

Understanding Prophecy

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Foolishness is often displayed in religious matters. I cringe when it shows up among those who have accepted the Lord's 2017 covenant. In moments of sober reflection, I realize it cannot be prevented. It astonishes me that the Lord intends to fulfill His covenants, vindicate His promises, and meet every prophecy of His prophets. It perplexes me how that can happen in this ignorant generation. Nevertheless, somehow God has decreed that it will be so.

One particularly foolish religious practice involves dogmatic claims to understand just how prophecy will be fulfilled. We can't do that because God has taken precautions to prevent that. As Isaiah reported: *Have you not known, have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth faints not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding* (Isaiah 14:5 RE). How God chooses to vindicate His prophecies is entirely in His own unsearchable mind. He intends for it to remain hidden, until at last He accomplishes it. When it is underway, we must consider and ask whether THIS (whatever "this" is) meets the promises God gave beforehand. No matter how it may vary from our predictions, when God's purposes are underway they will look only how God planned them to look.

God told Isaiah (referring to His people, Israel):

Because I knew that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew, and your brow brass, I have, even from the beginning, declared it to you; before it came to pass, I showed it to you, lest you should say, My idol has done them, and my engrave[n] image and my molten image has commanded them. You have heard [it], see all this; and will not you declare it? I have shown you new things from this time, even hidden things, and you did not know them. They are created now, and not from the beginning, even before the day when you heard them not, lest you should say, Behold, I knew them. Yea, you heard not, yea, you knew not; yea, from th[e] time that your ear was not opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously and were called a transgressor from the womb. For my name's sake will I defer my anger, and for my praise will I refrain for you, that I cut you not off. Behold, I have refined you, but not with silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake — even for [mine] own sake — will I do it. (Isaiah 17:1 RE)

He shows it beforehand, but to us, it still remains "hidden." We "know not" because our "ear was not "opened." We assume, we presume, we conjecture, and we impose our own vanity and foolishness thinking that we can search out God's plans, even when God has said, "There is no searching of his understanding."

When Jesus was here fulfilling all the prophecies of His coming to His people, there was a learned Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin whose interest in Christ was aroused. However, Nicodemus did not recognize Christ as the Messiah but, instead, thought Him just

a provocative teacher worth quizzing. Christ reminded Nicodemus that everything He had done, was doing, and would yet accomplish, had been foretold by the prophets. Christ explained it this way:

Every thing about my assignment, which I am now performing, was foretold by the prophets sent earlier to teach Israel, for they all testified of me. They told you I would come, and I am now here doing what was prophesied, but you refuse to see it happening. Enough is underway that rejecting it means you prefer darkness to light. Humble yourself and admit the prophets foretold the very things now underway; repent and be baptized and the Spirit of Truth will open your eyes. If you want greater light, you will obey this instruction. (TSJ 2:4)

Nicodemus knew the prophecies; he thought he understood them. However, he could not understand how it was possible for God to accomplish all those promises in a way that had never entered into his mind or heart.

To illustrate this subject, I intend to use three examples. The first example is a prophecy set out in an allegory likening Israel to an olive tree. After foretelling much of Israel's history, it covers future events. Concerning events just before the Lord's return, it reveals this:

And now behold, notwithstanding all the care which we have taken of my vineyard, the trees thereof have become corrupted, that they bring forth no good fruit.

There was a universal apostasy from what can save mankind.

And these I had hoped to preserve, to have laid up fruit thereof against the season unto mine own self. But behold, they have become like unto the wild olive tree, and they are of no worth but to be hewn down and cast into the fire; and it grieveth me that I should lose them. But what could I have done more in my vineyard? Have I slackened [my] hand, that I have not nourished it? Nay, I have nourished it, and I have dugged about it, and I have pruned it, and I have dunged it, and I have stretched forth mine hand almost all the day long, and the end draweth nigh. And it grieveth me that I should hew down all the trees of my vineyard and cast them into the fire that they should be burned. Who is it that has corrupted my vineyard?

See, that's a good question to ask: Who's responsible for the awful state of the vineyard?

And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master, Is it not the loftiness of th[e] vineyard?

