

THE PROPHET LIKE MOSES

by Jim Sibley

One of the most significant messianic prophecies in Scripture is also one of the most neglected. I am speaking of Deuteronomy 18:15–19.

The Prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15–19

In the preceding verses, vv. 9–14, Moses had warned the people of Israel against “the detestable things” (הַתּוֹעֵבֹת, vv.9, 12) the Israelites would encounter when they engaged with the inhabitants of Canaan, and especially against the evil practices of spiritism and necromancy. Then, in contrast to these Satanic and unreliable sources of truth, Moses looks farther into the future and relays the Lord’s promise of an absolutely reliable source of truth, greater even than that which Moses himself could provide. Listen, as Moses addresses the nation on the plains of Moab with this remarkable prophecy:

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, “Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.” The Lord said to me, “They have spoken well. I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him.”¹

The Prophecy in Contemporary Scholarship

The question is: Of whom does Moses speak? Many contemporary biblical scholars have lost confidence in a messianic reading of the Hebrew Scriptures. For example, Mark J. Boda says, “For an Old Testament scholar to venture into a study of Messiah is a daring act indeed.”² So it comes as no surprise that no consensus exists among modern scholars regarding the correct interpretation of Deuteronomy 18:15–19. Their interpretations can be categorized as either (1) non-Messianic, (2) indirectly Messianic, or (3) directly Messianic.

Non-Messianic View

Daniel I. Block is one who denies that this passage is speaking of the Messiah. For him, to speak of Jesus as a prophet like Moses is to put Jesus and Moses on the same level and is

¹Unless otherwise stated, the translation is from the *New American Standard Version*.

²Mark J. Boda, “Figuring the Future: The Prophets and Messiah,” in *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 35.

therefore “demeaning.”³ Tremper Longman III concurs by saying, “It is impossible to establish that any passage in its original literary and historical context must or even should be understood as portending a future messianic figure.”⁴ Of course, this is also the position of Jewish anti-Christian polemicists.⁵

If not of the Messiah, then of whom *does* Moses speak? Those who hold to the non-Messianic position most often propose either Joshua, Elijah, or Jeremiah.⁶ Joshua was Moses’ successor, so it is understandable that some would assume Moses was speaking of him. However, following a comprehensive review of Joshua in the context of the Torah, Dr. Yoon-Hee Kim concludes:

In the significant prophetic succession narrative in Numbers, Joshua is by no means portrayed as the one who is “like Moses.” Rather a conscious effort is made to present him as the one who is “unlike Moses in many ways (e.g., his subordination to Moses, his dependence on the priestly guidance).”⁷

Not only so, but Joshua is never regarded or referred to as a prophet, and the most cogent evidence that Joshua was not to be considered the prophet like Moses comes from Deuteronomy 34:9–10, where Joshua is presented as Moses’ agent and successor, and this is followed by the statement that “no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.”

³Matt Smethurst, “Slow Down! A Different Perspective on Christ in the Old Testament,” *Bible & Theology*, The Gospel Coalition; (November 19, 2012) [blog on-line]; accessed 4 May 2016; available from <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/slow-down-a-different-perspective-on-christ-in-the-old-testament>; Internet. See also, Daniel I. Block, “My Servant David: Ancient Israel’s Vision of the Messiah,” in *Israel’s Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 26–27.

⁴Tremper Longman III, “The Messiah: Explorations in the Law and Writings,” in *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 13.

⁵See, for example, Samuel Levin, *You Take Jesus, I’ll Take God: How to Refute Christian Missionaries* (Los Angeles, CA: Hamoreh Press, 1980), 36–37. Sometimes it is objected that the word, Messiah, is not used at such an early date; however, while the word comes later, the concept of a Deliverer from the consequences of sin can be traced back to Genesis 3:15.

⁶Abarbanel proposes Jeremiah, and the prophecy is applied to Joshua by Aben Ezra and Bechai. David L. Cooper interacts specifically with their arguments. See David L. Cooper, *Messiah: His Nature and Person*, Messianic Series Number Two (Los Angeles, CA: Biblical Research Society, 1933), 154–55. Dale Allison discusses the parallels between Moses and Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, David, Elijah, Josiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Ezra, Baruch, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, and Hillel. See Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 23–73. Ezekiel’s identity as the prophet like Moses is argued by H. McKeating, “Ezekiel the ‘Prophet Like Moses’?” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament [JSOT]* 61 (1994): 97–109, and Risa Levitt Kohn, “A Prophet Like Moses? Rethinking Ezekiel’s Relationship to the Torah,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft [ZAW]* 114 (2002): 236–54.

