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# INTRODUCTION

IN A REMARKABLE REVELATION GIVEN to the Prophet Joseph Smith in November 1831, the Lord said, “What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and 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; emphasis added). Later, the Lord added, “For he that receiveth my servants receiveth me” (D&C 84:36). Since the earliest days of the Restoration, the Latter-day Saints have come to appreciate how the Lord communicates to his people through those sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators.

One of the chief missions of a prophet is to teach truth. “A prophet is a teacher,” observed Elder John A. Widtsoe. “That is the essential meaning of the word. He teaches the body of truth, the gospel, revealed by the Lord to man; and under inspiration explains it to the understanding of the people. He is an expounder of truth.”<sup>1</sup>

While Moses rightly wished, “Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!” (Numbers 11:29), the mantle to authoritatively expound the gospel message nevertheless rests on fifteen chosen men—the prophets, seers, and revelators of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Appointed by revelation, they fulfill a unique charge on the earth. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. described their responsibility. “It should be in mind,” President Clark declared,

that some of the General Authorities 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. Others of the General Authorities are not given this special spiritual endowment and authority covering their teaching; they have a resulting limitation, and the resulting limitation upon their power and authority in teaching applies to every other officer and member of the Church, for none of them is spiritually endowed as a prophet, seer, and revelator.<sup>2</sup>

Seasoned by time and coupled with an endowment of spiritual light, the prophets, seers, and revelators of our time offer messages with special meaning for all who seek gospel insight. “Perhaps young men do speak of the future because they have no past, and old men of the past because they have no future,” quipped President Boyd K. Packer. “However,” he continued, “there are 15 old men whose very lives are focused on the future. They are called, sustained, and ordained as prophets, seers, and revelators. It is their right to see as seers see; it is their obligation to counsel and to warn.”<sup>3</sup> Fulfilling their divine mandate, the prophets in this dispensation have authored a large collection of essays, articles, and addresses expounding God’s truths to his children. In particular, they have addressed issues related to gospel teaching, learning, and scripture.

Established in 1975, the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University has regularly published landmark scholarship on Latter-day Saint scripture, doctrine, history, and culture. Among this collection are more than seventy significant essays by General Authorities addressing a wide range of topics. This book contains selections from that collection authored by prophets, seers, and revelators and published by the Religious Studies Center over the past thirty-five years. The articles come from the center’s journal, the *Religious Educator*, from addresses

to religious educators, and from conference proceedings and publications at Brigham Young University.

### TEACHING

Among these pieces are insightful ways to improve gospel teaching. President Thomas S. Monson begins the collection, offering counsel for effective communication. Modeling how “we let the Lord be our guide in developing communication skills,” President Monson stresses that improved “communication . . . accompanied by spirituality” allows the Lord to “work through His servants to accomplish His purposes.”<sup>4</sup> President Henry B. Eyring further challenges teachers to raise their sights about gospel teaching and find ways that the pure gospel of Jesus Christ can “go down into the hearts of students by the power of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>5</sup> Looking outward, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf discusses a doctrinal basis for global interaction, offering ways the Church can teach and lead in a cross-cultural world. Offering practical advice on how to more effectively teach, Elder Richard G. Scott stresses teaching by the Spirit, emphasizing the reality of personal communication with God, kindling a love of the scriptures, and encouraging students to “come unto Christ” as four fundamentals for gospel teaching. President Gordon B. Hinckley likewise offers four imperatives for success in religious education, charging teachers to continue learning, maintain balance, lead with love, and find joy in their journeys. Finally, Elder Bruce R. McConkie emphasizes the significance of gospel teaching in the Lord’s plan, offering a divine commission for how it is to be done.

