph placed his slippers upon my father's feet and sprang upon his horse from the doorway and rode home barefoot. The next day Joseph removed father to his own house and nursed him until he recovered" (quoted in *Stories about Joseph Smith the Prophet: A Collection of Incidents Related by Friends Who Knew Him*, comp. Edwin F. Parry [1934], 33-34).

Ask the assigned class member to share the story of Elder Spencer W. Kimball helping a mother and her children in an airport (Our Heritage, page 131, below).

An incident that was typical of his concern for all people occurred in a crowded airport where a young mother, stranded by bad weather, stood in line after line with her two-year-old daughter, trying to get a flight to her destination. She was two months pregnant and under doctor's orders not to carry her young child, who was exhausted and hungry. No one offered to help, although several people made critical comments about her crying child. Then, the woman later reported:

"Someone came towards us and with a kindly smile said, 'Is there something I could do to help you?' With a grateful sigh I accepted his offer. He lifted my sobbing little daughter from the cold floor and lovingly held her to him while he patted her gently on the back. He asked if she could chew a piece of gum. When she was settled down, he carried her with him and said something kindly to the others in the line ahead of me, about how I needed their help. They seemed to agree and then he went up to the ticket counter [at the front of the line] and made arrangements with the clerk for me to be put on a flight leaving shortly. He walked with us to a bench, where we chatted a moment, until he was assured that I would be fine. He went on his way. About a week later I saw a picture of Apostle Spencer W. Kimball and recognized him as the stranger in the airport."

For some months before his death, President Kimball suffered with severe health problems, but he was always an example of patience, long-suffering, and diligence in the face of trial. He died on 5 November 1985, after serving as President of the Church for 12 years.

After the class member's presentation, relate the following story about **President Gordon B. Hinckley**:

In 1998 a devastating hurricane caused great destruction in Central America. The Church sent large amounts of relief food and supplies. President Gordon B. Hinckley felt that he should go to Honduras and Nicaragua to meet with and encourage the people there. Later in a Christmas devotional, President Hinckley spoke of a two-year-old girl he met on this trip who had been orphaned in the disaster. Her mother had died a few months before the hurricane, and when the hurricane hit, the father piled the furniture in his house to avoid the rising water.

President Hinckley related that the father "took a little mattress and placed it at the top and laid [his daughter] on it. In his frantic and desperate effort he suffered a stroke and died.... No one knew anything of her, until a young man, two days later, happened to look up in that abandoned house and saw her still alive. He tenderly brought her down and delivered her to the bishop and the bishop's wife. It was there that we saw her... .

"I would hope that at this Christmas season, when there will be no gift-giving among these devastated people, this small orphan girl might receive perhaps a little taste of candy, something sweet and delicious. I must see that that happens.

"God bless the people everywhere ... that their hearts may be opened and their hands extended to help the needy" (Church News, 12 Dec. 1998, 4).

•What impresses you about the actions of these prophets? What can we learn from their example?

Conclusion: We are led by the word of God given through His prophet. As we listen to the prophet's counsel and act on his instructions, we will receive the direction and strength necessary to meet the challenges of our day. As prompted by the Spirit, testify of the truths discussed during the lesson.

You may want to have class members sing "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet" (Hymns, no. 19). Or ask the assigned class member or group of class members to sing it.

Additional Teaching Ideas:

1. The prophet will never lead us astray

We can have complete confidence that the prophet appointed by God will always lead us correctly.

While serving in the Quorum of the Twelve, Elder Ezra Taft Benson taught, "Keep your eye on the Prophet, for the Lord will never permit his Prophet to lead this Church astray" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1966, 123; or Improvement Era, Dec. 1966, 1145).

