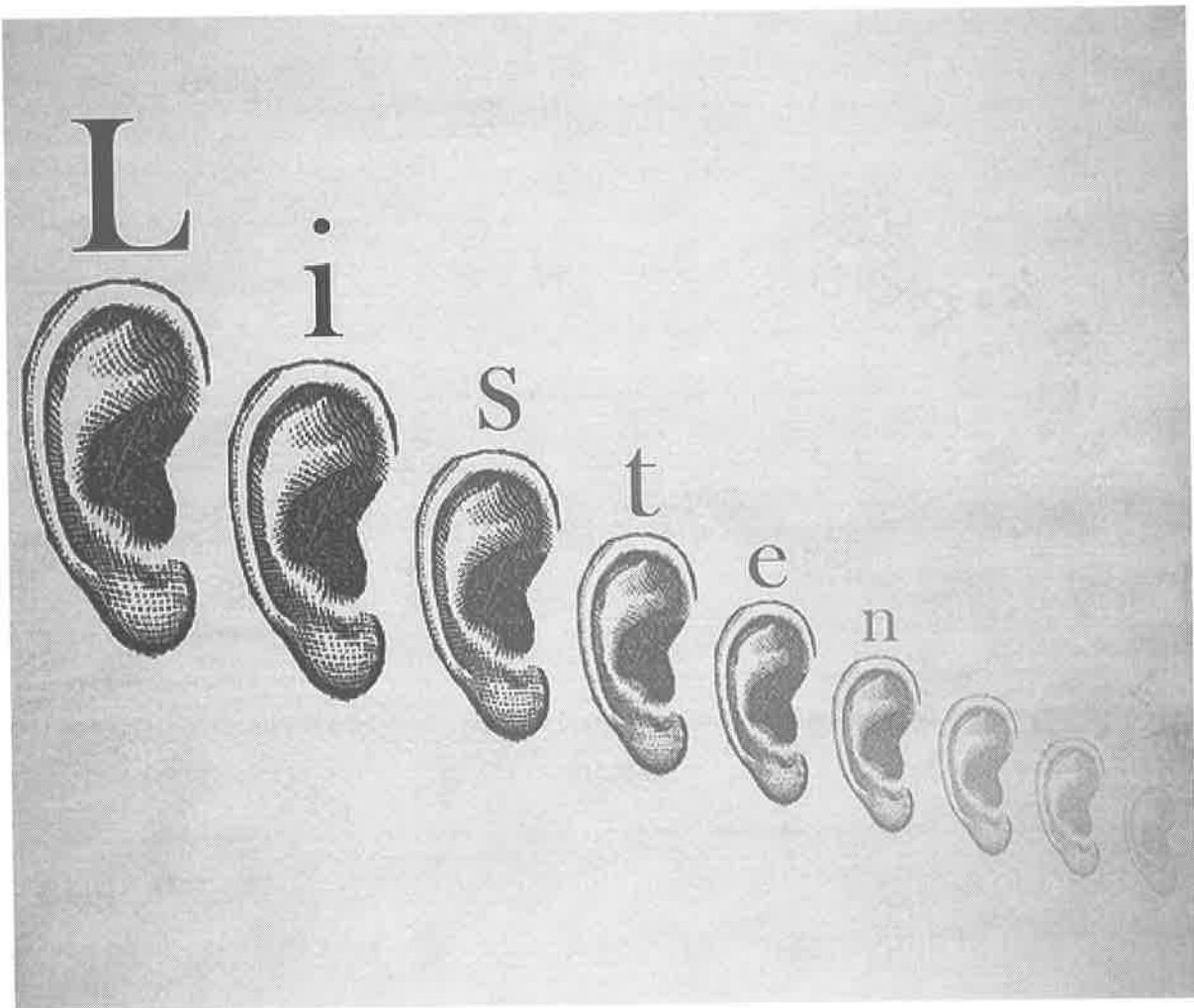


## “Heed” Does Not Mean “Obey,” That Would Be Too Easy

by Jason L | Mar 16, 2017 | Featured, infallibility, Obedience, Prophets | 1 comment



*[Though this post begins with a political reference, it is not a post about politics or partisanship.]*

I was listening to Sean Spicer yesterday try to explain when Donald Trump should be taken at his word and when he is merely joking. It's actually a tough distinction to make, as a rule, in advance. (Try it.) But what caught my attention was the way he chose to answer. His response was that you know Trump is being real when he speaks “with authority” or when he is being “presidential.”

That answer is both (1) totally unhelpful in judging tweets and (2) so much like how Mormons often talk about prophets. When are they speaking for the Lord? When they are speaking for

the Lord.

In order to resolve this difficulty I know Mormons who adopt a simple prescription: Follow the Prophet. Don't worry about whether he's right or wrong, speaking for the Lord or not, just follow.

I've written about this before and it came to my mind again in a recent Sunday School lesson. We read D&C 21:4 and were discussing the injunction to "give heed unto all [Joseph's] words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before [the Lord]." Pretty soon I was hearing strains of "Follow the Prophet" as class members talked about this command to obey Joseph.

But "heed" does **not** mean "obey." It means listen carefully, consider, weigh, pay close attention. That's what it meant when the word entered the English language. That's what it meant when Joseph wrote it. And I remain convinced that's what it means now.

That's difficult. It's challenging to listen to and recognize the voice of the Lord, to know when "I, the Lord have spoken" and when a prophet is just doing their imperfect best to guide us.

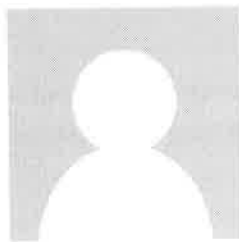
Frankly, I think that's part of why we have the Doctrine & Covenants and why it's worth studying. The Introduction says that "In the revelations, one hears the tender but firm voice of the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking anew in the dispensation of the fulness of times." So reading these revelations – many of them answers to questions from real, historical people – can help us learn to listen (heed) the voice of the Lord in our own lives. We can better learn to recognize when he is speaking to us and what he is trying to say.

I think that's at least part of what the Lord was telling the saints in D&C 21:4. Giving heed and walking in holiness go hand in hand not because holiness is a reward for obedience but because it will take holy living to be able to hear the Lord's voice. It's challenging but worth the growth that it can bring.

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**Jason L**

Jason L grew up in Arizona as a Mormon Democrat with a lawyer father – and heard all the jokes. Now he's got a Ph.D. in history, is married to a sugar sorceress, and enjoys raising their sweet son.

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**ChrisClarke** on March 16, 2017 at 9:33 am

Are there any scriptural injunctions to follow/obey the prophets elsewhere?

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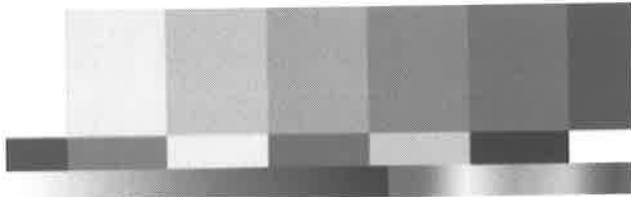
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