The vineyard has corrupted itself. Our own "loftiness" or pride has made us utterly corrupt. We have no fruit worth preserving and only ourselves to blame.

Hath not the branches thereof overcome the roots which are good? And because the branches have overcome the roots thereof — behold, they grew faster than the strength of the roots, taking strength unto themselves —

We rely on our own strength because we build successful religions that have power, wealth, influence, and fare sumptuously. Mormon described it: *[Our] churches [have] become defiled*

and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts, yea, even in a day when leaders of churches and teachers, in the pride of their hearts, even to the envying of them who belong to their churches (Mormon 4:4 RE).

...behold, I say, is not this the cause that the trees of thy vineyard have become corrupted?

And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant, Let us go to, and hew down the trees of the vineyard, and cast them into the fire, that they shall not cumber the ground of my vineyard, for I have done all. What could I have done more for [the] vineyard? But behold, the servant said unto the Lord of the vineyard, Spare it a little longer. And the Lord said, Yea, I will spare it a little longer, for it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard. Wherefore, let us take of the branches of these which I have planted in the nithermost parts of my vineyard, ...let us graft them into the tree from whence they came.

This is important: The “grafting” process is not taking an altogether foreign line but reintroducing the scattered remnants of Israel back into the original religion or people from where they came. Lost Israel becomes found/converted Israel.

And let us pluck from the tree those branches whose fruit is most bitter, and graft in the natural branches of the tree in the stead thereof. And this will I do that the tree may not perish, that perhaps I may preserve unto myself the roots thereof for mine own purpose. And behold, the roots of the natural branches of the tree which I planted whithersoever I would are yet alive. Wherefore, that I may preserve them...for mine own purpose, I will take of the branches of th[e] tree, and I will graft them in unto them. Yea, I will graft in unto them the branches of their mother tree, that I may preserve the roots...unto mine own self, that when they shall be sufficiently strong, perhaps they may bring forth good fruit unto me...

When—WHEN—they shall be “sufficiently strong.” This is a process and hardly happens when the first effort begins. Branches whose fruit are wild and bitter do not immediately bear suitable fruit. It is only later, when they become sufficiently strong, that “perhaps” some will be suitable.

...when they shall be sufficiently strong, perhaps they may bring forth good fruit unto me, [that] I may yet have glory in the fruit of my vineyard.

And it came to pass that they took from the natural tree which had become wild, and grafted in unto the natural trees which...had become wild. And they [took also] of the natural trees which had become wild and grafted into their mother tree.

See, the vineyard is gonna be rearranged at the end by grafting lost, natural branches (Gentiles who have lost their true identity and become “wild”), grafting them to the long-lost religion of the God of Israel. This allows them to return to their “natural roots” or to be numbered again with Israel.

And the Lord of the vineyard saith unto the servant, Pluck not the wild branches from the trees, save it be those which are most bitter; and in them, ye shall graft according to that which I have said. And we will nourish again the trees of the vineyard, and we will trim up...

Trimming involves discarding.

...we will trim up the branches thereof, and we will pluck from the trees those branches which are ripened that must perish and cast them into the fire. And this I do that perhaps the roots thereof may take strength because of their goodness, and because of the change of the branches, that the good may overcome the evil. And because that I have preserved the natural branches and the roots thereof, and that I have grafted in the natural branches again into their mother tree, and have preserved the roots of their mother tree, that perhaps the trees of my vineyard may bring forth again good fruit, ...that I may have joy...in the fruit of [the] vineyard, and perhaps...I may rejoice exceedingly that I have preserved the roots and the branches of the first fruit, wherefore, go to, and call servants, that we may labor diligently with our mights in the vineyard, that we may prepare the way, that I may bring forth again the natural fruit, which natural fruit is good, and the most precious above all other fruit.