⁷Yoon-Hee Kim, “‘The Prophet Like Moses’: Deut 18:15–22 Reexamined within the Context of the Pentateuch and in Light of the Final Shape of the TaNaK” (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1995), 206. For the full discussion, see pages 190–207.

Turning to Elijah, we find the parallels with Moses to be remarkable.⁸ But once again, as Dale Allison notes, “the numerous parallels with Moses accentuate the surprising weaknesses of Elijah, who, with God on his side, and in the wake of victory, only feels sorry for himself.”⁹

When we consider Jeremiah, we are struck immediately by the similarity between his call in Jeremiah 1 and the call of Moses in Exodus 3. This has given rise to many texts, both ancient and modern, that point out the similarities and some also argue that Jeremiah saw himself as the direct fulfillment of the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15–19. J. A. Thompson, like William Holladay before him, reaches this conclusion and says, “It is altogether likely that Jeremiah formed the conviction that he was himself the prophet like Moses.”¹⁰ But the similarities between him and Moses are clearly not as striking as those between Elijah and Moses, and the contrasts between Jeremiah and Moses remain: Moses’ ministry was one of deliverance, whereas the ministry of Jeremiah was characterized by proclamations of doom.¹¹ Even more significant is the fact that Moses was actually involved in the institution of the Covenant of Sinai, whereas Jeremiah only prophesied regarding the future inauguration of a “new covenant” (Jer 31:31–34).¹²

In the storyline of Torah, written by the hand of Moses, mankind’s greatest problem is sin, which is universal and which alienates humanity from God. This universal dilemma would be addressed in the call of Abram, and in the covenant promises made to him, his son Isaac, and grandson Jacob. With Moses, we are introduced to a man whose work towers over the remainder of the Hebrew Scriptures. God used him to provide deliverance for Israel from bondage in Egypt, but the greater need is deliverance from sin.

Through Moses, God worked mighty signs and miracles. Furthermore, Moses’ relationship to God was exceptionally close. This, in fact, is brought out clearly in Numbers 12:6–8, following the rebellion of Aaron and Miriam:

He [God] said, “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?”

⁸Allison summarizes the parallels, 40–42.

⁹Ibid., 45.

¹⁰William L. Holladay, “The Background of Jeremiah’s Self-Understanding: Moses, Samuel, and Psalm 22,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* [JBL] 83 (1964): 153–64; J. A. Thompson, *A Book of Jeremiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament [NICOT] (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 148. See also, Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: Prophet Like Moses* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015); Christopher Seitz, “The Prophet Moses and the Canonical Shape of Jeremiah,” *ZAW* 101 (1989): 3–27.

¹¹See Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* NAC Studies in Bible and Theology 9 (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2010), 56. See also, Alexander McCaul, *The Messiahship of Jesus: The Concluding Series of the Twelve Lectures on the Prophecies* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1852), 146.

¹²Allison notes other contrasts, as well. See, 60–61.

In this, God sets Moses apart from other prophets and accentuates the closeness of their communication. In this connection attention should be called to the “frame” of this passage. In verse 15, Moses says of the coming prophet, “you shall listen to him.” In verse 19, God says, “It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him.” Moses had been the mouthpiece, the voice, of God among men, but this coming prophet would have an even greater authority. So, it must be asked, “Is this prophecy directly messianic, or not?”

Indirectly Messianic View

Some understand the fulfillment of this prophecy to be indirectly messianic, that is to say, it is to be found in a succession of prophets, or in one specific prophet, although ultimately in the Messiah.¹³ This view requires two elements: 1) a hermeneutic of *sensus plenior*, or dual fulfillment, and 2) an understanding of the word “prophet” as a collective singular. The actual word for “prophet” in Deuteronomy 18:15–19 is in the singular form.

The question to be answered here is this: “Is the referent of Deuteronomy 18:15–19 only an individual, or not?” To answer this question, we must consider the context: first, of Deuteronomy 18, secondly, of the wider context of Deuteronomy 16–18, then of Torah, and finally of the Hebrew Scriptures, as a whole.¹⁴

Deuteronomy 18:9–22. This portion is divided into three sections: A prohibition against pagan practices of divination (vv. 9–14), the prophecy of a prophet “like” Moses (vv. 15–19); and a warning against false prophets (vv. 20–22). Those who understand the true prophet spoken of here to be a reference to all true prophets point out that the first portion, against pagan divination, seems to be in contrast with the next section, in which the wrong order or manner of revelation is contrasted with the right order or manner. In other words, you should not seek a witch, a sorcerer, a magician, or a medium, but instead, God will raise up prophets. Since the first is a category or an order of people, so also the “prophet” which follows should be understood as a prophetic order. This position is further bolstered by giving attention to the following section, which warns against false prophets—again, a category. Just as in verses 15 and 18 (true prophets), so in verses 20 and 22 (false prophets).¹⁵

