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Brent D. Fillmore

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“With the Assistance of the Holy Prophets”

Brent D. Fillmore

Brent D. Fillmore is an instructional designer in the CES Training Division at the Church Office Building.

Modern prophets have encouraged religious educators to do more to ensure that truth is locked into the hearts of the youth of the Church. When the truth goes down deeply into their hearts, they will then live the gospel and become fully converted. For this conversion process to take place, youth must be taught in such a way that they feel motivated to allow the Holy Ghost to make a mighty change within them. Knowing the gospel in their heads is insufficient—it must go down into their hearts by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Throughout the Book of Mormon, we read of many holy men who taught the word of God in just that way. The truth they taught pierced and penetrated those who heard and hearkened in such a way that caused real change. One of the reasons these teachers were so effective is that they taught using the scriptures *and* the teachings of their living prophets. Elder Neal A. Maxwell spoke of additional power that flows through teachers who use the scriptures *together* with the words of prophets: “Holy scripture *and* the words of living prophets occupy a privileged position; they are *the key to teaching by the Spirit.*”¹

This is an oft-repeated theme in the Book of Mormon. We read again and again of a conversion process that began as people heard and then hearkened to the words of God spoken by prophets and other holy men. We read of how these teachers taught using both the scriptures and the teachings of the living prophets. We read of how these people were changed by the Holy Ghost and how they were blessed by the Lord.

The purpose of this article is to look at some of these accounts and then suggest some ways that religious educators can more effectively incorporate the teachings of the living prophets into their teaching.

King Benjamin and His Priests

Mormon notes that King Benjamin, “*with the assistance of the holy prophets* who were among his people,” set out to establish peace in the land. “For behold, king Benjamin was a holy man, and he did reign over his people in righteousness; and there were many holy men in the land and they did speak the word of God with power and with authority. . . . Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and *also the prophets*, did once more establish peace in the land” (Words of Mormon 1:16–18; emphasis added).

Many people came to hear King Benjamin’s final discourse. The impact on those who heard and hearkened to the words of this holy man was profound. They believed, knew, had a mighty change wrought in them, and had no more disposition to do evil but to do good continually. They had great views, had great faith, rejoiced with great joy, and were willing to enter into a covenant to do God’s will to be obedient “all the remainder of our days” (see Mosiah 5:2–5).

King Benjamin gave the people a name to retain written always in their hearts. And then he “appointed priests to teach the people” (Mosiah 6:3). After Benjamin had spoken, “he caused that the words which he spake should be written and sent forth among those that were not under the sound of his voice, that they might also receive his words” (Mosiah 2:8). These written words were undoubtedly used by the priests so the people “might hear and know the commandments of God, and [be stirred] up in remembrance of the oath which they had made” (Mosiah 6:3).

Alma

The prophet Abinadi came forth among the people of Noah and began to preach. He was imprisoned, tried unjustly, and killed. Alma heard and hearkened to the words of this prophet. He “repented of his sins . . . and went about privately among the people, and began to *teach the words of Abinadi*” (Mosiah 18:1; emphasis added). A total of 204 other souls heard and hearkened to Alma, were baptized, and “were called the church of God” (Mosiah 18:17).

Then, Alma “ordained priests; even one priest to every fifty of their number did he ordain to preach unto them, and to teach them concerning the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And he commanded them that *they should teach nothing save it were the things which he had taught, and which had been spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets*” (Mosiah 18:18–19; emphasis added).

Look at the wonderful blessings poured out upon the people as they heard and hearkened to these priests who taught the words of Alma and Abinadi. In the churches that were established, “every priest preach[ed] the word according *as it was delivered to him by the mouth of Alma*. . . . Whosoever were desirous to take upon them the name of Christ, or of God, they did join the churches of God; and they were called the people of God. And the Lord did pour out his Spirit upon them, and they were blessed, and prospered in the land” (Mosiah 25:21, 23–24; emphasis added).

In response to Alma’s prayer in Mosiah 26, the Lord complimented him for teaching the words of the prophet Abinadi: “Blessed art thou, Alma, and blessed are they who were baptized in the waters of Mormon. Thou art *blessed because of thy exceeding faith in the words alone of my servant Abinadi*. And *blessed are [thy people] because of their exceeding faith in the words alone which thou hast spoken unto them*” (Mosiah 26:15–16; emphasis added).

