

Mosiah 8:12-17*Seer*

1

In ancient usage, "seer" is an alternative term for prophet (1 Sam. 9:9). A seer is a person endowed by God with a special gift for seeing spiritually. In the modern Church, members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles serve as seers. These fifteen apostolic officials are designated prophets, seers, and revelators who direct the Church by means of divine revelation, with the President of the Church being the only one in whom the keys are fully active at any one time. Though all three titles describe revelatory capacity, the terms are not fully synonymous. A "prophet" is one who speaks for God; the office of "seer" extends that divine Endowment to a capacity for envisioning future and past. The Book of Mormon teaches that a "seer is greater than a prophet," because a seer is "a revelator and a prophet also"; seers are unique among prophets in that they "can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed" (Mosiah 8:15-17).

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Prophet Joseph Smith refers to the spiritual process of seership. He describes "being in the Spirit" along with Sidney Rigdon, and "by the power of the Spirit our eyes were opened and our understandings were enlightened, so as to see and understand the things of God" (76:11-12; cf. JS-H 1:74).

The office of seer is often associated with the use of revelatory instruments, particularly the Urim and Thummim, sometimes called seer stones. The Book of Mormon suggests that "whosoever has these things is called seer, after the manner of old times" (Mosiah 28:16).

Visionary prophets of the Bible, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, and John the Revelator, clearly functioned as seers. In the Book of Mormon, Lehi refers to Joseph of Egypt as a seer who foresaw that in modern times God would raise up from among his descendants yet another "choice seer" (2 Ne. 3:6). The ancient calling of seer remains active through modern times. A seer is "one who sees with spiritual eyes. He perceives the meaning of that which seems obscure to others.... In short, he is one who sees, who walks in the Lord's light with open eyes" (Widtsoe, p. 205).

Encyclopedia of Mormonism, 1-4 vols., edited by Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1292

2

From among the Lord's prophets and revelators certain highly spiritual ones have been chosen to act as seers, and as such, as occasion has required, they have had the right to use the Urim and Thummim. A seer is a prophet selected and appointed to possess and use these holy interpreters. (Mosiah 8:13; 28:16.) Joseph Smith, the great seer of latter-days (2 Ne. 3:6-11; D&C 21:1; 124:125; 127:12; 135:3), for instance, translated the Book of Mormon and received many revelations by means of the Urim and Thummim.

"A seer is greater than a prophet. A seer is a revelator and a prophet also; and a gift which is greater can no man have, except he should possess the power of God, which no man can; yet a man may have great power given him from God. But a seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known. Thus God has provided a means that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles; therefore he becometh a great benefit to his fellow beings." (Mosiah 8:15-18.)

The President of the Church holds the office of seership. (D&C 107:92; 124:94, 125.) Indeed, the apostolic office itself is one of seership, and the members of the Council of the Twelve, together with the Presidency and Patriarch to the Church, are chosen and sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators to the Church.

If there are seers among a people, that people is the Lord's. Where there are no seers, apostasy prevails. (Isa. 29:10; 2 Ne. 27:5.)

Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966], 700

3

The word *prophet* as found in the Old Testament comes from the Hebrew *nabi*, the verbal root of which means to "bubble" or "spring forth." Used in the form of a noun, it means one in whom the message of God springs forth or one to whom anything is secretly communicated. *Nabi* is generally defined as a "speaker" or "spokesman" for God,

and carries the idea of "one who is called." A prophet, then, is one commissioned by God to make known his will. The spirit of prophecy is the spirit by which the knowledge of God must be communicated and is not confined to the foretelling of future events (see Moses 6:13, 23; Moses 8:16). Similarly, among the Book of Mormon peoples a prophet was understood to be a man "chosen of God" (Helaman 9:16) to speak his words (Alma 5:11), and to whom God had given great power and authority (Helaman 11:8) to act in his name (Alma 19:4).

In the earliest of Old Testament times a prophet was called a seer, from the Hebrew *ro'eh*, meaning "one who sees" (see 1 Samuel 9:9). Contextually this carried the idea of seeing that which was hidden to others. The Hebrew *hozen*, meaning "one who sees a vision," has also been translated as seer. In addition, *hozen* carries the meaning "to tell, to declare, or make known."