In response to this position, it can be said that rather than to conclude that the contrast between verses 9–14 and the following section implies a contrast between two groups or classes of people, instead the contrast is between two sources of revelation: these false, pagan sources or the great end-times Prophet, who would be the ultimate and perfect revelation of God. With

¹³ Most recently, this position has been adopted by Glenn R. Kreider. See his, “Jesus the Messiah as Prophet, Priest, and King,” *BibSac* 176:702 (April-June 2019), 181.

¹⁴ See the excellent work by Kim, cited above.

¹⁵ See, for example, Carl F. Keil’s commentary (in Keil and Delitzsch, 933–36). For the opposing view, see Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession*, trans. Samuel Ives Curtiss (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1891), 60–65.

regard to the following section about false prophets, Rydelnik says that it is also perfectly consistent with an individual prophet. He writes:

This is seen in two ways. First, the particle *'ak* ["but"] in 18:20 is an adversative that is short of a full antithesis and can best be translated as *however*. . . . A close examination of the text demonstrates that what is being contrasted is that the prophet like Moses will speak in God's name, whereas false prophets will only presume to do so.¹⁶

Another argument against the use of "prophet" in a collective sense is that when a collective is intended, it is usual to use both singular and plural forms (e.g., a singular noun with plural pronouns or pronominal suffixes). The use of the singular noun, "prophet," with singular pronouns ("like *him*," v. 15; "*he* shall speak . . . all that I command *him*," v. 18, emphases added) demonstrates an intention to refer to a specific individual, the Prophet like Moses, and not as a collective, i.e., as an order of prophets.¹⁷

Deuteronomy 16–18. In the wider context, the argument is made that the offices of kings and that of priests and Levites, which are discussed in 16:18–17:20 and 18:1–8 respectively, support taking 18:15–19 as referring to the office of prophet. This argument does not seem to be especially compelling, however, because the comparison could just as easily be between these offices of king, judge, priest, and Levite, on one hand, and the messianic Prophet on the other.

Torah. Dr. Kim makes the crucially significant observation that most of the arguments by modern scholars are based solely on Deuteronomy 18:15–19, but the evidence most often can be argued from either side, as has been seen above. The same remains the case, even if the discussion involves Deuteronomy 16–18. Thus the matter is really only resolved by considering evidence from the entirety of Torah. Kim argues that "it is important to take the whole Pentateuch into consideration to see the compositional strategy the author lays out with literary units belonging to it and the theological viewpoint that the author reflects behind that literary strategy."¹⁸

A study of the concept of a prophet in Torah, for example, reveals that Moses is not the first prophet. Prophets both preceded Moses and succeeded him. Yet Moses is distinguished as the prophet *par excellence* (see especially Numb 11–12). By considering the entirety of the Pentateuch, it can also be seen that the leadership of Moses was unique.

Likewise, Joshua is never presented in the text as being "like Moses," but instead he is a man who is distinctly different from Moses.¹⁹ He is presented favorably, and as one who "listened to him [i.e., Moses] and did as the Lord had commanded Moses" (Deut 34:9), but he is never referred to as a prophet. David Clines comments that with verse 10, "the text immediately

¹⁶Rydelnik, 57–58.

¹⁷Cf., Kim, 88.

¹⁸Ibid., 100.

¹⁹See the excellent survey of the evidence by Kim. Ibid., 190–207.

turns its back upon Joshua in order to pronounce its final encomium upon Moses.”²⁰ Kim reasons that “if it [i.e., the prophecy of Deut 18:15–19] refers to the collective sense of a ‘succession of prophets,’ then the very first candidate and also the natural one for this reference is eliminated by the larger context of Pentateuch.”²¹ Also, in connection with Deuteronomy 34, Sailhamer notes that verse 10 “does not say, ‘the office of prophecy never arose’; it says, ‘A prophet [singular] like Moses never arose.’”²²

As we have seen, parallels are noted between Moses and Joshua, Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or others of the prophets. Perhaps it is best to account for these similarities as pointing to these individuals as faithful servants of Moses and Torah—like Moses in certain respects, though not as *the* Prophet like Moses. They were faithful in calling Israel back to the Torah and to the God of Israel, but they were opposed by many in Israel, persecuted, and in many cases their messages went mostly unheeded.