While serving as a counselor in the First Presidency, President Joseph F. Smith taught: "If [the President of the Church] should become unfaithful, God would remove him out of his place. I testify in the name of Israel's God that he will not suffer the head of the Church, whom he has chosen to stand at the head, to transgress his laws and apostatize; the moment he should take a course that would in time lead to it, God would take him away. Why? Because to suffer a wicked man to occupy that position would be to allow, as it were, the fountain to become corrupted, which is something he will never permit" (Gospel Doctrine, 5th ed. [1939], 44-45).

2. Prophecy and revelation on war

As you discuss the roles of a prophet, you may want to read D&C 87 with class members. This revelation was given through Joseph Smith in 1832. It foretold the United States Civil War, which began in 1861.

3. "Watchmen on the Tower" video presentation

If the videocassette Teachings from the Doctrine and Covenants and Church History (53933) is available, consider showing "Watchmen on the Tower," a four-minute segment.

4. Contributions of latter-day Presidents of the Church

Display pictures of the latter-day Presidents of the Church (62575; Gospel Art Picture Kit 401, 507-20; see also page 219). If you use pictures from the meetinghouse library or the Gospel Art Picture Kit, you may want to display by each picture the prophet's name and the dates he served as President of the Church, as shown on page 219.

Ask class members to turn to "Church History Chronology" (pages 272-73 in this manual and pages 27-28 in the Class Member Study Guide). Explain that this is a helpful resource in finding some of the major contributions of each President of the Church

First Presidency Message

“We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet”

*By President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency,
Tambuli, Oct. 1992, 3*



In the Church we sing a stirring hymn, “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.” It is distinctive with us. As a people we sing some hymns that have come from other churches, and others sing some of ours. But only we can properly sing, “We thank thee, O God, for a prophet to guide us in these latter days.”

It was written more than a century ago by a man of humble circumstances who lived in Sheffield, England. He worked in the steel mills and was discharged because he joined the Mormon Church. But there burned in his heart a great and fervent testimony; and out of an overflowing spirit of gratitude, he penned these moving lines. They have become a grateful expression of appreciation for millions over the earth. I have heard them sung in many different languages as a reverent prayer of thanksgiving for divine revelation.

How thankful we ought to be, how thankful we are, for a prophet to counsel us in words of divine wisdom as we walk our paths in these complex and difficult times. The solid assurance we carry in our hearts, the conviction that God will make His will known to His children through His recognized servants, is the real basis of our faith and activity. We either have a prophet or we have nothing; and having a prophet, we have everything.

Many years ago, in company with the mission president from Hong Kong, it was my opportunity to initiate formally the work in the Philippines. On 28 April 1961,

we held a meeting that will never be forgotten by those of us who were present. We had no hall then in which to meet. We made a request of the United States Embassy for permission to meet on the beautiful porch of the marble memorial in the American military cemetery at what was then known as Fort McKinley, on the outskirts of Manila. We convened at 6:30 in the morning. In that hallowed and sacred place, where are remembered the tragedies of war, we commenced the work of teaching the gospel of peace.

We called upon the only native Filipino member we had been able to locate. He recounted a story which I remember as follows:

When he was a boy he found in a garbage can an old, tattered copy of the *Reader's Digest*. It contained a condensation of a book giving the story of the Mormon people. It spoke of Joseph Smith and described him as a prophet. The word *prophet* did something to that boy. Could there actually be a prophet upon the earth? he wondered. The magazine was lost, but concern over the presence of a living prophet never left him during the long, dark years of war and oppression when the Philippines were occupied. Finally the forces of liberation came, and with them the reopening of Clark Air Base. David Lagman found employment there. His supervisor, he learned, was a Mormon, an Air Force officer. He wanted to ask him if he believed in a prophet, but was afraid to do so. Finally, after much inner turmoil, he mustered the courage to inquire.

“Are you a Mormon, sir?” the young man asked.

“Yes, I am,” was the forthright reply.

“Do you believe in a prophet? Do you have a prophet in your church?” came the anxious question.

“We do have a prophet, a living prophet, who presides in this church and who teaches the will of the Lord.”

