

Prophets

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Churches are often led by individuals who must bear the burden of spiritual and temporal leadership for their congregations. History records the lives of excellent and revered church leaders across many religions and sects, as well as the lives and misdeeds of churchmen who have been less than exemplary—even reprehensible. How an ecclesiastical leader lives, is perceived, and revered in a religion can make a substantial difference in the effectiveness of that leader and in the quality of the members of the church he leads.

Historical Perspective on Prophets

“A prophet is a man called by God to be his representative on earth. When a prophet speaks for God, it is as if God were speaking. A prophet is also a special witness for Christ, testifying of His divinity and teaching His gospel. A prophet teaches truth and interprets the word of God. He calls the unrighteous to repentance. He receives revelations and directions from the Lord for our benefit. He may see into the future and foretell coming events so that the world may be warned” (Gospel Principles, 47).

Prophets have been on the earth since the time of Adam and Eve (Amos 3:7), although often marginalized by church political leaders, persecuted, and/or murdered. A prophet is chosen by God and called to be a prophet through the proper priesthood authority. The profile of a prophet can vary tremendously in terms of age, level of education, work vocation, or family upbringing.

The Scriptures Testify of Prophets after Christ

Jesus Christ clearly inferred the future presence of prophets when he told his disciples: “He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward (Matt. 10:41).

In his first epistle to the Corinthians the apostle Paul speaks of prophecy being a superior spiritual gift than that of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5). Paul writes “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets” (1 Cor. 14:30-32). Paul was clearly speaking of the presence of prophets during his time, with an overwhelming inference of prophets in the future.

Authority of a Prophet

Only the prophet of the Church, who is the presiding high priest (D&C 107:65–67), can receive revelations for the Church, provide binding interpretations of scripture, or change the existing doctrines of the Church. Can one imagine many prophets from different churches at the same time on earth trying to speak for God? Knowing God is an orderly God, such a situation would never take place, lest there be confusion among the children of God.

The prophet holds the “keys to the kingdom” with the power to loose or bind in all temporal and spiritual matters of the Church (Matt. 16:19). Although other members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are themselves prophets, when the term “prophet of the Church” is used, it means specifically the prophet who speaks for the entire world.

The Calling of a Prophet

The Lord has established a pattern that the most senior member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles is to be the prophet of the Church. This pattern ensures there is continuity in leadership without political maneuvering or elections of any kind.

The Prophets and Servants of God are not Perfect

Some have the mistaken impression that the prophets and chosen servants of God are perfect and that *all* of their actions and words should be judged accordingly. While this is certainly what God desires, it is unfortunately not always the case. King David was an adulterer and murderer; King Solomon as an idol worshiper; Jonah fled from the Lord in disobedience; Saul, before becoming Paul, fiercely persecuted the Christians (perhaps sending many to their death); and Joseph Smith reportedly had a large number of wives before his martyrdom. Despite the flawed human nature of these prophets and servants of the Lord, they were allowed to accomplish great things as instruments in God's hands to build His kingdom on earth.

When studying the life of a prophet one must consider the scripture from Deuteronomy 18:22 which reads: "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him." One can still be a prophet and misinterpret the inspiration of the Lord. None of us are in a position to judge past or present prophets or servants of the Lord; instead, we should lean upon the words of Jesus Christ who said "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20).

Following the Prophet Today

While many people on earth today revere and covenant to follow the prophets of the Old and New Testament, it is even more important that the people of the earth today follow the words of the living prophet. The apostle Peter declared: "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed (Acts 3:25). As the children of the prophets, the seed of Abraham, we are called to live in Christ and to follow his prophets. By following the living prophets on the earth today we can avoid the snares of the modern world and enjoy the blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Ask yourself: would the Lord have a reason to keep prophets from the earth after the apostles passed on? There is no reason to deny, and in fact every reason to

affirm, that prophets exist in our own time. Why would the Lord cease to provide us prophets to declare his word? The scriptures cannot take the place of the living oracles of God, otherwise God would cease to be the "great I am," and would instead become the "great I was."

The real test is to listen to the prophets and decide through the Holy Ghost. Listen to talks given by modern day prophets and read what they have written. You must experience for yourself the power and presence of the Holy Ghost testifying of the prophetic nature of those whom you are listening to.

Imagine listening to prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, Alma, Nephi and Paul—but in our modern day! There are prophets on the earth today, just as in the times of old. God would never leave his children without such living counsel during their time in mortality.

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