Directly Messianic View

So, to return to our question, “Of whom does Moses speak?” Since the Torah has made clear that Moses would prefigure God’s ultimate answer for the sin of man through his role as a deliverer, through his supernatural signs and wonders, and through his intimate relationship with God, to fail to recognize the messianic character of Deuteronomy 18:15–19, is thus to miss the whole point of Torah.²³ The prophet God promised to raise up in Deuteronomy 15:18 can be none other than the ultimate deliverer from sin, later to be known as the Messiah. He would be identified with even greater signs and wonders and would have an even closer relationship with God.

This view does not need to rely on *sensus plenior* or on an exceptional collective interpretation of the word, “prophet.” It takes the singular of “prophet,” found in Deuteronomy 18, at face value. It affirms the uniqueness and authority of Moses (e.g., Numb 12:6–8), the unsuitability of Joshua (and thus of the prophets who succeeded him) as the objects of this prophecy. It is in harmony with the narrative strategy of the Torah, and with the concluding verdict of Deuteronomy 34:10, that “since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses.”²⁴

The only individual presented in the Hebrew Scriptures who can be said to be truly “like Moses” is the Servant of the Lord in the book of Isaiah.²⁵ G. P. Huggenberger, after evaluating other attempts to identify the Servant in these texts, says, “What is proposed here is

²⁰David Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 10 (Sheffield, England: The University of Sheffield, 1994), 25. Indebtedness must be expressed to Kim for this reference.

²¹Ibid., 206–07.

²²John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic 2009), 18.

²³See Seth D. Postell, Eitan Bar, and Erez Soref, *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus: How the Torah Fulfills Its Goal in Yeshua* (Netanya, Israel: One For Israel Ministry, 2017).

²⁴Craigie translates it, “A prophet like Moses did not rise again in Israel.” Craigie, 406. See also Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 456.

²⁵See Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12; and, perhaps 61:1–3.

that this dominant and unifying image is that of a second Moses figure. In other words, the servant is the ‘prophet like Moses’ promised in Deuteronomy 18:14ff. and 34:10ff.”²⁶

Huggenberger bases this proposal on the context of the servant songs in Isaiah, and particularly on chapters 40–55, in which he says, “the controlling and sustained theme of these chs. is that of a second exodus.”²⁷ Second exodus imagery may be found in each of the servant songs, and the parallel is clear. God raised up Moses and the Servant to provide deliverance. Both Pharaoh and Cyrus also were raised up as pagan leaders to oppress Israel, but for the purpose of bringing the nations to see God’s glory in providing ultimate deliverance for Israel. Furthermore, the tension between a corporate understanding of the servant and an individual interpretation is resolved if the servant is identified as the prophet like Moses. As Huggenberger says, “The servant is the representative of and model for his people: they share a common calling to be the servant of Yahweh, a light to the nations, etc.”²⁸ One significant difference is that Jerusalem becomes the center of God’s eschatological salvation in Isaiah. David Pao says, “Just as the Law of Moses came from Sinai, so now the [Torah] will go out from Zion.”²⁹

Both Moses and the Servant of Isaiah 40–55 are God’s servants, so any opposition to them is opposition against the God whom they serve (Exod 16:8). Among the many parallels that could be mentioned, both Moses and the Servant intercede for Israel (Exod 32:30–32 and Isa 53:12). The Servant is like the prophet of Deuteronomy 18 also in his relationship with God. He is the one, God says, “in whom My soul delights” (Isa 42:1). Isaiah 50:4 indicates that the Servant listens directly to God daily so that he can communicate God’s message effectively. F. Duane Lindsey says, “thus the Servant asserts claim to a disciple’s ear in preparation for His exercise of a disciple’s tongue.”³⁰ Even as Moses was the mediator of the covenant at Sinai, Lindsey also makes a compelling argument, based on Isaiah 42:6c (“I will appoint You as a covenant to the people”), that the Servant “is the mediator of the New covenant with Israel, elaborated in Jeremiah 31:31–34 and referred to in numerous other prophetic texts.”³¹

Huggenberger says, “A felicitous consequence of the present approach to the servant songs is the substantial support it offers for the New Testament’s messianic interpretation without presupposing that interpretation.” Certainly, if the Servant is to be identified with the prophet like Moses, and if the Servant is to be identified as the Messiah, then Moses was directly prophesying the Messiah, whom God would raise up. As David Cooper says:

²⁶G. P. Huggenberger, “The Servant of the Lord in the ‘Servant Songs’ of Isaiah: A Second Moses Figure,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretations of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 119. Far from a novel view, it may be found in b. Sota 14a. Other evidence, both ancient and modern, of this view may be found in Huggenberger, 119–20. See also Allison, 142.

