

Are Apostles and Prophets Needed in the Church Today?

By Pastor Marvin W. Cowan

Mormonism claims that one of the identifying characteristics of the true church is that it will always have living apostles and prophets to govern it. In support of their claims they use Ephesians 2:20 which says that believers are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” The next two verses refer to believers as the building which is built upon that foundation. Since the text only mentions one building, how many foundations does it need? Or, when a builder builds a building, how many times does he lay the foundation? Ephesians 2:20 not only mentions the foundation of the apostles and prophets but in the same sentence it says that Jesus Christ is the chief Cornerstone. If the church needs a new foundation of apostles and prophets in each generation, does it also need a new Cornerstone or a new Christ? The foundation of the apostles and prophets was not the apostles themselves, but it was Christ. I Corinthians 3:11 declares, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Some might claim Christ couldn’t be both the Foundation and the chief Cornerstone. But, Christ was the Lamb of God and the Lion of the tribe of Judah as well as the Water of life and the Bread of heaven all at the same time! Nothing in this text suggests that apostles and prophets are to be perpetual offices to govern the church in every generation. Nor did Jesus or His apostles teach that idea.

To support their claim about apostles and prophets, Latter Day Saints use Ephesians 4:11 which says, “And He [Christ] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” The Omniscient Christ knew what kind of leader every part of the church needed, so He gave “some” one kind of gifted leader, and to “some” others He gave another kind of gifted leader. But, it does not say He gave the entire church in all generations all of those gifted leaders. But, Latter Day Saints claim the next two verses teach that apostles and prophets are offices which are to remain in the entire church until all the saints are perfected and united. If that is the meaning, it contradicts the Latter Day Saints claim that there were 1700 to 1800 years of universal apostasy when there were no apostles, prophets or true church on the earth. Latter Day Saints also claim the different beliefs in Christianity today prove that they are still part of that same “apostasy.”

When Mormonism was beginning they often proclaimed how united they were and how divided Christianity was. Christianity was then over 1800 years old while Mormonism had no history at all. Now that Mormonism has been around for 170 years and has produced over 200 splinter groups as well as a lot of dissension and differences within the Latter Day Saints Church, it isn’t quite as easy to claim that they are the only ones united! In the Latter Day Saints Church there are liberals who don’t believe Joseph Smith was a prophet or that the *Book of Mormon* is a real history of real people. There are other Mormons who believe everything Joseph Smith and Brigham Young taught, including such things as polygamy, God cursing the black race for their lack of valiance in the pre-mortal life and that Adam is our God. So even though Latter Day Saints have apostles and prophets, they haven’t brought unity and perfection to their church!

The sixth Latter Day Saint Article of Faith declares the church today should have:

“apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc.” Latter Day Saints criticize other churches for not having apostles and prophets, but they have no office of pastor or evangelist. When that is pointed out they usually say, “Our bishops are pastors and our seventies are evangelists.” But if Christians claim their pastors are prophets in the sense of expounding the word of God and their missionaries are apostles in the sense of being sent forth with the gospel message, Latter Day Saints reject that claim because they don’t have offices labeled “apostles” and “prophets.” Their inconsistency is obvious.

Is it necessary or even possible to have twelve apostles today who function the same way they did in New Testament times? If so, what are the specific requirements to be one of the twelve apostles? Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus, was the only member of the twelve apostles ever replaced in the Bible. The requirements for the one who replaced him are found in Acts 1:21-22: he must have accompanied Jesus and the twelve apostles from the time that John the Baptist baptized Jesus until Jesus ascended into heaven after His resurrection. Peter explained the reason for that requirement was that one must “be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection” (v. 22). In other words, they had to be with Jesus and His apostles throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry and then witness His resurrection so that they could testify that the risen Christ was the same Person they had known intimately. No one can meet that requirement today because no one is old enough to have accompanied Jesus and the apostles throughout His earthly ministry. Nor can anyone truthfully claim to have witnessed Jesus’ resurrection today because that was an historical event that happened nearly 2000 years ago. We can certainly believe in His resurrection, but we weren’t eyewitnesses of it like the twelve apostles of Christ were. That is why the apostle Peter wrote as an eyewitness in II Pet. 1:15-18. Christ didn’t come to bear witness of the need for apostles in the church, but the apostles came to bear witness of Christ, Who is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God by Him (Heb. 7:25).

For more information about Latter Day Saints’ apostles we suggest the booklet, *Apostles or Apostates*, by James D. Bales, published by World Vision Pub. Co., 1033 Belvidere Dr., Nashville TN in 1944. Our next article will discuss the Twelve Apostles in Mormonism.