David asked the officer to tell him more, and out of that teaching came his baptism. He was the first native elder ordained in the Philippines.

Could any people have a greater blessing than to have standing at their head one who receives and teaches the will of God concerning them? We need not look far in the world to know that the wisdom of the wise has perished and that the understanding of the prudent has come to naught. (See [D&C 76:9](#).) That wisdom for which the world should seek is the wisdom which comes from God. The only understanding that will save the world is divine understanding.

“Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” ([Amos 3:7](#)).

It was so in the days of Amos and in all the years when men of God spake as they were moved upon by the Holy Ghost. (See [2 Pet. 1:21](#).) Those ancient prophets not only warned of things to come but, more important, became the revealers of truth to people. It was they who pointed the way men should live if they were to be happy and find peace in their lives.

I think of a young man I know who, as a Christian, trying one church after another, could find none that taught of a modern prophet. Among the Jewish people he found reverent mention of prophets, and so he accepted and embraced the Jewish religion.

In the summer of 1964, he went to New York City and visited the World’s Fair. He entered the Mormon Pavilion and saw pictures of the prophets of the Old Testament. His heart warmed within him as he heard the missionaries speak with appreciation of these great men of ages past through whom Jehovah revealed his will. Then, as he progressed through the pavilion, he heard of modern prophets—of Joseph Smith, who was called a prophet, a seer, and a revelator. Something stirred within him. His spirit responded to the testimony of the missionaries. He was baptized. He served a mission in South America. He returned home and has since become the means of bringing his family and others into the Church. It is heartwarming to hear him testify that Joseph Smith was indeed a prophet of God and that all who have succeeded him have been legal successors in this high and sacred calling.

Could anyone, willing to read without bias the story of Joseph Smith, doubt that he was a great foreteller of events to come? Nearly thirty years before a shot was fired, he foretold the tragic American Civil War and stated that following that, war would be poured out upon all nations. You and I of this generation are witnesses to the fulfillment of those remarkable words.

It has been so with his successors. On a cold winter day in 1849, when our forebears in the Salt Lake Valley were hungry and were living on sago roots and thistle tops, while gold was being found in California, Brigham Young stood in the old bowery on Temple Square and spoke prophetic words to those who felt they might leave the hardships of life here to go to greener pastures in California. Among other things, he said:

“We have been kicked out of the frying-pan into the fire, out of the fire into the middle of the floor, and here we are and here we will stay. ... We shall build a city and a temple to the Most High God in this place. We will extend our settlements

to the east and west, to the north and to the south, and we will build towns and cities by the hundreds, and thousands of the Saints will gather in from the nations of the earth. This will become the great highway of the nations. Kings and emperors and the noble and wise of the earth will visit us here.” (Quoted in James S. Brown, *Life of a Pioneer: Being the Autobiography of James S. Brown*, Salt Lake City: Geo. Q. Cannon & Sons Co., 1900, pages 121–22.)

How could anyone stand on Temple Square today and witness the millions who come each year to visit us, and have any doubt that Brigham Young spoke as a prophet? Over the years there has been a veritable parade of notables who have found their way to the office of the First Presidency, there to meet particularly the man whom we sustain as the President of the Church and as the prophet of our day. They include leaders in the governments of the earth, in business and commerce, in education, in the professions. These are among “the noble and the wise of the earth” of whom Brigham Young spoke when we were an outcast people, isolated in a mountain wilderness.

I recall flying from San Francisco to Sydney, Australia. I noted a young man in a nearby seat reading the book *Joseph Smith, an American Prophet*. When opportunity presented itself, I spoke to him. I told him that I had read the book, that I had known the author, and asked him what his interest was. He said, among other things, that he had an interest in prophets and that this matter of a possible modern prophet had intrigued him. He had picked up the book at the library. We had a lengthy conversation in which I bore my witness that Joseph Smith was indeed a prophet. Not only did he speak of things to come, but more important, he was a revealer of eternal truth and a testifier of the divine mission of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am profoundly grateful not only for Joseph Smith as the prophet who served as an instrument in the hands of the Almighty in restoring this work, but also for all of those who have followed him. A study of their lives will reveal the manner in which the Lord has chosen them, has refined them, and has molded them to his eternal purposes. Joseph Smith declared on one occasion: “I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; ... knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938, page 304).

