

Lest Ye Be Deceived

Elder Ezra Taft Benson
Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles
Conference Report, October 1963, p.15-19

Humbly and gratefully I approach you today. Humble in the awesome task of speaking to you -- grateful for the gospel and a prophet at our head. I concur in this great address on man and free agency given by the Lord's mouthpiece. President McKay will go down in eternity as one of the great champions of free men.

Years ago my great-grandfather, while an investigator, attended a Mormon meeting during which a member had a quarrel over the Sacrament table with the branch president. When the service was over, Mrs. Benson turned to Ezra T. and asked him what he thought of the Mormons now. I'll always be grateful for his answer. He said he thought the actions of its members in no way altered the truth of Mormonism. That conviction saved him from many a tragedy. Before joining the Church, Grandfather was moved by a marvelous prayer of Apostle John E. Page.

But later the young convert was greatly shocked by the same man whose actions reflected his gradual apostasy.

Ironically, when Elder Page eventually was excommunicated, Brigham Young selected the young convert to fill Elder Page's place in the Quorum of the Twelve.

Six of the original Twelve Apostles selected by Joseph Smith were excommunicated. The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon left the Church. Three of Joseph Smith's Counselors fell -- one even helped plot his death.

A natural question that might arise would be, that if the Lord knew in advance that these men would fall, as he undoubtedly did, why did he have his Prophet call them to such high office? The answer is; to fill the Lord's purposes. For even the Master followed the will the will of the Father by selecting Judas. President George Q. Cannon suggests an explanation, too, when he states:

"Perhaps it is His own design that faults and weaknesses should appear in high places in order that His Saints may learn to trust in Him and not in any man or men." (*Millennial Star* 53:658-659. February 15, 1891.)

And this would parallel Lehi's warning; put not your

"... trust in the arm of flesh. . . ." (2 Nephi 4:34.)

"The Church," says President McKay, "is little, if at all, injured by persecution and calumnies from ignorant, misinformed, or malicious enemies." (*The Instructor*, February 1956, p. 33.)

It is from within the Church that the greatest hindrance comes. And so, it seems, it has been. Now the question arises, will we stick with the kingdom and can we avoid being deceived? Certainly this is an important question, for the Lord has said that in the last days the devil will "rage in the hearts of . . . men," (2 Nephi 28:20) and if it were possible he shall "deceive the very elect." (See Joseph Smith Matthew 1:5-37.)

"The adversary," said Brigham Young, "presents his principles and arguments in the most approved style, and in the most winning tone, attended with the most graceful attitudes; and he is very careful to ingratiate himself into the favour of the powerful and influential of mankind, uniting himself with popular parties, floating into offices of trust and emolument by pandering to popular feeling, though it should seriously wrong and oppress the innocent. Such characters put on the manners of an angel, appearing as nigh like angels of light as they possibly can, to deceive the innocent and the unwary. The good which they do, they do it to bring to pass an evil purpose upon the good and honest followers of Jesus Christ." (*Journal of Discourses* 11:238-239.)

Those of us who think "... all is well in Zion . . ." (2 Nephi 28:21) in spite of Book of Mormon warning might ponder the words of Heber C. Kimball when he said, "Yes, we think we are secure here in the chambers of these everlasting hills . . . but I want to say to you, my brethren, the time is coming when we will be mixed up in these now peaceful valleys to that extent that it will be difficult to tell the face of a Saint from the face of an enemy against the people of God. Then is the time to look out for the great sieve, for there will be a great sifting time, and many will fall. For I say unto you there is a test, a Test, a TEST coming." (Heber C. Kimball, 1856. Quoted by J. Golden Kimball, *Conference Report*, October 1930, pp. 59-60.)

One of the greatest discourses that I have ever heard or read on how to avoid being deceived was given from this pulpit during the priesthood session of the October,

1960 semiannual conference by Elder Marion G. Romney. (Ibid., October 1960, 73-75.) I commend it to you for your close study and wish that there were time to reread it. During the talk Elder Romney stated that there was no guarantee that the devil will not deceive a lot of men who hold the priesthood. Then, after referring to a talk on free agency by President McKay, Elder Romney states, “. . . Free agency is the principle against which Satan waged his war in heaven. It is still the front on which he makes his most furious, devious, and persistent attacks. That this would be the case was foreshadowed by the Lord. . . .”

