

## Our Need for Living Prophets

Teachings of the Living Prophets Student Manual

### Introduction

Since the days of Adam, one way the Lord has communicated His will to His children has been through prophets (see [Amos 3:7](#)). Prophets teach us God’s will and reveal His divine character. They are preachers of righteousness and denounce sin, and when inspired to do so, prophets foretell future events. Most importantly, prophets bear witness of Jesus Christ. The Lord promised that if we “give heed” to the words of the prophet, “the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory” (D&C 21:4, 6). With prophets to guide us, we can be sure of God’s will concerning us. We can be assured that when we follow the counsel of living prophets, we can better navigate through the troubled times we live in.

### Commentary

#### The Lord Reveals His Will to Living Prophets Now as He Did in the Past

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that from Adam down to the current President of the Church, prophets have been an important part of the Lord’s plan:

“The very first [dispensation of the gospel] was in the time of Adam. Then came dispensations of Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others [see Bible Dictionary, “[Dispensations](#),” 657–58]. **Each prophet had a divine commission to teach of the divinity and the doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ.** In each age these teachings were meant to help the people. But their disobedience resulted in apostasy. . . .

“Thus a complete restoration was required. God the Father and Jesus Christ called upon the Prophet Joseph Smith to be the prophet of this dispensation. All divine powers of previous dispensations were to be restored through him” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2006, 83–84; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 79–80; emphasis added).

The final gospel dispensation began with the calling of a prophet—Joseph Smith. As in past dispensations, God’s will is given to His children through the process of revelation. President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency discussed the necessity for constant revelation: “Much revelation received, in this time as well as anciently, has been

doctrinal. Some of it has been operational and tactical. Much of it is not spectacular. President John Taylor reminds us: ‘Adam’s revelation did not instruct Noah to build his ark; nor did Noah’s revelation tell Lot to forsake Sodom; nor did either of these speak of the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt. **These all had revelations for themselves**’ (*Millennial Star*, 1 Nov. 1847, 323)” (“Continuing Revelation,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1996, 5; emphasis added).

President Hugh B. Brown (1883–1975) of the First Presidency described a conversation he had with a member of the British House of Commons and former justice of the Supreme Court of England, who was not a member of the Church, about the need for living prophets and the revelation they receive:

“[I said,] ‘I am submitting to you in all seriousness that it was standard procedure in Bible times for God to talk to men.’

“[He responded,] ‘I think I will admit that, but it stopped shortly after the first century of the Christian era.’

“‘Why do you think it stopped?’

“‘I can’t say.’

“‘You think that God hasn’t spoken since then?’

“‘Not to my knowledge.’

“‘May I suggest some possible reasons why he has not spoken. Perhaps it is because he cannot. He has lost the power.’

“He said, ‘Of course that would be blasphemous.’

“‘Well, then, if you don’t accept that, perhaps he doesn’t speak to men because he doesn’t love us anymore. He is no longer interested in the affairs of men.’

“‘No,’ he said, ‘God loves all men, and he is no respecter of persons.’

“‘Well, . . . then the only other possible answer as I see it is that we don’t need him. We have made such rapid strides in education and science that we don’t need God anymore.’

“And then he said, and his voice trembled as he thought of impending war [World War II], ‘Mr. Brown, **there never was a time in the history of the world when the voice of God was needed as it is needed now.** Perhaps you can tell me why he doesn’t speak.’

“My answer was, ‘He does speak, he has spoken; but men need faith to hear him.’

“Then we proceeded to examine what I may call a ‘profile of a prophet.’ ...

“The judge sat and listened intently. He asked some very pointed and searching questions, and at the end of the interview he said, ‘Mr. Brown, I wonder if your people appreciate the import of your message. Do you?’ He said, ‘If what you have told me is true, it is the greatest message that has come to this earth since the angels announced the birth of Christ’” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1967, 118, 120; emphasis added; see also *The Profile of a Prophet*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year [Oct. 4, 1955], 4–5, 8; or “The Profile of a Prophet,” *Ensign*, June 2006, 36–37, 39).

### Today’s Problems Are Met with Divine Solutions

The Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) taught that we need continuing divine direction “adapted to the circumstances” of the people in this dispensation (see *History of the Church*, 5:135). He also taught that “we are differently situated from any other people that ever existed upon this earth” and, therefore, need unique revelation and direction (see *History of the Church*, 2:52; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 195). “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Articles of Faith 1:9).

In an 1883 revelation given through President John Taylor (1808–87), the Lord promised that He would continue to bless the Church with revelations: “I will reveal unto you, from time to time, through the channels that I have appointed, everything that shall be necessary for the future development and perfection of my Church, for the adjustment and rolling forth of my kingdom, and for the building up and the establishment of my Zion” (in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. [1965–75], 2:354).