He was hated and persecuted. He was driven and imprisoned. He was abused and beaten. And as you read his history, you see the evolution of which he spoke. There developed a power in his life. There came a refinement. There grew a love for others which even overcame his own love for life. The corners of that rough stone were knocked off, and he became a polished shaft in the hand of the Almighty.

It has been so with those who have succeeded him. Through long years of dedicated service, they have been refined and winnowed and chastened and molded for the purposes of the Almighty. Could anyone doubt this after reading of the lives of such men as Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, and Joseph F. Smith? The Lord subdued their hearts and refined their natures to prepare them for the great and sacred responsibility later thrust upon them. It has been so with him who stands as President of the Church today, our beloved leader, President Ezra Taft Benson.

As one to whom the Spirit has borne witness, I testify of President Benson's prophetic calling and add my voice to the voices of our people over the earth: "We thank thee, O God, for a prophet to guide us in these latter days." I am satisfied that the peace and the progress and the prosperity of this people lie in doing the will of the Lord as that will is articulated by him who is the servant of the Lord—the President of the Church. If we fail to observe his counsel, we repudiate his sacred calling. If we abide his counsel, we shall be blessed of God.

And what has been the counsel of President Ezra Taft Benson to us as a people? Have we not been counseled to search out and lovingly welcome back into fuller activity any of our number who have strayed?

Have we not been counseled to cleanse our inner vessels of any unworthiness that we may have before the Lord? Have we not been counseled to consistently bring the power and spirit and teachings of the Book of Mormon into our lives and to personally realize that the Book of Mormon was prepared under the direction of the Lord specifically for his latter-day work? Have we not been counseled to seek the Spirit of the Lord in all we do? Have we not been counseled to avoid despair and to trust in the Lord? Have we not been counseled against the great stumbling block of pride, of pitting our will against God's? Has he not counseled us time and again to come unto Christ, to think on Christ, to make a mighty change in our hearts, if needed, in order to follow Christ, and to make Christ our model for our entire lives?

We would do well today to heed the words spoken anciently by Jehoshaphat: "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper" ([2 Chr. 20:20](#)).

God lives and is a revealer of eternal truth. Jesus Christ is our Savior and stands at the head of this Church. We have a prophet upon the earth, a seer and a revelator to teach us. God give us the faith and the discipline within ourselves to follow those teachings.

"We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet"

Joseph Ray G. Brillantes, "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet," Liahona, Mar. 1998, 10

On the afternoon of 30 May 1996, I went with my family and two friends to the Araneta Coliseum in Manila to hear President Gordon B. Hinckley speak. He was visiting the Philippines, and we were excited to see him.

We arrived at the coliseum at 4:30 P.M. My friends, Princess and Paulo, my sister, Hay-Hay, and I lined up at an entrance. We soon found ourselves entering the topmost seating area of the coliseum.

We spent the next one and a half hours looking for better seats. When we were finally seated at 6:00 P.M., we waited and tried to be quiet. I did some thinking. I was preparing to hear the President of the Church, whom I had read so much about but did not know as a person. I could play "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet" (*Hymns*, number 19) on the piano from memory, but was I really thankful? I knew about President Gordon B. Hinckley because I had read about him. I believed he was a prophet because everybody said so. After some reflection, I realized I didn't have a testimony of him. I realized that to have a testimony of him, I needed to know him and love him.

