



Discussions with My Friend: An Introduction to the Gospel of Jesus Christ By David Stewart

Chapter 09: Ancient Prophets or Living Word?



The recognition of the Bible's inspiration does not complete our spiritual journey, as the Bible is claimed by more than 30,000 Christian denominations which preach contradictory tenets; parts are also claimed by Jews and Muslims. Christ and his apostles lived nearly two thousand years ago; the Old Testament prophets date to eras of even deeper antiquity. What connection do these modern denominations have to God today? Picking up a book of Confucius' sayings would not make one an authorized minister of Confucius, nor would it offer one the ability to make pronouncements on Confucius' behalf. Nor does picking up a Bible and claiming to teach from it make one an authorized representative of Christ. The connection of the Old Testament prophets to God was manifest by miracles and chain of authority; the connection of modern sectarian Christianity is not. Appeal to the Bible alone has been inadequate to settle with confidence all doctrinal matters or to provide comprehensive guidance for modern life, as different denominations interpret the same verses of Scripture very differently. Without modern prophets, is unclear who if anyone is authorized to interpret or proclaim God's word.

The teachings of prophets consist of both transcendent principles and situational directives. Sometimes the obedience to the prophet's word can have physical consequences. In other cases, consequences may be deferred until future judgment. Some principles offer timeless relevance, such as the Ten Commandments or Jesus' admonition to hunger and thirst after righteousness and to love one's neighbor as oneself. Others are situational, but nonetheless may be important to physical and spiritual welfare. An individual living in Noah's time who claim to accept the writings of Adam and Enoch but did not board the ark would have perished in the flood; those in Moses' day who acknowledged ancient patriarchs but refused to lift up their eyes to see the brass serpent likewise perished.^[1] According to the Old Testament record, failure to heed contemporary prophets resulted in misfortunes, plagues, famines, military defeats, and the eventual captivity and dispersion of the whole Israelite nation.

What was right in one age or situation was sometimes problematic or forbidden in another. For example, Abraham married his half-sister Sarah,^[2] and Jacob married sisters Leah and Rachel; both practices were strictly prohibited under the later Mosaic Law;^{[3],[4]} David and his men justifiably ate the shewbread which by law was restricted to the priests.^[5] Divine revelation was

required in every age to adopt the eternal principles of the gospel to the circumstances of the time. God gave varying instructions in different generations not because the gospel had changed, but because needs were different, just as a skilled physician prescribes different treatments depending on each patient's ailments and circumstances while remaining faithful to an overarching set of principles and knowledge.

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Every age has had its own needs and challenges, and every age God has sent messengers to declare the necessary portion of his word. The "voice of the Lord" and his laws are "set before" mankind "by his servants, the prophets."[\[6\]](#) The prophet Amos recorded the need for the living word: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."[\[7\]](#) As prophets know the will and doings of the Lord, prophets provide instructions for living, clarify doctrine, correct misunderstandings, and regulate the Church. The word of prophets is the same as the word

Only in times of great apostasy was the word of the Lord not declared by living prophets, as when Samuel was a child: "the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision."[\[8\]](#) There was no greater condemnation than to be cut off from the living word, as when God would not answer King Saul by prophets or revelation.[\[9\]](#) Yet there was never a belief that the Lord had ended speaking to man and that the canon of scripture was full; the righteous waited for the days in which God would call prophets and revelators to regulate the Church.[\[10\]](#)

The Pharisees claimed to be disciples of Moses and Abraham while rejecting the living Christ: "We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is."[\[11\]](#) They reviled the blind man whose sight was restored by Christ, saying: "Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples."[\[12\]](#) Yet were they really? Jesus pointed out that they were not true followers, but that He alone offered the living word: "Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keep the law?"[\[13\]](#) He further admonished them:

"Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"[\[14\]](#)

Christ taught that those who accept and keep the words of his servants accept him, and those who reject the prophets also reject Him.[\[15\]](#) He denounced the error of those who "build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,"[\[16\]](#) observing that their rejection of God's contemporary servants demonstrated their failure to understand or follow the teachings of the very prophets they claimed to acknowledge. The Pharisees asserted their authority to "sit in Moses' seat" while neglecting the very teachings they claimed to administer.[\[17\]](#) Their appeal to Moses settled nothing; the real question was, what authority or ongoing connection did the Pharisees have to him, or to God. Jesus declared: "blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled"[\[18\]](#) and reaffirmed the Old Testament commandment: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."[\[19\],\[20\]](#) These directives demonstrate the need for man in every age to continue to receive God's word through personal inspiration and through the words of living prophets as well as the study of ancient scripture. Spencer W. Kimball observed that the way of the world is "to garnish the sepulchres of yesterday's prophets and mentally stone the living ones."[\[21\]](#)

When Peter expressed his testimony of Christ's divinity as the Son of God, Christ replied: "flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my father which is in heaven...Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church."[\[22\]](#) Although it presents a wordplay upon his name (Petros is a Greek word meaning rock), this passage has been misunderstood by many that Peter was the rock on which the church would be built. Yet Christ did not tell Peter "you are the rock upon which I will build my church," but "upon this rock I will build my church." The definite article "this" refers not to Peter, but to the ongoing revelation of divine truth cited in the previous verse. Jesus also taught that "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."[\[23\]](#) Is this ongoing revelation of "all things" not the true rock of the Church?

[\[1\]](#) Numbers 21:9

[\[2\]](#) Genesis 20:12

[\[3\]](#) Leviticus 18:9, Deuteronomy 27:22

[\[4\]](#) Leviticus 18:18

[\[5\]](#) Mark 2:26

[\[6\]](#) Daniel 9:10

[\[7\]](#) Amos 3:7

[\[8\]](#) 1 Samuel 3:1

[\[9\]](#) 1 Samuel 28:6

[\[10\]](#) Ezra 2:63

[\[11\]](#) John 9:29

[\[12\]](#) John 9:28

[\[13\]](#) John 7:14

[\[14\]](#) John 5:39, 45-47

[\[15\]](#) John 15:20

[\[16\]](#) Matthew 23:29-32

[\[17\]](#) Matthew 23:2-3

[\[18\]](#) Matthew 5:6

[\[19\]](#) Matthew 4:4

[\[20\]](#) Deuteronomy 8:3

[\[21\]](#) Kimball, Spencer W., Instructor, 95:257

[\[22\]](#) Matthew 16:17-18

[\[23\]](#) John 14:26