



By **Elder Kevin R. Duncan**
Of the Seventy

Our Very Survival

May we have the wisdom to trust in and follow the counsel of the living prophets and apostles.

The winter of 1848 was difficult and challenging for the pioneer settlers in the Salt Lake Valley. During the summer of 1847 Brigham Young had declared that the Saints had finally reached their destination. “This is the right place,”¹ said Brigham Young, who had been shown in a vision where the Saints were to be established. The early members of the Church had endured tremendous adversity as the Restoration of the gospel unfurled. They had been driven from their homes, persecuted, and hounded. They had suffered untold hardships as they crossed the plains. But now they were at last in “the right place.”

And yet the winter of 1848 had been extremely harsh. The winter had been so cold that some people’s feet had been badly frozen. A spirit of uneasiness began to descend upon the Saints. Some Church members declared that they would not build their homes in the valley. They wanted to remain in their wagons, for they were sure that Church leadership would herald them on to some better location. They had brought seeds and fruit plants, but they dared not waste them by planting in the barren desert wasteland. Jim Bridger, a well-known explorer of the time, told Brigham Young he would give a thousand

dollars for the first bushel of corn raised in the Salt Lake Valley because, he said, it could not be done.²

To complicate matters, gold had just been discovered in California. Some Church members envisioned that life would be simpler and more abundant if they were to move on to California in search of riches and a better climate.

Under this cloud of discontent, Brigham Young addressed the members of the Church. He declared:

“[This valley] is the place God has appointed for His people.

“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. God has shown me that this is the spot to locate His people, and here is where they will prosper; He will temper the elements for the good of His Saints; He will rebuke the frost and the sterility of the soil, and the land shall become fruitful. Brethren, go, now, and plant . . . your . . . seeds.”

In addition to promising these blessings, President Young declared that the Salt Lake Valley would become known as a highway to the nations. Kings and emperors would visit the land. Best of all, a temple to the Lord would be erected.³

These were remarkable promises. Many Church members had faith in Brigham Young’s prophecies, while others remained skeptical and left for what they assumed would be a better life. Yet history has shown that every prophecy Brigham Young declared has come to pass. The valley did blossom and produce. The Saints prospered. The winter of 1848 was a great catalyst for the Lord to teach His people a valuable lesson. They learned—as we all must learn—that the only sure and secure road to protection in this life comes through trusting in and obeying the counsel from the prophets of God.



Surely one of the crowning blessings of membership in this Church is the blessing of being led by living prophets of God. The Lord declared, “There is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred.”⁴ The prophet and President of the Church today, Thomas S. Monson, receives God’s word for the entire membership of the Church and for the world. In addition, we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators the counselors in the First Presidency and the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

With frozen feet and a barren wasteland, those early Saints surely needed faith to trust their prophet. Their very survival and lives were at stake. Yet the Lord rewarded their obedience and blessed and prospered those who followed His mouthpiece.

And the Lord does the same today for you and me. This world is full of so many self-help books, so many self-proclaimed experts, so many theorists, educators, and philosophers who have advice and counsel to give on any and all subjects. With technology today, information on a myriad of subjects is available with the click of a keystroke. It is easy to get caught in the trap of looking to the “arm of flesh”⁵ for advice on everything from how to raise children to how to find happiness. While some information has merit, as members of the Church we have access to the source of pure truth, even God Himself. We would do well to search out answers to our problems and questions by investigating what the Lord has revealed through His prophets. With that same technology today, we have at our fingertips access to the words of the prophets on nearly any subject. What has God taught us about marriage and the family through His



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prophets? What has He taught us about education and provident living through His prophets? What has He taught us about personal happiness and fulfillment through His prophets?

What the prophets teach may to some seem outdated, unpopular, or even impossible. But God is a God of order and has established a system whereby we may know His will. “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.”⁶ At the opening of this, the dispensation of the fulness of times, the Lord reaffirmed that He would communicate with us through His prophets. He stated, “My word . . . shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.”⁷

Trusting in and following the prophets is more than a blessing and a privilege. President Ezra Taft Benson declared that “our [very] salvation hangs on” following the prophet. He described what he called “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet.” In the session this morning, Elder Claudio Costa

of the Presidency of the Seventy so eloquently instructed us on these 14 fundamentals. Because they are of such great importance to our very salvation, I will repeat them again.

“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: [Follow] . . . the living prophet and the First Presidency . . . and be blessed; reject them and suffer.”⁸

Brothers and sisters, like the Saints of 1848, we can choose to follow the prophet, or we can look to the arm of flesh. May we have the wisdom to trust in and follow the counsel of the living prophets and apostles. I am a witness of their goodness. I testify that they are called of God. I also testify that there is no safer way to approach life, find answers to our problems, gain peace and happiness in this world, and protect our very salvation than by obeying their words. I bear this witness in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Brigham Young, as quoted by Wilford Woodruff, in *The Utah Pioneers* (1880), 23.
2. See Bryant S. Hinckley, *The Faith of Our Pioneer Fathers* (1956), 9–15; see also Gordon B. Hinckley, “Remarks at Pioneer Day Commemoration Concert,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2001, 70–72.
3. See Hinckley, *The Faith of Our Pioneer Fathers*, 11–12; see also *Ensign*, Oct. 2001, 71.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 132:7.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 1:19.
6. Amos 3:7.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 1:38.
8. Ezra Taft Benson, “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet,” in *1980 Devotional Speeches of the Year* (1981), 29–30.



By Elder Gerrit W. Gong
Of the Seventy

Temple Mirrors of Eternity: A Testimony of Family

An eternal perspective of gospel conversion and temple covenants can help us see rich blessings in each generation of our forever families.

Dear brothers and sisters, when our son was in the Provo Missionary Training Center, Sister Gong mailed fresh-baked bread to him and his missionary companions. Here are some of the missionary thank-you notes Sister Gong received: “Sister Gong, that bread was a taste of home.” “Sister Gong, all I can say is wow. That bread is the best thing to enter my mouth since my mother’s enchiladas.” But this is my favorite: “Sister Gong, the bread was wonderful.” He then jokingly continued, “Keep me in mind if things don’t work out between you and Mr. Gong.”

We love our missionaries—each elder, sister, and senior couple. We are eternally grateful to that special missionary who first brought the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to our family. I gratefully testify that an eternal perspective of gospel conversion and temple covenants can help us see rich blessings in each generation of our forever families.

The first convert in our Gong family to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is our mother, Jean Gong. As a teenager in Honolulu, Hawaii, she listened; she knew; she was baptized and confirmed; she is continuing in faith. Faithful Church members helped my mother so that she had gospel friends, Church callings, and continued nourishment by God’s good word. In today’s parlance each new convert, young single adult, those returning to Church activity, and others bless generations when they become fellow Saints in the household of God.¹

One family who nurtured my mother was that of Gerrit de Jong Jr. A linguist who loved the language of the heart and Spirit, Grandpa de Jong tickled my little boy imagination by sayings like “Blackberries when red are green.” Today, speaking of electronic handheld devices, I tell young friends, “Blackberries read in Church make green bishops blue.”

My parents, Walter and Jean Gong,