Suddenly the crowd stood up. Some people said President Hinckley had arrived. But after five minutes, we realized he hadn't and sat down. I joked that it was just practice—we'd be able to stand with elegance and unity when he did arrive. The second time we stood, he still hadn't arrived. The third time I was skeptical, but the choir began singing "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet." Some people were waving, and some were clapping. Then I saw him; he passed right in front of us. We sat down when he motioned for us to sit, and the meeting began.

The first speaker talked about missionary work in the Philippines and how it has progressed in the short time since Elder Gordon B. Hinckley gave his first speech here in April 1961. At that time Elder Hinckley said, "What we begin here will affect the lives of thousands and thousands of people in this island republic, and its effects will go on from generation to generation for great and everlasting good" ("Dateline Philippines," *Tambuli*, April 1991, 17). He was right; the Philippines now has more than 350,000 Church members.

President Hinckley counseled the young people to be "honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous," and to do "good to all men" ([A of F 1:13](#)). He counseled all students to seek after the best education they can attain. He counseled single members to find worthy companions and marry in the temple for time and eternity. He apologized for not being able to hug and shake hands with all 35,000 people in the congregation. But he sent his love and his special blessing to each of us—blessing us that we would walk uprightly before the Lord.

While he was speaking, I *felt* his love—personally. At that moment, he became real to me. *He has real love to offer to people*, I thought. I couldn't help but love him back. This was the first time I had ever had such an experience. His love answered many doubts in my mind. Finally I had a testimony that he is a prophet of God. I had not just knowledge, but a real testimony!

The meeting ended with the choir singing "God Be with You Till We Meet Again" (*Hymns*, number 152). President Hinckley and his companions walked down the aisle waving for the last time—until we meet again.

Tears were flowing from people's eyes as they sent their love and gratitude to him.

I went home thanking my Heavenly Father for a prophet. I went home knowing that Heavenly Father has much in store for me. And because I had come to know a prophet of God, I went home knowing myself a little better.

"We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet"

President Spencer W. Kimball, President of the Council of the Twelve, Address delivered Friday morning, October 6, 1972, Ensign, Jan. 1973, 33



Beloved brethren and sisters and friends: Long will this solemn assembly remain in our memories. Long will we tingle from the impressive address of President Lee, following the voting. I think almost if one had a heart of stone, it would melt with the demonstration of this morning to see all the various groups raise their hands in unison to support the leaders of the Church, and it touched my heart deeply.

Another act in the greatest drama is being played. No theatrical stage has ever produced such acts of such engrossing interest and importance as have been the scenes of the history of the Church in these last days. The stage has changed from New York to Ohio to Missouri to Illinois to Utah. The conditions have altered and the people who have taken the parts are different people. Today another great leader is sustained. What a privilege for us who are here to be a part of such an important event! In this change in leadership of the Church, it is important that the quorums of the priesthood and the assembly of the Saints have an opportunity to express their gratitude, pledge their support and confidence, and reaffirm their covenants.

The calling of President Harold B. Lee follows the same pattern as that of the other Presidents back for many, many years. He holds all the same keys, has the same authority, represents the same church except that it has grown much larger.

When the Church was organized in 1830 it was composed of six people. So the Prophet Joseph Smith presided at first over a very small group, but it grew to many thousands by the time of his martyrdom.

When Brigham Young became President, there were approximately 40,000 members. In 1877 the new President, John Taylor, presided over about 145,000.

Wilford Woodruff in 1887 had about 192,000 under him. When Lorenzo Snow became President in 1898, there were about 253,000 members, and then Joseph F. Smith had over a quarter of a million. President Heber J. Grant had nearly half a million; George Albert Smith one million, and when David O. McKay became President in 1951, there were over 1,100,000 members.

When Joseph Fielding Smith took over the reins, there were 2,800,000, and as President Harold B. Lee becomes the President, there are about 3,200,000 and growing very rapidly.

It is reassuring to know that President Lee was not elected through committees and conventions with all their conflicts, criticisms, and by the vote of men, but was called of God and then sustained by the people.