²⁷Huggenberger, 122. See also, David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000).

²⁸Huggenberger, 131.

²⁹Pao, 158.

³⁰F. Duane Lindsey, “The Commitment of the Servant in Isaiah 50:4–11” (Part 3 in the series: “Isaiah’s Songs of the Servant”), *Bibliotheca Sacra [BibSac]* 139 (1982):220.

³¹Lindsey, “The Call of the Servant in Isaiah 42:1–9” (Part 1 in the series: “Isaiah’s Songs of the Servant”), *BibSac* 139 (1982):25.

The nation looked forward to a perfect sacrifice that would make complete and perfect satisfaction for all sins. The prophet Isaiah, therefore, foretold such an offering which would be made for the nation (Isa. 53). In the same way Moses pointed forward to a lawgiver greater than himself (Deut. 18:15–18).³²

As the Servant of the Lord, the Prophet like Moses would provide final atonement for sin. Sailhamer says, “The mediator Moses becomes one of the central narrative vehicles for depicting the messianic hope.”³³ Here, Isaiah refers to God’s Servant as a Lamb (Isa 53:7), who would be the ultimate guilt offering (v. 10), bearing the guilt of “all of us” (v. 6).

The evidence from Scripture would seem to indicate that the prophecy of the Prophet like Moses was intended to speak solely and directly of an individual, namely, the coming Deliverer, the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, who would inaugurate a new covenant, one that would fulfill and supplant that of Moses.

The Prophecy in the New Testament

In the New Testament, Jesus is viewed as the direct fulfillment of the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15–19. To make this claim is not to “read the New Testament into the Old Testament,” or post-Resurrection revisionism,³⁴ but it is to read the Hebrew Scriptures correctly. If the apostles were slow to fully recognize Jesus’ identity, or to understand exactly how the events of His life, death, and resurrection related to prophecy in the Scriptures, it is because “their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him” (Luke 24:16).³⁵

Jesus did not rebuke the disciples for their ignorance or their mishandling of the sacred Scriptures, but instead, He rebuked them because they did *not* recognize Him from those very Scriptures! He said, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!” (Luke 24:25).

The Prophet in the Four Gospels

They must have taken His rebuke to heart. Once their eyes were opened, and especially when they were inspired by the Spirit to write the gospel accounts, they recognized how perfectly the Scriptures had been fulfilled and how the events of His life matched the prophecies of old.

³²David L. Cooper, *Messiah: His Nature and Person*, Messianic Series Number Two (Los Angeles, CA: Biblical Research Society, 1933), 154.

³³Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 245.

³⁴For a representative example of this approach, see J. Severino Croatto, “Jesus, the Prophet like Elijah, and Prophet-Teacher like Moses in Luke-Acts,” *JBL* 124 (2005): 451–65.

³⁵For an excellent explanation of the disciples’ “eye-opening” experience on this occasion, see Dane C. Ortlund, ““And Their Eyes Were Opened, and They Knew’: An Inter-canonical Note on Luke 24:31,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society [JETS]* 53 (2010): 717–28.

In the gospels, there is no explicit quotation of the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18, nor is reference ever made to Jesus as “the prophet like Moses.” It will become clear, however, that the identity of Jesus as the one of whom Moses spoke is developed by other means. For example, in the episode on the Emmaus road, the disciples apparently had already identified Jesus as the Prophet like Moses, but they had not anticipated His death. When they mentioned the things that had happened in Jerusalem, Jesus asked them, “What things?” They answered, “The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people” (Luke 24:19).

References to Jesus as “a prophet” or as “the prophet” are salted throughout the gospel accounts. Even more striking, however, are the ways in which the events of His life point to His identity as the promised Prophet. Sukmin Cho comments, “It is clear that the idea of a coming prophet as a messianic figure was strong in Jewish belief based on Deut. 18.15, 18. . . . All four Gospels contain evidence that Jesus was regarded as a prophet during his lifetime, although all four evangelists recognize that Jesus is greater than a prophet.”³⁶ This is seen as early as the narratives of His birth and the beginning of His public ministry. For the sake of time, I will pass over the narratives of His birth, the sojourn in Egypt, and His baptism and temptation in the wilderness, and go to Cana at the beginning of Jesus’ Galilean ministry.