*Wherefore, let us go to and labor with our mights this last time; for behold, the end draweth nigh, and this is for the last time that I shall prune my vineyard. Graft in the branches. Begin at the last, that they may be first and that the first may be last; and dig about the trees, both old and young, the first and the last, ...the last and the first, that all may be nourished once again **for the last time**. Wherefore, dig about them, and prune them, and dung them once more **for the last time**, for the end draweth nigh. And if it so be that these last grafts shall grow and bring forth the natural fruit, then shall ye prepare the way for them that they may grow. And as they begin to grow, ye shall clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit...*

How the Lord “clears away” branches, as growth begins, may have been explained, at least in part, by a post on my website (“God’s Wisdom”) on January 29, 2023, in which the Lord explained to me, “...some people are taken and not healed because, in the Wisdom of God that person is ready and if left will recede rather than advance, and some are taken because, if left, would interfere with and delay or hinder [the] God’s purposes for others, and some are given to suffer because it gives them [an] opportunity to develop in Godly attributes they would not otherwise attain. God’s Wisdom is greater than man’s and sees more than can man. But in all matters there is reason and wisdom in how matters of health, life, and death unfold.”

...ye shall clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit, according to the strength of the good and the size thereof. And ye shall not clear away the bad thereof all at once, lest the roots thereof should be too strong for the graft and the graft thereof shall perish, and I lose the trees of my vineyard; for it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard. Wherefore, ye shall clear away the bad according as the good shall grow, that the root and the top may be equal in strength, until the good shall overcome the bad...

The word “until” means it’s a process and, perhaps, gradual over some length of time before it is possible for the good to gain the strength and numbers to “overcome the bad”—because the bad are not going to willingly abandon their false beliefs, incorrect ideas, and vain ambition.

...equal in strength, until the good shall overcome the bad and the bad be hewn down...

This suggests the Lord will be responsible for removing them from the vineyard.

...and cast into the fire, that they cumber not the ground of my vineyard. And thus will I sweep away the bad out of my vineyard. And the branches of the natural tree will I graft in again into the natural tree...

Notice that the graft and the final tree are both identified as “natural,” meaning that these will both be literal descendants of Abraham and also heirs to that same priesthood held by Abraham. The Lord promised Abraham, *And in you (that is, in your Priesthood) and in your seed, (that is, your Priesthood) — for I give unto you a promise that this right shall continue in you and in your seed after you (that is to say, the literal seed or the seed of the body) — shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal (Abraham 3:1 RE).*

...and the branches of the natural tree will I graft in [un]to the natural branches of the tree, and thus will I bring them together again, that they shall bring forth the natural fruit, and they shall be one. And the bad shall be cast away, ...even out of all the land of my vineyard; for behold, only this once will I prune my vineyard.

And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard sent his servant, and the servant went and did as the Lord had commanded...and [he] brought other servants, and they were few. And the Lord of the vineyard said unto them, Go to and labor in the vineyard with your mights, for behold, this is the last time that I shall nourish [the] vineyard, for the end is nigh at hand and the season speedily cometh. And if ye labor with your mights with me, ye shall have joy in the fruit which I shall lay up unto myself against the time which...soon come[th].

And it came to pass that the servants did go and labor with their mights, and the Lord of the vineyard labored also with them. And they did obey the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard in all things. And there began to be...natural fruit again in the vineyard. And the natural branches began to grow and thrive exceedingly, and the wild branches began to be plucked off and to be cast away; and they did keep the root and the top thereof equal, according to the strength thereof. And thus they labored with all diligence, according to the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard, even until the bad had been cast away out of the vineyard and the Lord had preserved unto himself, that the trees had become again the natural fruit. And they became like unto one body...

Meaning that they’re united by the same religion—not bickering, not contending.

...and the fruit were equal.

...“equal” in the way the Lord uses the term: meaning equally accountable before Him. Mankind is **never the same**. There are greater and lesser intelligences (*if there be two spirits...one shall be more intelligent than the other, yet these two spirits — notwithstanding one is more intelligent than the other...* (Abraham 5:4 RE), and it goes on from there). They’re all **equally** accountable.

And the Lord of the vineyard had preserved unto himself the natural fruit, which was most precious unto him from the beginning. (Jacob 3:21-27 RE, emphasis added)

So, with this first prophecy in mind, I want to discuss two other prophecies and their potential meaning. I hope to show that they all fit together.