The Church has had three different Presidents in three years. A *Deseret News* editorial writer wrote this:

“In many organizations such rapid turnover at the top could readily bring on confusing shifts of direction and with them a feeling of hesitancy and uncertainty.

“By contrast, the feeling within the church during this historic period has been one of stability and clear purpose, of constancy amidst change.” (*Deseret News*, July 8, 1972, p. A–6.)

The pattern divine allows for no errors, no conflicts, no ambitions, no ulterior motives. The Lord has reserved for himself the calling of his leaders over his church. It is a study of great interest and importance.

President Harold B. Lee became the President of the Church on July 7, 1972, but was ordained an apostle April 10, 1941, and was undoubtedly foreordained to these responsibilities in the far, far-away past as were his predecessors. The Prophet Joseph Smith made this statement over a century ago:

“Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 1940 ed., p. 365.)

One of the early apostles spoke of Joseph Smith:

“That authority was not conferred upon him when he first saw angels and had some of the gifts ... it required the laying on of the hands of someone who had the authority of the Holy Priesthood.”

In due time he received that authority under the hands of those who last held the keys upon the earth. He continues:

“When Jesus ... took His three disciples into the mount, He was transfigured before them, and Moses and Elias administered unto them, and at that time Peter was

ordained to hold the keys of that dispensation. He held the keys in conjunction with his brethren, James and John.

“They came in modern times and unitedly laid their hands upon the heads of Joseph [Smith] and Oliver [Cowdery] and ordained them to the authority that they themselves held, that of the Apostleship.” (George Q. Cannon, in *Gospel Truth* [Zion’s Book Store, 1957], vol. 1, pp. 253–54.)

Significant to us is the fact that there has never been one minute since April 6, 1830, 142 years ago, that the Church has been without divine leadership. No deceased President has ever taken the keys and authorities into the spirit world away from the Church on the earth.

The second that the spirit left the body of President Joseph Fielding Smith on July 2, President Harold B. Lee in that same second as president of the twelve apostles rightfully assumed command and was the true and recognized leader, having been foreordained as said by Joseph Smith.

President George Q. Cannon speaks of the foreordination:

“It is a remarkable fact that Joseph Smith had gifts before he was ordained. He was a Seer, for he translated before he was ordained; he was a Prophet, for he predicted a great many things before he was ordained ... ; he was a Revelator, for God gave unto him revelations before the Church was organized. He, therefore, was a Prophet, Seer and Revelator before he was ordained in the flesh.” (*Gospel Truth*, p. 253.)

The Quorum of the Twelve on July 7, 1972, held all these gifts. And President Harold B. Lee has held them and the keys and the fullness of the priesthood since April 10, 1941, reaffirmed by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on July 7 of this year.

Full provision has been made by our Lord for changes. Today there are fourteen apostles holding the keys in suspension, the twelve and the two counselors to the President, to be brought into use if and when circumstances allow, all ordained to leadership in their turn as they move forward in seniority.

There have been some eighty apostles so endowed since Joseph Smith, though only eleven have occupied the place of the President of the Church, death having intervened; and since the death of his servants is in the power and control of the Lord, he permits to come to the first place only the one who is destined to take that leadership. Death and life become the controlling factors. Each new apostle in turn is chosen by the Lord and revealed to the then living prophet who ordains him.

The matter of seniority is basic in the first quorums of the Church. All the apostles understand this perfectly, and all well-trained members of the Church are conversant with this perfect succession program.

Joseph Smith bestowed upon the twelve apostles all the keys and authority and power that he himself possessed and that he had received from the Lord. He gave unto them every endowment, every washing and anointing, and administered unto them the sealing ordinances.

Today we have the opportunity as did the children of Israel to covenant again and to sustain a new prophet. The Lord said to Joshua, and it applies likewise to President Lee: “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses,” the Lord says, “so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” ([Josh. 1:5](#).)