The testimony of Philip and the first miracle. In John 1, we find the testimony of Philip. First, Jesus called two of the disciples of John the Baptist—Andrew and Simon Peter, to follow Him. They followed on the basis of John’s testimony. Jesus’ baptism and time in the wilderness had pointed to a new Moses. Next, Jesus called Philip (v. 43), and when Philip found Nathanael he reported, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (v. 45). In other words, Philip identified the Prophet like Moses with the Messiah of the prophets, and this coming Deliverer was none other than Jesus.

Immediately following this account is the story of Jesus turning the water to wine in John 2. In verse 11, John specifically draws attention to the fact that this was Jesus’ first miracle. Many are the supersessionist interpretations. George Beasley-Murray says, “Most writers acknowledge that in the Johannine narrative there is an implicit contrast between water used for Jewish purificatory rites and the wine given by Jesus; the former is characteristic of the old order, the latter of the new.”³⁷

But if all purification rites were passé, why had Jesus just submitted to ritual immersion? Was Torah set aside prior to the inauguration of the New Covenant? If so, how did Jesus fulfill its demands? This interpretation, while ancient, is nevertheless without merit. Instead, it is better to see that here Jesus is introducing Himself as the Prophet like Moses. Moses’ first public miracle was turning the water of Egypt to blood, symbolizing judgment and death. Jesus’ first miracle was turning the water to wine, symbolizing salvation and its

³⁶Sukmin Cho, *Jesus as Prophet in the Fourth Gospel*, New Testament Monographs 15 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 2–3.

³⁷George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 36.

accompanying joy. With this, Jesus is presenting Himself as the Prophet like Moses. This is seen as further signaling the time for the new Exodus.³⁸

Jesus' encounter with the woman of Samaria. Jesus was recognized as “prophet” by the woman at the well in John 4. The Samaritans were anticipating the arrival of the Prophet like Moses, and Jesus' interaction with the woman convinced her that He was this very Prophet (v. 19). There seem to have been two primary reasons for this recognition: their discussion regarding “water” (vv. 7–15) and Jesus' supernatural knowledge of her private life (vv. 16–18).

Moses gave water to the people of Israel in the wilderness (Exod 15, 17; Numb 20, 21), and, significantly, the place where the water was given in Numbers 21:18 is called Mattanah, which means “gift.” In John 4:10, Jesus told the woman, “If you knew the gift [Heb., *mattanah*] of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” With this, Jesus presents Himself to this Samaritan woman as the Prophet like Moses.³⁹

Certainly, it was possible for a prophet, such as Elijah, to possess knowledge supernaturally (e.g., see 2 Kngs 5:25–27); however, in Samaritan tradition, “if one shows supernatural knowledge, that one must be the *Taheb*.”⁴⁰ The *Taheb*, or Restorer, in Samaritan thought was the Prophet like Moses.⁴¹ This was the woman's resulting testimony: “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet” (v. 19). Again, it is likely that she was proclaiming Jesus to be “*the prophet*” on the basis of the principle of Greek grammar known as Colwell's Rule.⁴²

The Sermon on the Mount. Regarding the Sermon on the Mount, Frederic Godet, writing in 1899, pronounced that “the mount where Jesus speaks is as the Sinai of the new covenant.”⁴³ If this is true, Jesus is the Prophet like Moses. In Deuteronomy 9:9, Moses says, “When I went up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the Lord had made with you, then I remained on the mountain forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water.” In addition to the parallel between this verse and Matthew 4:2, the word translated “remained” (רָשַׁב) has as its primary meaning, “sat.” Matthew 5:1 says, “When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him.” Following an examination of extra-biblical evidence, Allison concludes: “The point is simply this: the image of Moses sitting on Sinai . . . was firmly established in the

³⁸Bill Day, *The Moses Connection in John's Gospel*, e-book (n.p.: by author, 2013), loc. 501. See also T. Francis Glasson, *Moses in the Fourth Gospel*, Studies in Biblical Theology (London: SCM Press, 1963; reprinted, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009).

³⁹Cho, 175.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 179.

⁴¹See, for example, Shomron, “The Taheb, the Restorer, A Prophet like Moses” [on-line]; accessed 19 June 2019; available from http://members.tripod.com/~osher_2/html_articles/taheb1.htm; Internet.

⁴²Colwell's Rule says that if a predicate nominative precedes the copulative verb, it drops the definite article most (87%) of the time; therefore, it should not be translated as an indefinite noun simply because of the absence of the article. Nevertheless, Cho concludes that the claim is deliberately expressed with some degree of ambiguity (181–82).