### LEARNING

Prophetic commentaries on gospel scholarship regularly highlight the dual responsibility of both the teacher and the learner in inspired learning. In this volume, President Boyd K. Packer reminds readers that the home should be the main source for gospel learning. “This shield of faith is handmade in a cottage industry. What is most worth doing ideally is done at home,” he writes. “It can be polished in the classroom, but it is fabricated and fitted in the home, handcrafted to each individual.”<sup>6</sup> Elder Dallin H. Oaks expands the understanding of personal revelation

in the process of learning, outlining purposes of divine communication and principles governing its use. Elder Robert D. Hales continues the theme, describing how, through committed study and faith, gospel learning can become a lifelong endeavor. Taking an example from the Book of Mormon, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland offers an astute analysis of the brother of Jared's rending the veil of unbelief and how it models our own process of learning by faith. Elder David A. Bednar further develops the student's role in gospel learning. Elder Bednar observes, "I suspect we emphasize and know more about a teacher teaching by the Spirit than we do about a learner learning by faith."<sup>7</sup>

### SCRIPTURE

While numerous prophetic talks emphasize teaching and learning, others provide insightful analysis of scripture itself. Assisting students of the Old Testament, Elder Russell M. Nelson scans the breadth of the ancient witness of Christ, establishing "strong and significant links between ancient and modern Israel."<sup>8</sup> Turning to modern revelation, Elder D. Todd Christofferson elaborates on the sacramental covenant, highlighting the responsibility to "always remember [Christ]" in all we do. President James E. Faust focuses his attention on the New Testament, emphasizing ways this biblical witness of the life and ministry of the Master informs our understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Finally, Elder Neal A. Maxwell further explores the depths of the great latter-day witness for Christ, analyzing how the Book of Mormon answers "the great question . . . , is there really a redeeming Christ?"<sup>9</sup>

These messages highlight ways modern prophets have disseminated the gospel. The Lord and his servants emphasize that obedience to their messages opens the gates to heaven's choicest blessings as one treats the voice of his servants as if from the Lord himself (see D&C 1:38; 21:6). "Where else can you go for guidance?" asked President Harold B. Lee. "Where is there safety in the world today? Safety can't be won by tanks and guns and the airplanes and atomic bombs. There is only one place of safety and that is within the realm of the power of Almighty God that he gives to those who keep his commandments and listen to his voice, as he speaks through the channels that he has ordained for that

purpose.”<sup>10</sup> Following the teaching and message of prophets provides a spiritual anchor for Saints today. “The authorities which the Lord has placed in his Church constitute for the people of the Church a harbor, a place of refuge, a hitching post, as it were,” promised President Spencer W. Kimball. “No one in this Church will ever go far astray who ties himself securely to the Church authorities whom the Lord has placed in his Church. This Church will never go astray; the Quorum of the Twelve will never lead you into bypaths; it never has and never will. . . . The Lord has chosen them; he has given them specific responsibilities. And those people who stand close to them will be safe.”<sup>11</sup>

While some of these addresses were originally delivered to specific audiences, like scripture, the voice of the Lord’s servants applies to all mankind. It is hoped that this volume will help facilitate greater access to their timely and timeless messages. We invite our readers to “come, listen to a prophet’s voice, and hear the word of God.”<sup>12</sup>

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## NOTES

1. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 257.
2. J. Reuben Clark Jr., “When are the Writings or Sermons of Church Leaders Entitled to the Claim of Scripture?” address to seminary and institute personnel (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, July 7, 1954).
3. Boyd K. Packer, “The Snow-White Birds,” *BYU Speeches*, August 29, 1995.
4. Thomas S. Monson, “How to Communicate Effectively,” *Religious Educator* 11, no. 3 (2010): 5–6.
5. Henry B. Eyring, “We Must Raise Our Sights,” *Religious Educator* 2, no. 2 (2001), 3.
6. Boyd K. Packer, “The One Pure Defense,” *Religious Educator* 5, no. 2 (2004), 8.
7. David A. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith,” *Religious Educator* 7, no. 3 (2006), 1.
8. Russell M. Nelson, “Remnants Gathered, Covenants Fulfilled,” in *Voices of Old Testament Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 3.
9. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Book of Mormon: A Great Answer to ‘The Great Question,’” in *First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman

- and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 1.
10. Harold B. Lee, "Closing Remarks," *Ensign*, January 1974, 125.
  11. Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, April 1951, 104.
  12. Joseph S. Murdock, "Come, Listen to a Prophet's Voice," *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 21.