“And the people ... said ... we will serve the Lord.

“The Lord God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.

“So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day.” ([Josh. 24:21, 24–25](#).)

Let this then be our covenant today. An early leader said: “I look at our President—I always did watch the captain of the ship with peculiar interest, when on the ocean surrounded by icebergs or when in the midst of great storms. ... I watched his eye and his demeanor, and I fancied ... that I could form a good idea of our peril by watching him. I have been in storms when everybody on board excepting the Elders expected to go down. ...” (*Gospel Truth*, p. 271.)

Now it is our privilege to sustain President Lee.

An important rule was given to us by the Prophet Joseph with which you are probably familiar: “I will give you one of the Keys of the mysteries of the Kingdom. It is an eternal principle, that has existed with God from all eternity. That man who rises up to condemn others, finding fault with the Church, saying that they are out of the way, while he himself is righteous, then know assuredly, that that man is on the high road to apostasy; and if he does not repent, will apostatize, as God lives.” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 156–57.)

President Cannon warned again: “If any of you have indulged in the spirit of murmuring and fault-finding and have allowed your tongues to give utterance to thoughts and words that were wrong and not in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel, ... you ought to repent of it with all your hearts and get down into the depths of humility and implore Him for the forgiveness of that sin—for it is a most deadly sin.

“The men who hold the Priesthood are but mortal men: they are fallible men. ... [No one knows that better than they themselves.] No human being that ever trod this earth was free from sin, excepting the Son of God. ...”

This is true concerning all of the brethren, I am sure.

“Nevertheless, God has chosen these men. He has singled them out, ... but He has selected them, and He has placed upon them the authority of the Holy Priesthood,

and they have become His representatives in the earth. He places them as shepherds over the flock of Christ, and as watchmen upon the walls of Zion. And He holds them to a strict accountability ... for the authority which He has given to them, and in the day of the Lord Jesus they will have to stand and be judged for the manner in which they have exercised this authority. If they have exercised it wrongfully and against the interests of His work and the salvation of His people, woe unto them in the day of the Lord Jesus! He will judge them. ...” (*Gospel Truth*, p. 276.)

This same early apostle tells us that the Lord gives the authority to judge and condemn only to the regularly constituted councils of the Church and not to man generally; “and those who lift their voices ... against the authority of the Holy Priesthood ... will go down to hell, unless they repent.” (*Ibid.*)

It was President Wilford Woodruff who, in his closing years, made this statement: “I ask my Heavenly Father to pour out his spirit upon me, as his servant, that in my advanced age, and during the few days I have to spend here in the flesh, I may be led by his inspiration. I say to Israel, the Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as president of this Church to lead you astray. It is not in the program. It is not in the mind of God. If I were to attempt that the Lord would remove me out of my place, and so he will any other man who attempts to lead the children of men astray from his oracles of God and from their duty. ...” (*The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff* [Bookcraft, 1969], pp. 212–13.)

This should give us deep assurance.

One other leader wrote: “Men do not obtain place in this Church because they seek for it. If it were known that a man was ambitious to hold a certain office in the Church, that fact itself would lead to his defeat because his desire would not be granted unto him. This is the case with the officers of this Church. ... [They] are responsible to God. God chose and nominated [them], and it is for him to straighten [them] out if [they] do wrong.” (George Q. Cannon, in *Deseret Weekly*, May 21, 1898, p. 708.)

May the Lord bless our new President and his counselors and fully sustain them. May we the people uphold his hands and totally sustain President Harold B. Lee, whom I know to be the Lord’s prophet on this earth. I bear testimony that God, whose voice was heard on the Jordan River, among the Nephites, in the grove in New York, is our Heavenly Father; and the one to whom he alluded when he said, “This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” is our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the Church. I bear testimony too that President Lee is a prophet of God, and if we will follow him, we will make great headway in the kingdom. I bear this testimony to you in all fervor and sincerity and in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.