⁴³Frederic Godet, *Introduction to the New Testament: The Collection of the Four Gospels and the Gospel of St. Matthew* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899), 131.

imagination of pre-Christian Jews.”⁴⁴ Allison also points out that even as the opening words of Matthew 5 are similar to the biblical texts “about Moses and Sinai, the same is true of 8:1, which concludes [the Sermon on the Mount].”⁴⁵ Here, Jesus is a teacher like Moses, delivering a new Torah. The implication, of course, is that Jesus is the Prophet like Moses.

The feeding of the five thousand. The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded by all four gospels.⁴⁶ All of the accounts contain elements that point to Jesus’ identity as the Prophet like Moses,⁴⁷ but none as clearly as John. In fact, Christopher Maronde points out that John is given to an emphasis on the connection with Moses. He says,

The most significant Old Testament figure to be brought into the Gospel of John, however, is Moses. In John, a document steeped in the rich theology and history of the Old Testament, it is only natural that Moses would have a prominent place. He is the agent of God’s deliverance used to bring Israel out of Egypt. He is prophet and king, bringing the law and covenant of Yahweh to his people. David, Jacob, and Abraham all deserve mention, but Moses towers over them all.⁴⁸

In John 5, Jesus calls Moses to His defense in His disputation with the religious leaders when He says, “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me.” (John 5:45–46). Moses is also prominent in chapters six through nine.

In John’s account of the feeding of the five thousand, the most explicit reference to Jesus as the Prophet like Moses is in the reaction of the crowd, following the miraculous provision of food: “This is of a truth the Prophet who is to come into the world” (John 6:14). This miracle was paralleled by Moses’ miraculous provision of food in the wilderness. Cho points out that this recognition by the crowd “indicates that they already have knowledge about the Jewish eschatological tradition of the prophet-like-Moses promised in Deut. 18.15–18.”⁴⁹ Cho says that when the crowd gives voice to this identification, “Jesus seems not to deny the prophetic identity for himself. This implicitly indicates that Jesus accepts the title ‘the prophet’ for his identity.”⁵⁰ Other miracles likewise function as indications of Jesus’ identity as the Prophet.⁵¹

⁴⁴Allison, 179.

⁴⁵Ibid., 179–80.

⁴⁶Matt 14:13–21; Mark 6:32–44; Luke 9:10–17; and John 6:1–15.

⁴⁷See Allison, 238–42.

⁴⁸Christopher A. Maronde, “Moses in the Gospel of John,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 77 (2013),

23.

⁴⁹Cho, 215.

⁵⁰Ibid. See also, Anthony M. Moore, *Signs of Salvation: The Theme of Creation in John’s Gospel* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2013), 25.

⁵¹See Feiler, 158–61; Maronde; and Allison, 207–13.

The Transfiguration. All three synoptic Gospels record the transfiguration of Jesus (Matt 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; and Luke 9:28–36). The drama and the details of these accounts of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration reflect the account of Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 24). After six days in which the glory of the Lord remained on Mt. Sinai, Moses went up on the seventh day (Exod 24:16). Six days after the Father had revealed Jesus’ identity to His disciples at Caesarea Philippi, on the seventh day, they went up to the Mount of Transfiguration. Moses was accompanied by Aaron and two others who were brothers, Nadab and Abihu (Exod 24:1). Jesus was accompanied by Peter and two others who were brothers, James and John (Matt 17:1). Then there was the cloud: As Jim Congdon says, “As Moses had entered the cloud and divine light with the result that his face shone, so Jesus shone with heaven’s light, and before Him appeared Moses and Elijah, the only Old Testament saints to receive a revelation on ‘the mountain.’”⁵² A. M. Ramsey writes, “Moses went up into the Mount . . . and when he came down to the people the skin of his face shone. Here, in contrast is the new and greater Moses, whose face shines not with a reflected glory but with the unborrowed glory as of the sun’s own rays.”⁵³ Not only do these accounts include the fact that Jesus ascended a mountain and that His face and garments shone, but Luke’s version gives the subject matter of the conversation Jesus had with Elijah and Moses, namely, “of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (v. 31). The word for “departure” is literally “exodus,” so Jesus was speaking to them of His anticipated “exodus.” When Moses was at the base of Mt. Sinai, he erected an altar, “with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel” (Exod 24:4). Jesus descended the mountain and was with His twelve apostles (Matt 10:2–3), representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