This talk is to illustrate the topic, not to cover it comprehensively. It’s left to you to apply the principles illustrated in these examples to other prophecies. These next two just seem to be currently under discussion by some people. The first is from Third Nephi, with **Christ** speaking:

I will establish my church among them, and they shall come in unto the covenant and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob, unto whom I have given this land for their inheritance. And they shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city which shall be called the New Jerusalem. And then shall they assist my people, that they may be gathered in, who are scattered upon all the face of the land, in unto the New Jerusalem. And then shall the Powers of Heaven come down among them, and I also will be in the midst. And then shall the work of the Father commence at that day, even when this gospel shall be preached among the remnant of this people. (3 Nephi 10:1 RE)

This prophecy is important because it relates to the building of a city and a New Jerusalem where the Powers of Heaven (meaning angels, a title referring to a specific group with status on the other side of the veil; it’s a proper noun, not just an abstraction. In the afterlife, there are different rungs on Jacob’s ladder where different Powers are fixed: Angel, Archangel, Principality, Power, Dominion, Throne, Cherubim, and Seraphim—they may all be called the Powers of Heaven)... The Powers of Heaven will be present in this New Jerusalem. There are debates about the identities because some presume, in the list that the Lord gives in His prophecy about this New Jerusalem, that it will be impossible for anyone other than Native Americans to build this city.

Christ mentions at least three (perhaps four) different groups. It’s a challenge to identify these different groups in order to understand what the Lord is predicting to take place:

- First, the Lord mentions a first group of Gentiles among whom the Lord will establish a church.
- Second, a group of the remnant of Jacob who have been given this land for their inheritance. (Apparently, the first group will assist the second group to build a city.)
- Third, a group referred to as a “house of Israel.”

- Perhaps there is also a fourth group to be gathered in “who are scattered upon all the face of the land.”

So if we want to guess about these three (or four) groups, we have a few obvious choices. But we have no guarantee we know who the “Gentiles” are among whom the Lord will establish His “church.” There are presently over 100 diverse churches who all claim Joseph Smith as their founder. It’s likely that all of them would say they are the Gentiles among whom the Lord has established a church.

The Lord adds a helpful clarification to His description of the Gentiles. It involves Gentiles who will “come in unto the covenant and be numbered among...the remnant of Jacob.” In the covenant offered by the Lord in September 2017, the covenant included the following statement by the Lord:

*All you who have turned from your wicked ways and repented of your evil doings, of lying and deceiving, and of all whoredoms, and of secret abominations, idolatries, murders, priestcrafts, envying, and strife, and from all wickedness and abominations, and have come [in] unto me, and been baptized in my name, and have received a remission of your sins, and received the holy ghost, **are now numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel.*** (T&C 158:10, emphasis added)

Those words from the covenant may be how the Lord intends to identify the group of Gentiles who have come into a covenant and become numbered with the remnant. This idea of taking one identified group of people and then re-identifying them by “numbering among” a different identified group is one of the major themes of the Book of Mormon.

The first time we encounter this idea of changing identities is in a prophecy of Nephi’s:

And it shall come to pass that if the gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day that he shall manifest himself unto them in word and also in power, [and] in very deed, unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks, and harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father. Yea, they shall be numbered among the house of Israel; and they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land for ever. (1 Nephi 3:25 RE)

To Gentiles who receive both the Bible and Book of Mormon, the Lord will manifest Himself to them “in word [by them accepting His voice in scripture] and also in power [by the Holy Ghost], in very deed [by removing the veil that keeps Him hidden], unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks.” Joseph Smith began that process, which ended abruptly when he and Hyrum were killed. But the Lord has recommenced the process and revealed Himself again. For those who hear His voice, obey His commands, and come unto Him, “they shall be numbered among the seed” of Nephi’s father. And “they shall be numbered among the house of Israel; and they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land for ever.”

If these Gentiles represent grafting natural branches back into the natural tree connected to the natural roots, does numbering them among Israel and pronouncing them a blessed people upon the promised land forever make them part of the first group, or does it, instead, make them part of the second group? If they are part of the first, they will assist

others to build the New Jerusalem. But if they are part of the second, **they will build** the New Jerusalem and receive assistance from Gentiles as they build. These are questions that events alone will answer.