And then after quoting the scripture from the Pearl of Great Price regarding the war in heaven over free agency (Moses 4:1-4) Elder Romney continues:

“You see, at the time he was cast out of heaven, his objective was (and still is) ‘to deceive and to blind men and to lead them captive at his will.’ This he effectively does to as many as will not hearken unto the voice of God. His main attack is still on free agency. When he can get men to yield their agency, he has them well on the way to captivity.

“We who hold the priesthood must beware concerning ourselves, that we do not fall into the traps he lays to rob us of our freedom. We must be careful that we are not led to accept or support in any way any organization, cause or measure which, in its remotest effect, would jeopardize free agency, whether it be in politics, government, religion, employment, education, or any other field. It is not enough for us to be sincere in what we support. We must be right!”

Elder Romney then outlined some tests to distinguish the true from the counterfeit. Now this is crucial for us to know, for as President [John] Taylor said, “Besides the preaching of the Gospel, we have another mission, namely, the perpetuation of the free agency of man and the maintenance of liberty, freedom, and the rights of man.” (JD 23, 63.)

It was the struggle over free agency that divided us before we came here; it may n ell be the struggle over the same principle which will deceive and divide us again.

May I suggest three short tests to avoid being deceived, both pertaining to this freedom struggle and all other matters.

1. What do the standard works have to say about it? “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,” said Isaiah. (Isa. 8:20.) This is one of the great truths of Isaiah so important that it was included in the Book of Mormon scriptures. There it reads: “To the law and to the testimony; and if they speak not according to

this word, it is because there is no light in them.” (2 Nephi 18:20.) And Hosea said, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: . . .” (Hos. 4:6.)

We must diligently study the scriptures. Of special importance to us are the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. Joseph Smith said, “. . . that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.” (*History of the Church* 4: 461.)

The Book of Mormon, Brigham Young said, was written on the tablets of his heart and no doubt helped save him from being deceived. The Book of Mormon has a lot to say about America freedom, and secret combinations.

The Doctrine and Covenants is important because it contains the revelations which helped lay the foundation of this great latter-day work. It speaks of many things. Section 134, verse 2, states that government should hold inviolate the rights and control of property. This makes important reading in a day when government controls are increasing and people are losing the right to control their own property.

2. The second guide is: what do the latter-day Presidents of the Church have to say on the subject -- particularly the living President? President Wilford Woodruff related an instance in church history when Brigham Young was addressing a congregation in the presence of the Prophet Joseph Smith:

“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’. . . .” (*Conference Report*, October 1897, pp. 18-19.)

There is only one man on the earth today who speaks for the Church. (See D&C 132:7, 21:4.) That man is President David O. McKay. Because he gives the word of the Lord for us today, his words have an even more immediate importance than those of the dead prophets. When speaking under the influence of the Holy Ghost

his words are scripture. (See D&C 68:4.) I commend for your reading the masterful discourse of President J. Reuben Clark Jr., in the Church News of July 31, 1954, entitled: "When Are Church Leader's Words Entitled to Claim of Scripture?"

The President can speak on any subject he feels is needful for the Saints. As Brigham Young has stated: "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: 364) Other officers in the kingdom have fallen but never the Presidents. Keep your eye on the captain is still good counsel. The words of a living prophet must, and ever will take precedence.

President McKay has said a lot about our tragic trends towards socialism and communism and the responsibilities liberty-loving people have in defending and preserving our Constitution. (See, *Conference Report*, April 1953, pp. 112-113.) Have we read these words from God's mouthpiece and pondered on them?

3. The third and final test is the Holy Ghost -- the test of the Spirit. By that Spirit we ". . . may know the truth of all things." (Moroni 10:5.) This test can only be fully effective if one's channels of communication with God are clean and virtuous and uncluttered with sin. Said Brigham Young:

"You may know whether you are led right or wrong, as well as you know the way home; for every principle God has revealed carries its own convictions of its truth to the human mind, . . .

"What a pity it would be if we were led by one man to utter destruction! Are you afraid of this? I am more afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire of themselves of God whether they are led by Him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting their eternal destiny in the hands of their leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in their salvation, and weaken that influence they could give to their leaders did they know for themselves, by the revelations of Jesus, that they are led in the right way. Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path that the Lord dictates, or not. This has been my exhortation continually." (*Journal of Discourses* 9:149-150.)

Elder Heber C. Kimball stated: "The time will come when no man or woman will be able to endure on borrowed light." (Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 1888 edition 461.)