President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles reminded Latter-day Saints that constancy and change in the Church are both dictated by revelation:

“There will be changes made in the future as in the past. Whether the Brethren [the prophet and apostles] make changes or resist them depends entirely upon the instructions they receive through the channels of revelation which were established in the beginning.

“The doctrines will remain fixed, eternal; the organization, programs, and procedures will be altered as directed by Him whose church this is” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1989, 19; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 16).

President John Taylor spoke of the need for present-day revelation as part of the Lord’s true religion:

“We believe that it is necessary for man to be placed in communication with God; that he should have revelation from him, and that unless he is placed under the influence of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he can know nothing about the things of God. ... **Whoever heard of true religion without communication with God?** To me the thing is the most absurd that the human mind could conceive of. I do not wonder, when the people generally reject the principle of present revelation, that skepticism and infidelity prevail to such an alarming extent. I do not wonder that so many men treat religion with contempt, and regard it as something not worth the attention of intelligent beings, for without revelation religion is a mockery and a farce. ...

“**The principle of present revelation then, is the very foundation of our religion**” (“Discourse by Elder John Taylor,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 4, 1874, 68; emphasis added; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor* [2001], 158–59).

### Revelation Is Constant in This Dispensation

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) testified that the flow of revelation is constant in our dispensation: “I say, in the deepest of humility, but also by the power and force of a burning testimony in my soul, that from the prophet of the Restoration to the prophet of our own year, the communication line is unbroken, the authority is continuous, a light, brilliant and penetrating, continues to shine. The sound of the voice of the Lord is a continuous melody and a thunderous appeal” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1977, 115; or *Ensign*, May 1977, 78; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* [2006], 241).

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President George Q. Cannon (1827–1901) of the First Presidency taught: “**This Church from the day of its organization up to the present time has never been one hour, yea, I may say, one moment without revelation**, without having a man in our midst who can tell us as a people the mind and will of

God, who can point out to us that which we should do, who can teach us the doctrines of Christ, who can point out to us that which is false and incorrect, and who can, upon all matters that come within the range of our experience, and that are necessary for us to attend to give us the necessary counsel and instruction. This has been the case always” (“Discourse by President George Q. Cannon,” *Deseret News*, Jan. 21, 1885, 3; emphasis added).

### **The Lord’s Church Is Built on the Foundation of Apostles and Prophets**

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) testified:

“This is the restored Church of Jesus Christ. We as a people are Latter-day Saints. We testify that the heavens have been opened, that the curtains have been parted, that God has spoken, and that Jesus Christ has manifested Himself, followed by a bestowal of divine authority.

“Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of this work, and it is built upon a ‘foundation of ... apostles and prophets’ (*Ephesians 2:20*)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2002, 87; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 81).

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained why the foundation of apostles and prophets is needed today: “The apostolic and prophetic foundation of the Church was to bless in all times, but *especially* in times of adversity or danger, times when we might feel like children, confused or disoriented, perhaps a little fearful, times in which the devious hand of men or the maliciousness of the devil would attempt to unsettle or mislead. ... In New Testament times, in Book of Mormon times, and in modern times these officers form the foundation stones of the true Church, positioned around and gaining their strength from the chief cornerstone, ‘the rock of our Redeemer, who is [Jesus] Christ, the Son of God’ [*Helaman 5:12*]” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 5; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 7).

“In New Testament times, in Book of Mormon times, and in modern times [prophets and apostles] form the foundation stones of the true Church, positioned around and gaining their strength from the chief cornerstone, ‘the rock of our Redeemer, who is

[Jesus] Christ, the Son of God.”

### **The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles Are Prophets, Seers, and Revelators**

President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) taught what it means when we sustain the First Presidency and

Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators: “**All members of the First Presidency and the Twelve are regularly sustained as ‘prophets, seers, and revelators.’** ... This means that any one of the apostles, so chosen and ordained, could preside over the Church if he were ‘chosen by the body [which has been interpreted to mean, the entire Quorum of the Twelve], appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church,’ to quote from a revelation on this subject, on one condition, and that being that he was the senior member, or the president, of that body. (See *D&C 107:22*.)” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 123; or *Improvement Era*, June 1970, 28; emphasis added; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* [2000], 82).

President J. Reuben Clark Jr. (1871–1961) of the First Presidency explained that “some of the General Authorities [the Apostles] have had assigned to them a special calling; they possess a special gift; they are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators, which gives them a special spiritual endowment in connection with their teaching of the people. **They have the right, the power, and authority to declare the mind and will of God to his people**, subject to the over-all power and authority of the President of the Church” (“When Are Church Leaders’ Words Entitled to Claim of Scripture?” *Church News*, July 31, 1954, 9; emphasis added).