The next reference Nephi makes to “numbering” of the Gentiles with Israel is in Second Nephi:

Wherefore, the gentiles shall be blessed and numbered among the house of Israel. Wherefore, I will consecrate this land unto thy seed, and they who shall be numbered among thy seed, for ever, for the land of their inheritance; for it is a choice land, saith God unto me, [and] above all other lands. Wherefore, I will have all men that dwell thereon that they shall worship me, saith God. (2 Nephi 7:4 RE)

Here the land is consecrated to the Gentiles who are “numbered among” the Nephites as their inheritance. This makes them situated in the identical position as the Nephites themselves. This makes it more likely these converted, covenanting gentiles are part of the second group (who will build the New Jerusalem) rather than the first (who will assist).

Nephi later mentions the Gentiles who are “numbered among” more directly as covenant Israel: *I would say unto you, as many of the gentiles as will repent **are the covenant people of the Lord*** (2 Nephi 12:11 RE, emphasis added). If they ARE the covenant people, then perhaps they ARE the second group mentioned by the Lord in His prophecy. We must at least allow that possibility.

When He came to the Nephites, Christ taught that it was the Father who declared the covenanted Gentiles would change identity to become Israel: *But if the gentiles will repent and return unto me, saith the Father, behold, they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel* (3 Nephi 7:5 RE). This change of identity requires Gentiles to repent, be baptized, and return to the Lord’s true doctrine: *...the gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and know of the true points of my doctrine, that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel* (Ibid. 9:11). When Christ taught this principle, He quoted from Isaiah: *Thy seed shall inherit the gentiles and make the desolate cities to be inhabited* (Ibid. 10:2).

In the closing words of Third Nephi, Christ makes an appeal to the Gentiles in words that are echoed in the language of His 2017 covenant with the Gentiles. This is Third Nephi, and this is the Lord speaking:

Hearken, O ye gentiles, and hear the words of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, which he hath commanded me that I should speak concerning you; for behold, he commandeth me that I should write, saying, Turn, all ye gentiles, from your wicked ways, and repent of your evil doings — of your lyings and deceivings, ...of your whoredoms, ...of your secret abominations, [of] your idolatries, and...your murders, and your priestcrafts, and your envyings, and your strifes, and from all your wickedness and abominations — and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins and be filled with the holy ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel. (Ibid. 14:1)

The wording was changed by the Lord in the covenant from “that ye may be numbered with my people who are the house of Israel” to state affirmatively that the covenanting Gentiles “**are now numbered** with my people who are of the house of Israel” (T&C 158:10, emphasis added).

As Moroni was finishing the translation of the Book of Ether, he added his explanation of who would build the New Jerusalem:

Wherefore, the remnant of the house of Joseph shall be built up upon this land, and it shall be a land of their inheritance. And they shall build up a holy city unto the Lord like unto...Jerusalem of old. And they shall no more be confounded until the end come, when the earth shall pass away. ...there shall be a new heaven and a new earth. And they shall be like unto the old, save the old have passed away and all things have become new. ...then cometh the New Jerusalem; and blessed are they who dwell therein, for it is they whose garments are white through the blood of the Lamb; and they are they who are numbered among the remnant of the seed of Joseph, who were of the house of Israel. And then also cometh the Jerusalem of old and the inhabitants thereof; blessed are they, for they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. And they are they who were scattered, and gathered in from the four quarters of the earth and from the north countries, and are partakers of the fulfilling of the covenant which God made with their father, Abraham. And when these things come, bringeth to pass the scripture which saith, [They] are they who were first who shall be last, and [they] are they who were last who shall be first. (Ether 6:3 RE)

The question arises as to whether the Gentiles retain any identity other than “Israel” after they repent, are baptized, learn of the Lord’s true doctrine, and enter into a covenant with Him. There are some helpful hints in the Book of Mormon text that discuss what happens following people being “numbered among” a different group.

One example is the people of Jershon: *They were called by the Nephites, the people of Ammon; therefore, they were distinguished by that name ever after. And they were numbered among the people of Nephi, and also numbered among the people who were of the church of God (Alma 15:9 RE).* Once they were numbered among the Nephites, they were thereafter **only regarded** as Nephites.