Alma chose to teach the words of Abinadi. These words were also taught by the priests who served with him. By so doing, Alma strengthened his own teaching and the teaching of his priests. Such powerful teaching had a dramatic impact on those they taught.

Later, in Alma the Younger’s discourse to the people in Zarahemla (Alma 5), he referred to his father’s experience with Abinadi. Note the results that he reported about those who heard and hearkened:

Behold, I can tell you—did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi? And was he not a holy prophet? Did he not speak the words of God, and my father Alma believe them?

And according to his faith there was a *mighty change wrought in his heart*. Behold I say unto you that this is all true.

And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a *mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God*. And behold, *they were faithful until the end*; therefore *they were saved*. (Alma 5:11–13; emphasis added)

The Sons of Mosiah

The experiences of Ammon with Lamoni demonstrate the same theme. Ammon taught Lamoni and “rehearsed and laid before him the records and the holy scriptures of the people, which had been *spoken by the prophets*” (Alma 18:36; emphasis added).

Through the teaching of Ammon, Lamoni and his wife were converted unto the Lord. When they were raised from the ground and stood upon their feet, Lamoni began to teach his people. What did he teach them? Lamoni, “seeing the contention among his people, went forth and began to rebuke them, and to *teach them the words which he had heard from the mouth of Ammon.*” And the result?

“And as many as heard his words believed, and *were converted unto the Lord.* . . . And they did all declare unto the people the selfsame thing—that their *hearts had been changed*; that they had *no more desire to do evil.* . . . And they *became a righteous people*, and they did *establish a church* among them. And thus the work of the Lord did commence among the Lamanites; thus the *Lord did begin to pour out his Spirit upon them*” (Alma 19:31, 33, 35–36; emphasis added).

Notice how Mormon defined the success of Mosiah’s sons: “And thousands were brought to the knowledge of the Lord, . . . and they were taught the records and prophecies which were handed down even to the present time. And . . . as many as were brought to the knowledge of the truth, through the preaching of Ammon and his brethren . . . *were converted unto the Lord*, [and] *never did fall away.* For they *became a righteous people*; they did lay down the weapons of their rebellion, that they did not fight against God any more, neither against any of their brethren” (Alma 23:5–7; emphasis added).

These people had been taught the “records” *and* the “prophecies which were handed down even to the present time.” That mixture of teaching that included records *and* prophecies was a key piece of their teachings. Because the Spirit of the Lord carries truths taught from the scriptures and the prophets to the hearts of the children of men (see 2 Nephi 33:1), this teaching fostered deep conversion.

Samuel the Lamanite

In the account of Samuel the Lamanite, Mormon included what Samuel spoke about the people of Ammon. As Samuel taught, he listed some of the results of their choices to hear and hearken. Note how closely the words here both mirror and expand upon the words in Alma 23:

And I would that ye should behold that the more part of them are in the path of their duty, and they do walk circumspectly before God, and they do observe to keep his commandments. . . .

They are striving with unwearied diligence that they may bring the remainder of their brethren to the knowledge of the truth; therefore there are many who do add to their numbers daily.

And behold, . . . as many of them as are brought to the knowledge of the truth, and to know of the wicked and abominable traditions of their fathers, and are *led to believe the holy scriptures, yea, the prophecies of the holy prophets*, which are written, which leadeth them to faith on the Lord, and unto repentance, which faith and repentance bringeth a change of heart unto them—

Therefore, as many as have come to this . . . are firm and steadfast in the faith. . . .

They fear to sin. . . .

And now, because of their steadfastness [and] their firmness when they are once enlightened, behold, the Lord shall bless them. (Helaman 15:5–10; emphasis added)

Jesus Christ

Sorrowing at the plight of his people who would be killed if Samuel’s signs were not seen, the prophet Nephi called on the Lord and was told to be of good cheer. Then, among all the things that He could have said to him, the Lord chose to tell Nephi that the reason He was coming to the world was “to show . . . that *I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets*” (3 Nephi 1:13; emphasis added).

Mormon described the people of the Nephites. There was not one among them who “did *doubt in the least the words of all the holy prophets* who had spoken. . . . And they knew that it must be expedient that Christ had come, because of the many signs which had been given, *according to the words of the prophets*” (3 Nephi 5:1–2; emphasis added). Because of this, they forsook their sins and served God with all diligence (see v. 3).

