

Prophets in Mormonism – Part 5

by Marvin W. Cowan

On Sunday morning at the 1981 LDS Semi-Annual Conference, President Ezra Taft Benson, the thirteenth LDS Prophet said, “The ultimate test of a true prophet is that when he speaks in the name of the Lord, his words come to pass” (*Deseret News*, Oct. 6, 1981, p. 6A). That article also says that “President Benson also spoke of the prophecy concerning Stephen A. Douglas who was promised by Joseph Smith that if he ever spoke out against the (LDS) Church, the wrath of God would come down against him. That came to pass when in 1857 Douglas was aspiring to the presidency (of the USA), he spoke out against the Church, was badly defeated in the election and died a broken man one year later.”

Benson’s information about Douglas came from *History of the Church*, Volume V, pages 393-398, by Joseph Smith where it is used to show that Smith was a true prophet. But it actually shows that Smith’s prophecy about Douglas is part of his false prophecy about the demise of the United States if it didn’t do as Smith requested.

In that prophecy dated May 18, 1843, Smith said,

I prophecy in the name of the Lord God of Israel, unless the United States redress the wrongs committed upon the Saints in the state of Missouri and punish the crimes committed by her officers that in a few years the government will be utterly overthrown and wasted and there will not be so much as a potsherd left, for their wickedness in permitting the murder of men, women and children, and the wholesale plunder and extermination of thousands of her citizens to go unpunished, thereby perpetrating a foul and corroding blot upon the fair fame of this great republic, the very thought of which would have caused the high-minded and patriotic framers of the Constitution of the United States to hide their faces with shame. *Judge (Douglas), you will aspire to the presidency of the United States; and if ever you turn your hand against me or the Latter-day Saints, you will feel the weight of the hand of Almighty upon you; and you will live to see and know that I have testified the truth to you; for the conversation of this day will stick to you through life* (*History of the Church*, vol. V, p. 394).

In Smith’s prophecy above, the part about Judge Douglas is in italics.

The first part of the above prophecy declares that unless the United States redresses the wrongs committed against the LDS in Missouri, the government will be overthrown and wasted so that nothing is left of it. Again on December 16, 1843,

while discussing the LDS request for redress for their losses in Missouri, Smith said, "I prophesied, by virtue of the holy Priesthood vested in me, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that, if Congress will not hear our petition and grant us protection, they shall be broken up as a government, *and God shall damn them, and there shall nothing be left of them—not even a grease spot*" (*Millennial Star*, vol. 22, p. 455).

That prophecy was republished in the *History of the Church*, Volume VI, page 116, but the italicized words at the end of it are missing in that account. These prophecies both warned of the demise of the United States Government if it didn't do as Smith requested. But, all Mormons who lost their property in Missouri and who requested special protection from the US Government died over a hundred years ago without receiving redress or protection. There is no way to protect or compensate them now, so both of these prophecies were false.

The first prophecy mentioned in this article was the context of Smith's prophecy about Stephen A. Douglas, so was it a true prophecy? In *History of the Church*, Volume V, pages 395-396, the notes about this prophecy say that,

The prediction concerning Stephen A. Douglas in this chapter is one of the most remarkable prophecies either in ancient or modern times. It was impossible for any merely human sagacity to foresee the events predicted. Stephen A. Douglas was a bright, but comparatively an *unknown man*, nationally, at the time of the interview, *May, 1843*, and but thirty years of age. It is a matter of history that Stephen A. Douglas did, however, aspire to the presidency of the United States, and was nominated for that office by the Democratic convention held in Charleston, South Carolina, on the 23rd of June 1860... Twenty days less than one year after his nomination by the Charleston convention, while yet in the prime of manhood—forty-eight years of age, — Mr. Douglas died at his home in Chicago, a disappointed, not to say heart-broken man.

That sounds like Douglas died from his disappointment at losing the election.

The *Encyclopedia Americana* presents a very different story of Douglas. It says,

His rise as a power in the Democratic Party was phenomenal...by 1840 he was chairman of the Democratic state committee and secretary of state (in Illinois). A year later, at the age of 28, he became judge of the Illinois Supreme Court. In 1842 he was elected to Congress and served from March 4, 1843 until he resigned to become senator in 1847. He held this position until his death...Douglas bolted the (Democratic) party and ran on an independent ticket (for President) in 1860. This action split the Democratic vote, assuring the election of the Republican candidate, Abraham Lincoln. With the threatened outbreak of war, *Douglas loyally supported the new administration and devoted his talent and influence to preservation of the Union. He died of typhoid fever shortly after the war began.*

Douglas did speak out against polygamy and other LDS practices that were not a part of American values. Did he feel the weight of the hand of the Almighty upon him for doing that as Smith said he would? He died as a *young man* just 48 years old, but was it because he lost the election in 1860? Joseph Smith, who prophesied the demise of the US government if it didn't do as he requested and who warned

Douglas never to speak against the LDS Church, didn't fare nearly so well. He died at the age of 38 in a gun battle while in jail after making numerous false prophecies.

Those who want to read more LDS prophecies can do so in *Latter-Day Prophets Speak*, by Daniel Ludlow, published by Bookcraft in Salt Lake City, UT in 1951. Next time we will look at other LDS prophecies in the light of historical evidence.