When the Nephites were destroyed by losing the power of governing themselves and practicing their distinct religion, all those who would remain would **forever** be numbered among the Lamanites:

I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, according to the spirit of revelation which is in me, in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them, shall dwindle in unbelief. Yea, ...then shall they see wars and pestilences, yea, famine and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct. Yea, and this because they shall dwindle in unbelief and fall into the works of darkness, and lasciviousness, and all manner of iniquities. Yea, I say unto you that because they shall sin against so great light and knowledge, ...I say unto you that from that day, even the fourth generation shall not...pass away before this great iniquity shall come. And when

*that great day cometh, behold, the time very soon cometh that those who are now, or the seed of those who are now numbered among the people of Nephi, **shall no more be numbered among the people of Nephi.** But whosoever remaineth and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day **shall be numbered among the Lamanites,** and shall become like unto them. (Alma 21:3 RE, emphasis added)*

That loss of identity and renumbering-Nephites-to-be-Lamanites was permanent—so much so that the Nephites became extinct. All who remained, even if they were Nephite by blood, were thereafter only Lamanite.

Bearing all this in mind, how do you decipher the three or four different groups mentioned in the prophecy about the New Jerusalem? To repeat, they are:

- First, a group of Gentiles among whom the Lord will establish a church.
- Second, a group of the remnant of Jacob who are given the land for their inheritance. (Apparently, the first group will assist the second group to build a city.)
- Third, a group referred to as the “house of Israel.”
- And perhaps a fourth group to be gathered in “who are scattered upon all the face of the land.”

We can guess—we may be even able to make a justifiable guess that seems to get it right—but we will not know how the Lord will fulfill the prophecy until it is fulfilled. This was the problem with Nicodemus. Christ fulfilled all the prophecies about His coming. But He did it in an unexpected way, different from what the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin anticipated. They thought they understood the Scriptures, and Christ did not fit their understanding. Therefore, the prophecies about Christ’s coming became a barrier to their recognizing His presence.

Prophecies are only meant to be understood after they’re fulfilled. God’s ways are unsearchable until they are accomplished. We can anticipate, look carefully, observe cautiously—but until God performs His strange act, our best guesses are likely to be wrong. God does this *lest you should say, Behold, I knew them. Yea, you heard not, yea, you knew not; ...from th[e] time that your ear was not opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously and were called a transgressor from the womb* (Isaiah 17:1 RE). We want to be learned, wise, and appear to share godly insight to make ourselves seem holy. We are not. We are, in God’s words, treacherous transgressors who have a form of godliness, but we deny the power thereof.

Watch carefully. Watch humbly. God will fulfill the prophecy. Keep an open mind about how He will choose to do so. Then, and only then, will you see how great things the Lord has done.

Remember that the original, natural branches which had produced bitter fruit are to be grafted back to the natural roots. Even if all the vineyard is bitter, what the Lord does to reclaim the vineyard is restoring the original branches. Or in other words, lost, scattered Israel is being re-gathered. That gathering brings both bloodlines and covenant together.

The second prophecy I want to discuss is this:

And it shall come to pass that I, the Lord God, will send one mighty and strong, holding the scepter of power in his hand, clothed with light for a covering, whose mouth shall utter words, eternal words, while his bowels shall be a fountain of truth, to set in order the House of God, and to arrange by lot the inheritance of the saints, whose names are found, and the names of their fathers and of their children, enrolled in the Book of the Law of God; while that man who was called of God, and appointed, that puts forth his hand to steady the ark of God, shall fall by the shaft of death, like as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning. (T&C 83:4)

I'll try not to smile.

OK, the LDS Church thinks this was fulfilled long ago. They correctly have noted that this passage has been used by numerous apostates from the LDS Church to claim they are someone “mighty and strong,” deserving to be followed. This is the LDS explanation of the matter:

It is to be observed first of all that the subject of this whole letter [the Prophet's letter to William Phelps], as also...part of it subsequently [being] accepted as a revelation, relates to the affairs of the Church in Missouri, the gathering of the Saints to that land and obtaining their [inheritance] under the law of consecration and stewardship; and the Prophet deals [specifically] with the matter of what is to become of those who fail to receive their inheritances by order or deed from the bishop...