These people listened to the teachings of Nephi and “began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel” (3 Nephi 8:3). They hearkened to the words of their living prophets. At the death of Jesus, great destruction occurred for three days, and many perished. Mormon emphasized who was spared and why: “And it was the more righteous part of the people who were saved, and it was *they who received the prophets* and stoned them not. . . . And now, whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scrip-

tures, let him search them, and see and behold if . . . all these things are not *unto the fulfilling of the prophecies of many of the holy prophets*" (3 Nephi 10:12, 14; emphasis added).

After being introduced by the Father, Jesus descended from heaven. The first thing Mormon tells us that Jesus said to the people in the New World was, "Behold, I am Jesus Christ, *whom the prophets testified* shall come into the world" (3 Nephi 11:10; emphasis added). Before mentioning that He was the light of the world, before telling them that He had taken upon Himself the sins of the world, and before inviting the people to come forth and thrust their hands into His side and feel the prints of the nails in His hands and feet, He identified Himself as He of whom the prophets had testified! The Savior values the words of His prophets!

The first verse of the next chapter helps us to understand a bit more of how Jesus feels about His prophets: "(Now the number of them who had been called, and received power and authority to baptize, was twelve) and behold, he stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them, saying: Blessed are ye if ye shall *give heed unto the words of these twelve* whom I have chosen" (3 Nephi 12:1; emphasis added).

Near the end of the book of 3 Nephi, Mormon admonished his readers again to hear and hearken to God's prophets: "And wo be unto him that will not hearken unto the words of Jesus, and *also to them whom he hath chosen* and sent among them; for whoso receiveth not the words of Jesus and the words of those whom he hath sent *receiveth not him*; and therefore *he will not receive them* at the last day" (3 Nephi 28:34; emphasis added).

Perhaps it is for this reason that Moroni so emphatically commended us "to seek this Jesus of whom the *prophets and apostles* have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever" (Ether 12:41; emphasis added).

Therefore What?

An extra measure of spiritual power is given to teachers who teach the scriptures together with the words of modern prophets. This theme is visited again and again throughout the Book of Mormon. People who learned from holy men and prophets who taught the scriptures together with the words of the living prophets were deeply converted. What more can modern religious educators do to put this pattern into action? How might we more effectively utilize the words of modern prophets to supplement and complement the teachings of the scriptures?

Incorporating the Words of Prophets

As modern gospel teachers, we should listen very intently to the words of the prophets and holy men in our day—probably much more intently than we often tend to do. We could study more carefully and prayerfully their words. We could give additional attention to those words that have been spoken directly to CES. We could more frequently, effectively, and systematically study and discuss their teachings with our colleagues. We could ask and attempt to answer, "How do these modern teachings apply in my particular assignment?" We could choose to hear and hearken more fully to their words in our own lives and in our teaching.

We could do more than just quote the Brethren. We could do more than simply copying a statement onto the board or onto a hand-out to substantiate or emphasize a particular doctrinal or historical point. Speaking about the scriptures, Elder Maxwell said, "Only by searching the scriptures, not using them occasionally as quote books, can we begin to understand the implications as well as the declarations of the gospel."² The same principle applies to the words of the prophets. What is being suggested here is that gospel teachers see, understand, and apply to their own teaching the "implications as well as the declarations" of what the prophets teach.

President James E. Faust taught that we should give priority to the words of living prophets: "Since revelations continue to come to this divine institution all of the time, I . . . suggest that *some priority should be given to the declarations of the modern prophets* as against those received many, many centuries ago and that were intended for a different people at a different time. For instance, I feel that the counsel of our current prophet should receive far greater attention than the pronouncements of Ezekiel."³

We could ask the Lord to help us as we listen to and study these modern teachings. We could plead with Him to bless us with additional insight into the scriptures because we have invested ourselves in the words of His modern servants. We could more carefully prepare lessons that purposefully point our students to the living prophets, seers, and revelators. As we pray for our students and also pray about what and how we will teach, we could remember this statement from Elder Henry B. Eyring:

"If I'd like to have a student be able to withstand persecution, I need to *tune his ears to the words of living prophets*. . . . Now I bear you my testimony that your young people can be deeply affected by the way

you tell them what prophets are like. If, when you read the words of prophets, and if, when you describe your experiences with the words of prophets, you tell them the joy you felt and the joy you feel from knowing that God speaks to you by living prophets, I bear you my testimony that you *will be building power in them to resist temptation and to resist persecution.*”⁴

We could encourage students to develop a respect for, a love for, and a devotion to the words of our living prophets by providing them with opportunities to use the teachings of the prophets as they explain, share, and testify to one other. We could encourage each student to have his or her own copy of the conference edition of the *Ensign* or *Liabona*. In addition to urging our students to develop a daily habit of scripture study, we could encourage them to develop a habit of studying the words of the living prophets. As they develop such habits, we could encourage them to pray for help in seeing the connections between the scriptures and modern prophetic teaching. We could encourage them to cross-reference and mark the addresses of the prophets of our day. We could encourage them to copy the words of the Brethren into their scriptures.

We could have copies of the most recent conference edition of the Church magazines for frequent use in our classes. We could teach our students to use the Topical Index in the conference editions and then give them opportunity to do so. In addition to having students share thoughts, scriptures, and testimony in devotionals, we could invite them to include a recent quote from general conference. We could encourage students to bear their testimonies of gospel truths they have studied from the words of the prophets. We could encourage them to become as familiar with the words of the modern prophets as they are becoming with the scriptures. What might happen in the lives of our students if they read and marked and used the conference editions like they read, mark, and use their scriptures?

President Harold B. Lee said, “If you want to know what the Lord would have the Saints know and to have his guidance and direction for the next six months, get a copy of the proceedings of this conference, and you will have the latest word of the Lord as far as the Saints are concerned.”⁵

President Ezra Taft Benson encouraged us to study more thoroughly and to use the words of the prophets from the most recent general conference: “For the next six months, your conference edition of the *Ensign* should stand next to your standard works and be referred to frequently. As my dear friend and brother Harold B. Lee said, we

should let these conference addresses 'be the guide to [our] walk and talk during the next six months. These are the important matters the Lord sees fit to reveal to this people in this day.'"⁶

President Benson taught about the most important prophet: "God's revelation to Adam did not instruct Noah how to build the Ark. Noah needed his own revelation. Therefore the *most important prophet so far as you and I are concerned is the one living in our day and age* to whom the Lord is currently revealing His will for us. Therefore the *most important reading we can do is any of the words of the prophet contained each month in our Church Magazines*. Our instructions about what we should do for each six months are found in the General Conference addresses which are printed in the Church magazine."⁷

Relative to the teachings in general conference, President Howard W. Hunter taught that "our modern prophets have encouraged us to make the reading of the conference editions of our Church magazines an important and regular part of our personal study. Thus general conference becomes, in a sense, a supplement to or an extension of the Doctrine and Covenants."⁸

As teachers, we could learn how to utilize fully the resources available at www.lds.org. We could teach our students how to use this and other resources the Lord has blessed us with. Three of these are mentioned here. First is <http://scriptures.byu.edu>. Currently, this index links from the scriptures to the general conference talks that cite those scriptures between 1942 and the present. Citations can be sorted by scripture, by speaker, or by date. Second is the "Find a Talk" section of www.byubroadcasting.org. "BYU Broadcasting's exclusive speeches database features complete information on all the talks, speeches, addresses, devotionals and other presentations broadcast on all BYU Broadcasting's channels. Results include links to the audio or video archives, transcript information, purchasing information, and future broadcast times (when available)."⁹ This database is searchable by speaker, title, event, keyword, and date. Most general conference addresses are also included. Students who learn how to use these and other resources will be empowered to use the words of prophets and holy men in their talks and lessons as they teach both in and out of our classes. Third, devotional addresses given at the various campuses of BYU and LDS Business College are catalogued for our use (www.byu.edu, www.byui.edu, www.byuh.edu, and www.ldsbc.edu. CES firesides are also available at www.ldsces.org/cesfiresides.asp

When we issue challenges to our students, we could challenge them to live up to the words of the prophets. We could promise them

the same blessings that came to the people in the Book of Mormon who heard and hearkened to those words.