### **What Are Prophets, Seers, and Revelators?**

#### Prophet

A prophet is “a person who has been called by and speaks for God. As a messenger of God, a prophet receives commandments, prophecies, and revelations from God. His responsibility is to make known God’s will and true character to mankind and to show the meaning of his dealings with them. A prophet denounces sin and foretells its consequences. He is a preacher of righteousness. On occasion, prophets may be inspired to foretell the future for the benefit of mankind. **His primary responsibility, however, is to bear witness of Christ.** The President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is God’s prophet on earth today. Members of the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators” (Guide to the Scriptures, “Prophet,” [scriptures.lds.org](http://scriptures.lds.org); emphasis added).

- Seer

A seer is “a person authorized of God to **see with spiritual eyes things which God has hidden from**

**the world** (Moses 6:35–38). He is a revelator and a prophet (Mosiah 8:13–16). In the Book of Mormon, Ammon taught that only a seer could use special interpreters, or a Urim and Thummim (Mosiah 8:13; 28:16). A seer knows the past, present, and future. Anciently, a prophet was often called a seer (1 Sam. 9:9; 2 Sam. 24:11).

“Joseph Smith is the great seer of the latter days (D&C 21:1; 135:3). In addition, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators” (Guide to the Scriptures, “Seer,” scriptures.lds.org; emphasis added).

Elder John A. Widtsoe (1872–1952) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained: “A seer is one who sees with spiritual eyes. He perceives the meaning of that which seems obscure to others; therefore he is an interpreter and clarifier of eternal truth. . . . In short, he is one who sees, who walks in the Lord’s light with open eyes [see Mosiah 8:15–17]” (*Evidences and Reconciliations*, arr. G. Homer Durham, 3 vols. in 1 [1960], 258).

President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) described one of his counselors as one who possessed the gift of seership: “President Harold B. Lee is a pillar of truth and righteousness, a true seer who has great spiritual strength and insight and wisdom, and whose knowledge and understanding of the Church and its needs is not surpassed by any man” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 114; or *Improvement Era*, June 1970, 27).

- Revelator

As revelators, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles make known the will of the Lord for the Church and for mankind in general. **They reveal His will in both spiritual and temporal affairs**, though all things are spiritual to the Lord (see D&C 29:34). They teach doctrine, direct priesthood quorums, guide auxiliaries, supervise the construction of meetinghouses and temples, and do whatever else is necessary so that “the gospel [will] roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth” (D&C 65:2).

Elder John A. Widtsoe taught: “A revelator makes known, with the Lord’s help, something before unknown. It may be new or forgotten truth, or a new or forgotten application of known truth to man’s need” (*Evidences and Reconciliations*, 258).

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### Prophets Help Us Build Faith in Jesus Christ

Listening to and following the words of the living prophets strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ (see Romans 10:17). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “**Faith comes by hearing the word of God, through the testimony of the servants of God**; that testimony is always attended by the Spirit of prophecy and revelation [see Revelation 19:10]” (in *History of the Church*, 3:379; emphasis added). Prophets declare the word of God by the spirit of prophecy so that those who hear may exercise faith in Jesus Christ.

Because He loves His children, and “knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth” (D&C 1:17), Heavenly Father provided a solution: He restored the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the Prophet Joseph Smith. In doing so, the Lord prepared the way so that “faith . . . might increase in the earth” (D&C 1:21). He promised, “Though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38). As we hear the word of the Lord through the teachings of the prophets and witness its fulfillment, our faith grows. That faith brings us peace, hope, and joy, even in a world racked by doubt, wickedness, and calamities.

### Prophets Teach for Our Benefit

To those tempted to resist the counsel and warning of the prophets, President Gordon B. Hinckley offered this assurance:

“Please know that our pleadings are not motivated by any selfish desire. Please know that our warnings are not without substance and reason. Please know that the decisions to speak out on various matters are not reached without deliberation, discussion, and prayer. Please know that our only ambition is to help each of you with your problems, your struggles, your families, your lives. . . .

“We have no selfish desire . . . other than the wish that our brethren and sisters will be happy, that peace and love will be found in their homes, that they will be blessed by the power of the Almighty in their various undertakings in righteousness” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1992, 80; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 59–60).

### Safety Comes in Knowing and Applying the Teachings of the Living Prophets

The temporal and spiritual dangers facing the world today are evidence of how much we need prophetic guidance. President James E. Faust described how we can be safe from those dangers: “We have been promised that the President of the Church, as the revelator for the Church, will receive guidance for all of us. **Our safety lies in paying heed to that which he says and following his counsel**” (*Ensign*, Aug. 1996, 6; emphasis added).

Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gave an example of how a prophetic teaching protected faithful Church members from danger:

**“Prophets are inspired to provide us with prophetic priorities to protect us from dangers.** As an example, President Heber J. Grant, the prophet from 1918 to 1945, was inspired to emphasize adherence to the Word of Wisdom [see *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Heber J. Grant* (2002), 189–97], the principle with a promise revealed by the Lord to the Prophet Joseph [see *D&C 89*]. He stressed the importance of not smoking or drinking alcoholic beverages and directed the bishops to review these principles in temple recommend interviews.

“At that time, smoking was accepted by society as an appropriate, even glamorous, behavior. The medical profession accepted smoking with little concern because the scientific studies linking cigarette smoking with several kinds of cancer were far in the future. President Grant counseled with great vigor, and we became known as a people who abstained from drinking and smoking. ...

“Obeying the Word of Wisdom gave our members, especially our youth, a preventive inoculation against drug use and the resulting health problems and moral hazards” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 48–49; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 48; emphasis added).

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles warned that because safety is found in following the words of the living prophet, we should guard against obstacles that have kept some from heeding the prophet’s words:

“It is no small thing, my brothers and sisters, to have a prophet of God in our midst. ... When we hear the counsel of the Lord expressed through the words of the President of the Church, our response should be positive and prompt. History shows that there is safety, peace, prosperity, and happiness in responding to prophetic counsel as did Nephi of old: ‘I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded’ (*1 Nephi 3:7*).

“We know of the experience of Naaman, who was struck with leprosy and who eventually contacted the prophet Elisha and was instructed to ‘go and wash in [the] Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean’ (*2 Kings 5:10*).

“At first, Naaman was unwilling to follow Elisha’s counsel. He couldn’t understand the thing he had been asked to do—to wash seven times in the Jordan river. In other words, his pride and stubbornness were keeping him from receiving the Lord’s blessing through His prophet. Finally he went down and ‘dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean’ (*2 Kings 5:14*).

“At first, Naaman was unwilling to follow Elisha’s counsel. ...

“... And what a humbling thing it is to contemplate how many of us might miss out on great and promised blessings because we do not listen and then do the relatively simple things our prophet is telling us to do today.”

“What a humbling thing it must have been for Naaman to realize how close he came to allowing his own pride and his unwillingness to listen to the counsel of the prophet to prevent him from receiving such a great, cleansing blessing. And what a humbling thing it is to contemplate how many of us might miss out on great and promised blessings because we do not listen *and then do* the relatively simple things our prophet is telling us to do today. ...

“Today I make you a promise. It’s a simple one, but it is true. **If you will listen to the living prophet and the apostles and heed our counsel, you will not go astray**” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2001, 84–85; or *Ensign*, May 2001, 65–66; emphasis added).

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the First Presidency reminded us that blessings come when we act upon inspired answers given to us by the prophet:

“We have a living prophet on the face of the earth. ... He knows our challenges and fears. He has inspired answers. ...

“The prophets speak to us in the name of the Lord and in plainness. As the Book of Mormon confirms, ‘the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding’ (*2 Nephi 31:3*).

**“It is our responsibility not only to listen but also to act upon His word,** that we may claim the

blessings of the ordinances and covenants of the restored gospel. He said, ‘I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise’ (D&C 82:10).

“There may be times when we may feel overwhelmed, hurt, or on the edge of discouragement as we are trying so hard to be perfect members of the Church. Be assured, there is balm in Gilead. Let us listen to the prophets of our day as they help us to focus on the things that are central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2002, 10–11; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 12; emphasis added).

### **One of Our Greatest Needs Is to Harken to the Prophets**

President Harold B. Lee explained the value of heeding the prophet’s counsel, even when our own views may differ from that counsel: “The only safety we have as members of this church is to do exactly what the Lord said to the Church in that day when the Church was organized. We must learn to give heed to the words and commandments that the Lord shall give through his prophet, ‘as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me; . . . as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.’ (D&C 21:4–5.) There will be some things that take patience and faith. You may not like what comes from the authority of the Church. It may contradict your political views. It may contradict your social views. It may interfere with some of your social life. But if you listen to these things, as if from the mouth of the Lord himself, with patience and faith, the promise is that ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory.’ (D&C 21:6.)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1970, 152–53; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1970, 126; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee*, 84–85).

Elder Robert D. Hales

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles assured us freedom from “unnecessary pain” if we will follow prophetic counsel: “If we follow the counsel given by the prophets, we can have a life in mortality where we do not bring upon ourselves unnecessary pain and self-destruction. This does not mean we will not have challenges. We will. This does not mean we will not be tested. We will, for this is part of our purpose on earth. But if we will listen to the counsel of our prophet, we will become stronger and be able to withstand the tests of mortality. We will have hope and joy. All the words

of counsel from the prophets have been given so that we may be strengthened and then be able to lift and strengthen others” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 20; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 17; see also Mosiah 2:41; D&C 59:23).