It was while these conditions of rebellion, jealousy, pride, unbelief and hardness of heart prevailed among the brethren in Zion—Jackson county, Missouri—in all of which Bishop Partridge participated, that the words of the revelation taken from the letter to William W. Phelps, of the 27th of November, 1832, were written. The “man who was called and appointed of God” to “divide...the Saints their inheritance”—Edward Partridge—was at that time out of order, neglecting his own duty, and putting “forth his hand to steady the ark”; hence, he was warned of the judgment of God impending, and the prediction was made that another, “one mighty and strong,” would be sent of God to take his place, to have his bishopric—one having the spirit and power of [the] high office resting upon him, by which he would have power to “set in order the house of God, and arrange by lot the inheritance of the Saints”; in other words, one who would do the work that Bishop Edward Partridge had been appointed to do, but had failed to accomplish...

And inasmuch as through his repentance and sacrifices and suffering, Bishop Edward Partridge undoubtedly obtained a mitigation of the threatened judgment against him of falling “by the shaft of death, like...a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning,” so the occasion for sending another to fill his station—“one mighty and strong to set in order the house of God, and to arrange by lot the [inheritance] of the Saints”—may also be considered as having passed away and the whole incident of the prophecy closed. (From James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. [1965–75], 4:112, 115, 117)

That seems reasonable enough to me—but the language still gets used by claimants who want a following. Assuming that the LDS explanation is wrong and there will yet be someone who comes forward to set in order the House of God, what should we be looking for?

- Someone to set in order the LDS Church?
- Someone to set in order the temple rites?
- Someone to set in order the family of God through adoption?
- Something else?

That unidentified person will set in order the House of God through “holding the scepter of power in his hand”:

- What exactly is that?
- Will it be a physical object or a metaphorical scepter?
- If metaphor, what’s the correct meaning?

Then, too, this unidentified fellow will be “clothed with light for a covering”:

- How’s that to be understood?
- What will make that happen?
- Can a casual observer detect that light, or is it merely internal to the one who’s mighty and strong?

The same questions can be asked about his “mouth...utter[ing] words, eternal words,” and his “bowels...be[ing] a fountain of truth.” These are ill-defined, lofty words, lacking any specific way to know how they are fulfilled.

Well, you can guess about all these things, but you cannot know for certain. If God intends to do more than was once done in Missouri in the 1830s, then He will accomplish it in His way, His own time, in the manner of His choosing. Only a fool will proclaim that they are the very one described in that passage as “mighty and strong”—and a particular braggart fool who has done nothing more than put his ego on display with self-promotion. I’ve never claimed to be mighty and strong, and I’ll never do so.

Watch and pray always that you’re not deceived. Allow God the privilege of accomplishing His strange work in a way that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet entered into your heart. Be trusting and believing and wait on the Lord. Eagerness and impatience will not prove useful.

Let me use two quotes from Christ to illustrate this. First, after quoting from Isaiah, the Lord commanded this:

I say unto you that ye had ought to search these things. Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently, for great are the words of Isaiah. For surely he spake as touching all things concerning my people which are of the house of Israel. Therefore, it must needs be that he must speak also to the gentiles. And all

things that he spake hath been and shall be, even according to the words which he spake. (3 Nephi 10:4 RE)

From this, we know we ought to carefully study Isaiah's prophecy because he spoke about "all things" involving Israel. And if it covers all things involving Israel, it must include the Gentiles. Although the Gentiles must be grafted back into the roots, they are nevertheless part of the natural branches of the tree (or Israelites who have lost their identity).

On the other hand, the same Lord says: *Watch, therefore, for you know not at what hour your Lord do[th] come* (Matthew 11:13 RE). Even if you study carefully the words of Isaiah and know that he prophesied about "all things" involving Israel, still you will not know about our Lord's return. Watch! But you won't know. Why? Because you do not know how the Lord will choose to fulfill the words of Isaiah until the Lord fulfills them. And if you watch, while being familiar with the prophecies, you should be able to see them as they are fulfilled, even if the fulfillment is not something you can predict in advance. The Lord's conduct will always be **His** "strange act" and not according to our anticipated predictions.