Conclusion

What a privilege we enjoy of living in a day when the words of holy men are so readily available to teachers and to students! Elder Bruce R. McConkie commented on the thrill we should feel to have living prophets: “We cannot explain the wonder and the marvel of living in a day when God has sent a revealer to speak His word to the whole world, and when He sent supplemental prophets to echo the message and proclaim the truth and get as much into the hearts of men as they are able to receive.”¹⁰

Mormon included in his abridgment of the Book of Mormon story after story after story of people whose teachers and leaders used the scriptures *and* the words of prophets in their teaching. They chronicled how the lives of these people changed, how they were converted unto the Lord, and how they came unto Christ and thus had peace established. As these people “were taught the *records and the prophecies which were handed down even to the present time*, . . . [they] were brought to the knowledge of the truth . . . and were converted unto the Lord [and] never did fall away. For they became a righteous people” (Alma 23:5–7; emphasis added). Further, “They were perfectly honest and upright in all things; and they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end” (Alma 27:27).

Early in this dispensation, the Lord admonished the elders in Kirtland: “And let them journey from thence preaching the word by the way, saying none other things than that which the prophets and apostles have written, and that which is taught them by the Comforter through the prayer of faith. . . . Let them labor with their families, declaring none other things than the prophets and apostles, that which they have seen and heard and most assuredly believe, that the prophecies may be fulfilled” (D&C 52:9, 36).

Modern prophets have encouraged religious educators to do more, to do better, and to improve—all to the end that the youth of the Church become more deeply converted and come unto Christ. The results chronicled in the lives of people in the Book of Mormon give us motivation to improve. As religious educators become more effective in using the scriptures *together with* the words of the prophets, we will more fully tap into what Elder Maxwell called “the key to teaching by the Spirit.” We will then provide our students with an additional measure of power that will yield the blessings of deep conversion in their lives. **RE**

Notes

1. Neal A. Maxwell, "Teaching by the Spirit—The Language of Inspiration," CES Symposium on the Old Testament, August 13, 1991; emphasis added.

2. Neal A. Maxwell, "Called and Prepared from the Foundation of the World," *Ensign*, May 1986, 34.

3. James E. Faust, "The Doctrine and Covenants and Modern Revelation," in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. Craig K. Manscill (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2004), 2; emphasis added.

President Wilford Woodruff related a story that taught this same principle: "I will refer to a certain meeting I attended in the town of Kirtland in my early days. . . . Some remarks were made . . . with regard to the living oracles and with regard to the written word of God. . . . A leading man in the church . . . talked upon the subject, and said: 'You have got the word of God before you here in the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants; you have the written word of God, and you who give revelations should give revelations according to those books, as what is written in those books is the word of God. We should confine ourselves to them.' When he concluded, Brother Joseph turned to Brother Brigham Young and said, 'Brother Brigham I want you to go to the podium and tell us your views with regard to the living oracles and the written word of God.' Brother Brigham took the stand, and he took the Bible, and laid it down; he took the Book of Mormon, and laid it down; and he took the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and laid it down before him, and he said: 'There is the written word of God to us, concerning the work of God from the beginning of the world, almost, to our day. And now,' said he, 'when compared with the living oracles those books are nothing to me; those books do not convey the word of God direct to us now, as do the words of a Prophet or a man bearing the Holy Priesthood in our day and generation. I would rather have the living oracles than all the writing in the books.' That was the course he pursued. When he was through, Brother Joseph said to the congregation; 'Brother Brigham has told you the word of the Lord, and he has told you the truth'" (in Conference Report, October 1897, 22–23; emphasis added).

4. Henry B. Eyring, "Eyes to See, Ears to Hear," *Supplement, A Symposium on the New Testament* 1984, 11; emphasis added.

5. Harold B. Lee, "Closing Remarks," *Ensign*, January 1974, 128.

6. Ezra Taft Benson, "'Come unto Christ, and Be Perfected in Him,'" *Ensign*, May 1988, 84.

7. Ezra Taft Benson, "Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet," *Tambuli*, June 1981, 2–3; emphasis added.

8. Howard W. Hunter, "The Heavens Are Open" satellite broadcast, November 13, 1988, from *Come unto Me*, Church videocassette, (1988)

9. See <http://www.byubroadcasting.org/findatalk/>.

10. Bruce R. McConkie, "'This Generation Shall Have My Word through You,'" in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Doctrine and Covenants* (Provo and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2004), 46; emphasis added.