How then can we know if a man is speaking by the spirit? The Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants give us the key. (See D&C 50:17-23; 100:5-8; 2 Nephi 33:1; 1 Cor. 2:10-11.) President Clark summarized them well when he said:

"We can tell when the speakers are moved upon by the Holy Ghost only when we, ourselves, are moved upon by the Holy Ghost. In a way, this completely shifts the responsibility from them to us to determine when they so speak . . . the Church will know by the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the body of the members, whether the brethren in voicing their views are moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and in due time that knowledge will be made manifest." (*Church News*, July 31, 1954.)

Will this Spirit be needed to check actions in other situations? Yes, and it could be used as a guide and a protector for the faithful in a situation described by Elder Lee at the last general priesthood session of the Church when he said:

"In the history of the Church there have been times or instances where Counselors in the First Presidency and others in high station have sought to overturn the decision or to persuade the President contrary to his inspired judgment, and always, if you will read carefully the history of the Church, such oppositions brought not only disastrous results to those who resisted the decision of the President, but almost always such temporary persuasions were called back for reconsideration, or a reversal of hasty action not in accordance with the feelings, the inspired feelings, of the President of the Church. And that, I submit, is one of the fundamental things that we must never lose sight of in the building up of the kingdom of God." (*Conference Report*, April, 1963, p. 81.)

These then, are the three tests: The standard works; the inspired words of the Presidents of the Church, particularly the living Presidents; and the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

Now, brothers and sisters, in this great struggle for free agency just think what a power for good we could be in this world if we were united. Remember how President Clark used to reiterate in the general priesthood meeting of the Church that there was not a righteous thing in this world that we couldn't accomplish if we were just united.

And President McKay has reiterated it again and again when he's stated: "Next to being one in worshiping God, there is nothing in this world upon which this Church should be more united than in upholding and defending the Constitution of the United States!

"May the appeal of our Lord in His intercessory

prayer for unity be realized in our homes, our wards, our stakes, and in our support of the basic principles of our Republic,” said President McKay. (*The Instructor*, February 1956. p. 34.)

To that I say Amen and Amen.

President McKay speaks of a unity on principles. President Clark said:

“God provided that in this land of liberty, our political allegiance shall run not to individuals, that is, to government officials, no matter how great or how small they may be. Under His plan our allegiance and the only allegiance we owe as citizens or denizens of the United States, runs to our inspired Constitution which God Himself set up. So runs the oath of office of those who participate in government. A certain loyalty we do owe to the office which a man holds, but even here we owe, just by reason of our citizenship, no loyalty to the man himself. In other countries it is to the individual that allegiance runs. This principle of allegiance to the Constitution is basic to our freedom. It is one of the great principles that distinguishes this ‘land of liberty’ from other countries.

“Thus God added to His priceless blessings to us.

“I wish to say with all the earnestness I possess that when you youth and maidens see any curtailment of these liberties I have named, when you see government invading any of these realms of freedom which we have under our Constitution, you will know that they are putting shackles on your liberty, and that tyranny is creeping upon you, no matter who curtails these liberties or who invades these realms, and no matter what the reason and excuse therefore may be.” (*The Improvement Era*, 43, [July 1940] 444.)

We all should know by now what President McKay has said about liberty-loving peoples’ greatest responsibility. We’ve heard him tell of our drift toward socialism and communism. We know of his feelings regarding recent tragic decisions of the Supreme Court. We know the Church’s position supporting right to work laws and the Church’s opposition to programs of federal aid to education. These and many more things has President McKay told us that involve the great struggle against state slavery and the anti-Christ. Now, inasmuch as all these warnings have come through the only mouthpiece of the Lord on the earth today there is one major question we should ask ourselves. Assuming we are living a life so we can know, then what does the Holy Spirit have to say about it?

We are under obligation to answer this question. God will hold us responsible.

Let us not be deceived in the sifting days ahead. Let us rally together on principle behind the prophet as

guided by the promptings of the Spirit.

We should continue to speak out for freedom and against socialism and communism as President McKay has consistently admonished us. We should continue to come to the aid of patriots, programs and organizations which are trying to save our Constitution through every legal and moral means possible.

God has not left us in darkness regarding these matters. We have the scriptures ancient and modern. We have a living prophet, and we may obtain the Spirit.

Joseph Smith did see the Father and the Son. The kingdom established through the Prophet’s instrumentality will roll forth.

We can move forward with it.

That we may all do so and be not deceived is my humble prayer. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.