

Three Hebrew Words

Buck Hudson

Prophecy comprehends three things: prediction; singing by the dictate of the Spirit; and understanding and explaining the mysterious, hidden sense of Scripture by an immediate illumination and motion of the Spirit.

The Old Testament uses three Hebrew words that are translated into the English word “prophet” or “seer”: nabi, roeh, and hozeh.

The English word prophet comes from the Greek word προφήτης (profētés) meaning advocate.

Nabi is the first and the most generally used for a prophet.

The Hebrew word derives from a verb signifying “to bubble forth” like a fountain; hence the word means one who announces or pours forth the declarations of God. The English word comes from the Greek prophetes (profetes), which signifies, in classical Greek, one who speaks for another, especially one who speaks for a god, and so interprets his will to man; hence its essential meaning is “an interpreter”. **Nabi = “prophet”** (BDB 611), cognate of Akkadian verb nabu = “to call” and Arabic naba’a = “to announce.” This is the most common OT term to designate a prophet. It is used over 300 times. A prophet is someone who speaks for God to His people (cf. Amos 3:8; Jeremiah 1:7,17; Ezekiel 3:4). Nabi literally means “to bubble up.” It describes one who is stirred up in spirit. It is the most frequently used of the three by the Hebrew writers. When the sense of “bubbling up” is applied to speaking, it becomes “to declare.” Hence, a nabi, or a prophet, is an announcer—one who pours forth the declarations of God.

Ro’eh = “seer” In the time of Samuel another word, ro’eh, “seer,” began to be used. (1 Samuel 9:9). It occurs seven times in reference to Samuel. **Ro’eh** is from the general Hebrew term “to see.” This person understood God’s ways and plans and was consulted to ascertain God’s will in a matter. Roeh means “to see” or “to perceive.” It is generally used to describe one who is a revealer of secrets, one who envisions.

Hozeh = “seer” 2 Samuel 24:11; Amos 7:12. (Ezekiel, Zechariah) Afterwards another word, hozeh, “seer” (2 Samuel 24:11), was employed. In 1 Chronicles 29:29 all three words are used: “Samuel the seer (ro’eh), Nathan the prophet (nabi), Gad the seer” (hozeh). In Joshua 13:22 Balaam is called (Hebrew) a kosem “diviner,” a word used only of a false prophet.

It is from a rarer Hebrew term “to see in a vision.” It also means “to see” or “to perceive,” but is also used in reference to musicians. It is used to describe a counselor or an advisor to a king. The Hebrew does not necessarily indicate that the person is a prophet, but rather an advisor—someone who has wisdom. It means “one who has insight.” The translators try to indicate whether the message is spiritual. If it is spiritual, then they tend to translate hozeh as “prophet.” If it does not give any indication of being spiritually generated, then they would render it “advisor” or “counselor

All three terms are used of the prophet’s office in 1 Chronicles 29:29; Samuel - Ro’eh; Nathan - Nabi’; and Gad - Hozeh.