How God chooses to fulfill His promises in our day is as unsearchable and unpredictable as how Christ fulfilled prophecy in front of the learned members of the Sanhedrin while He went unrecognized. He was regarded by them as merely a threat/a pretender who may have had some interesting things to say, but surely (they thought) He could not be the Messiah.

There have been a great number of things accomplished in these last few years. More is presently underway. It may seem like there is little progress, but preparations take time. Those who will not wait on the preparations put their impatience on display. That in turn allows others to identify them. Haste brings pestilence. In all probability, hasty people will not be suitable for gathering.

I want to add a word of caution about people claiming inspiration to prophecy. Joseph Smith's letter from Liberty Jail—and I'm calling it his letter because he was the primary person responsible and the primary one whose voice is heard throughout it, but it was co-signed by Hyrum Smith, Lyman Wight, Caleb Baldwin, and Alexander McRae also—Joseph gave us sage advice that applies in many circumstances. That letter gives us good advice about understanding prophecy.

A fanciful and flowery and heated imagination [beware] of, because the things of God are of deep import, and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Your mind, O man, if you will lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost Heavens, and search into and contemplate the lowest considerations of the darkest abyss, and expand upon the broad considerations of eternal expanse. You must commune with God. How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God than the vain imagination of the human heart? None but fools will trifle with the souls of men.

How vain and trifling have been our spirits, our conferences, our councils, our meetings, our private as well as public conversations: too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending for the dignified characters of the called and chosen of God, according

to the purposes of his will from before the foundation of the world, to hold the keys of the mysteries of those things that have been kept hid from the foundation until now.
(T&C 138:18-19)

Recently, there have been some public displays of foolishness made by zealous people acting in haste. God's meaning only becomes clear when we take enough thought to solemnly, carefully, and through enough experience have allowed God's meaning to become clear. Haste brings pestilence. Impatience is the enemy of understanding. When it comes to understanding scripture, obeying God, and parsing through prophecy, nothing should be done abruptly.

Finally, I would suggest that we all stay in our own lane. I've refrained from telling others what they should do. If there is any message I've delivered, I considered myself equally obligated to follow and never thought that I stood apart or independent of the message. Rather than thinking we can interpret God's will for others, our search should be to find God's will for ourselves. If we think someone makes it look easy, that is only because you do not comprehend the price that must be paid in hard-won experience that precedes the result. Joseph Smith said his life "was like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing [he got was] when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else, striking with accelerated force against religious bigotry, priest-craft, ...lying editors, ...backed by mobs, blasphemers, licentious and corrupt men and women—all hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus [he was to] become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty" (*DHC* 5:401). Reflecting on all this and all his difficulties, he wrote, "For my part, I think I never could have felt as I now do if I had not suffered the wrongs that I have suffered. All things shall work together for good to them that love God" (letter from Joseph Smith to Presendia Huntington Buell, Mar. 15, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri).

No matter how easy it may appear for some to know God, if we saw all of the picture, we would realize it requires as high a price from us as was required of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Abraham, Joseph of Egypt, and all the others God has taken into His confidence.

Finally, this needs to be repeated:

Joseph Smith said: "The reason we do not have the secrets of the Lord revealed unto us, is because we do not keep them but reveal them; we do not keep our own secrets, but reveal our difficulties to the world, even to our enemies, then how would we keep the secrets of the Lord?" Elsewhere Joseph admonished: "If God gives you a manifestation; keep it to yourselves." The Second Comforter is for one's individual comfort and instruction. Not for public display or to gratify one's pride or [to] serve one's vain ambition. Sacred things tend to lose their luster as they are profaned by being made common. Just as the white snow tends to stain the longer it is trodden underfoot by men, so also does the purity of revelation become denigrated by being revealed without regard to the audience's preparation and worthiness to learn of sacred things. This is a binding limitation and an essential part of the process. To be qualified, one must be someone who can be trusted to keep sacred things sacred. ("Casting Pearls Before Swine," T&C Glossary; footnotes removed)

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.