It is generally supposed that a prophet is one who prophesies, meaning one who foretells the future. In fact, one can be a prophet without doing so. The role of a prophet is to proclaim the word of God by the authority of the Holy Ghost (see 1 Nephi 10:22). More specifically, a prophet is one who has and declares the testimony of Jesus (see Revelation 19:10). A prophet's primary role is to be a *forthteller* rather than a *foreteller*. To call a man a prophet is to emphasize his role in declaring the word of God, whereas to call him a seer is to emphasize the manner in which that word was received. Thus it is properly said that a seer is greater than a prophet, because all seers are prophets but not all prophets are seers.

Among the special spiritual gifts granted the seer is the ability to restore, interpret, and understand the past. In so doing the seer may by the use of various interpreters translate ancient records that have been written in languages that now are otherwise indecipherable. This is what Mosiah did in translating the records of the Jaredites and what Joseph Smith did in translating the Book of Mormon.

Ammon's comments relative to a seer as translator, couched in a conversation about ancient records, were not intended to be a complete description of the seer's role. Enoch "beheld the spirits that God had created; and he beheld also *things which were not visible to the natural eye*; and from thenceforth came the saying abroad in the land: A seer hath the Lord raised up unto his people" (Moses 6:36; italics added). A seer is a visionary in the highest sense, one who can "see afar off" (Moses 6:27). "A seer," wrote Elder John A. Widtsoe, "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. He foresees the future from the past and the present. This he does by the power of the Lord operating through him directly, or indirectly with the aid of divine instruments such as the Urim and Thummim. In short, he is one who sees, who walks in the Lord's light with open eyes." (*Evidences and Reconciliations*, p. 258.) Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987-1992], 2: 191

Prophet, Seer, and Revelator

4

"Prophet, seer, and revelator" is the threefold title applied to all who have received the fulness of the keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood associated with the apostleship. Ordinarily, those to whom this title applies are members of the First Presidency or the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. All members of these two governing bodies are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators by the Latter-day Saints in a public congregational vote (see Common Consent).

Though there are technical distinctions between the functions of a prophet, a seer, and a revelator (cf. Mosiah 8:12-18), this threefold term is applied in its entirety to describe all these leaders. It was applied to Hyrum Smith when he was made Assistant President of the Church and Patriarch to the Church, and to Joseph Smith in his role as President of the Church (D&C 124:94). Also, at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in 1836, Joseph Smith invited the members of the Church to acknowledge the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators (*TPJS*, p. 109). *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1-4 vols., edited by Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1170

5 One can trust a seer because a seer may see the heavens open. He may see the great vision of God working in all his majesty. He may see the fullness of truth as it is revealed to him by God who makes no mistakes....The seer can bear personal testimony, not based on books, not based on scholarship, not based on tradition, but based on the evidence of things that God himself can reveal to him in an actual experience with Deity. He may receive a revelation from God by actually seeing and hearing and being instructed in the real truth.

A seer then is one who may see God, who may talk with God, who may receive personal instruction from God. Our prophet is a seer and a revelator....I was taught this doctrine by Elder Marion G. Romney, who told me that the Lord will never let his prophet, the seer, lead his people astray....

How grateful, my brothers and sisters, we should be that God in the fullness of his grace has given us a living prophet to guide us to Him; even more that God has given us a seer, for this seer and prophet reveals personal testimony to young and old alike that Jesus is in very deed the risen Savior, the Living God....

Of this I bear sacred testimony, for under conditions too sacred to mention here God has given me witness three times in the temples that David O. McKay is truly and indeed a prophet of God, a seer, and I bear you this testimony. Theodore M. Burton, in *Conference Report*, Sept/Oct 1961 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1961], 121-122

Mosiah 8:17

6 *Things which are not known shall be made known*

Why does the prophet say to young people, "Don't date until you're sixteen"? What does he "see" that we may not? I heard of a mother who said, "If my daughter is not going steady by the time she's fourteen—how will she ever get a date for the school dances?" I could just weep, because I know a bishop is very likely to see that girl down the road, as she comes to him to confess serious transgressions. If she's going steady at fourteen, there will usually be problems later. Why? Because youth are not yet mature enough to understand the powers of sexual attraction and how easily young couples can get into moral trouble. But the prophet understands. The prophet can see things that other people cannot see, and he has counseled the youth not to date until the age of sixteen....A prophet and seer can foresee how to help our youth avoid moral tragedy.

Selected Writings of Gerald N. Lund [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999], 106

Mosiah 8:20

7 *She*

The antecedent of *she* in this sentence is wisdom. Joseph Smith's translation of this verse as "she should rule" rather than "it should rule" is in harmony with the Semitic world view. In Hebrew and other languages of the ancient Near East *wisdom* is a feminine noun.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary*, 2:192, emphasis in original