Matthew also records the words of the voice from heaven that said (17:5), “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.” This last phrase is taken from Isaiah 42:1 and identifies Jesus as the Servant of the Lord, who is also equated with the Prophet like Moses. The voice from heaven continues with the admonition, “Listen to Him!” This points to Deuteronomy 18:15 (according to Luke, this is a verbatim quotation from the LXX). Finally, as Allison says, “It is natural to see in [Matthew] 17:1–9 the greater than Moses theme; for, at the last, Moses and Elijah disappear, and the reader is left with the command to “hear him,” that is, the one Son of God, Jesus.”⁵⁴

Jesus and the Jewish leaders. The response to Jesus on the part of the religious leadership is negative from His baptism and throughout His earthly ministry. This is seen in John 9, with the healing of the man born blind, and it seems to grow stronger and harden as Jesus teaches and performs miracles. On two separate occasions, Moses faced the prospect of death by stoning at the hands of the people. This would be the sort of resistance which both Moses and Jesus faced. In John 9, in the account of the healing of the man born blind, the irony of the position in which the religious leadership find themselves is beautifully highlighted. The formerly blind man testifies to the religious leaders that Jesus is “the Prophet” [i.e., like Moses

⁵²Jim Congdon, “The Mosaic Law and Christian Ethics: Obligation or Fulfillment?” in *Jews and the Gospel at the End of History: A Tribute to Moishe Rosen*, ed. by Jim Congdon (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2009), 149.

⁵³Arthur Michael Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949), 120.

⁵⁴Allison, 247.

(v. 17)].⁵⁵ Yet even as they are rejecting Jesus and His disciple, they are claiming to be the disciples of Moses!⁵⁶

The attitude of Israel's leadership toward Moses could be expressed with the words of Exodus 2:14: "Who made you a prince or a judge over us?" Likewise, the refusal to recognize the authority of Jesus by the religious leadership resulted in an increasing level of hostility, which ultimately led to the Crucifixion. This hostility is evidenced in each of the gospels. In Matthew 21, Jesus' authority is challenged to the point that He relieves the chief priests and Levites of their spiritual authority and transfers it to the apostles as the leadership of the remnant of Israel (21:43, 45).⁵⁷ This resistance results in Jesus' seven-fold pronouncement of woe against the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23.⁵⁸ This is in sharp contrast to the response of the crowds who were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee" (Matt 21:11).

With this as background, it is significant that Jesus is aware of His coming violent death.⁵⁹ This and the destruction of the Temple were specific prophecies, which came true, just as He had said. Rejection was always a result of the ministry of God's prophets and would be supremely evident in the death of the Servant of the Lord/Prophet like Moses. Even as Moses had offered himself as an atoning redeemer (Exod 32:32), the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15 must have included His willingness to offer Himself. Only in this manner could atonement be made, not only for His own people, but for "all the families of the earth" (Gen 12:3).

The Last Supper. The Last Supper is recounted in all four gospels (Matt 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–25; Luke 22:7–23; and John 13) and is presented as the antitype of the sacrifice at the original Passover. Even though Moses is most prominently associated with the covenant at Mt. Sinai, in which the sacrificial system provided temporary atonement for sin through the sacrifice of a bull or a goat (see Lev 4–7:10; 17:11), the Last Supper was a Passover meal, which drew attention to Exodus 12 and the offering of a lamb. The Passover lamb was intended to point forward to the Servant of the Lord (Isa 52:13–53:12), who was also a Lamb. Isaiah says that He would offer Himself as the Lamb, who would "not open His mouth," but was "like a lamb that is led to slaughter" (Isa 53:7). Moses commanded the slaying of a lamb; Jesus offered Himself as the Lamb. At the beginning of His earthly ministry, He had been introduced as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29); He ended His life as the Passover Lamb, providing ultimate atonement for sin. His death inaugurated the New Covenant. It is worth noting that other than Moses and Jesus, no other prophet ever instituted a covenant.

The Prophet in Acts

⁵⁵Although the definite article is not present, the predicate nominative precedes the copulative verb, and the context requires invoking Colwell's Rule. After the blind man's confession, the leaders threaten to expel anyone who confessed Jesus *as Messiah* from the synagogue (v. 22).

⁵⁶See Jim R. Sibley, "The Messianic Jewish Apologetic Purpose of John 9," (paper presented at the annual meeting of Evangelical Theological Society, Messianic Jewish Studies Section, San Antonio, Texas, 16 November 2016).

⁵⁷See Turner, 236–51.

⁵⁸Ibid., 269–397.

⁵⁹Cho, 159–64.

The Gospel of Luke can be seen as a prequel to the Book of Acts. So it should come as no surprise that Luke's "account of the things accomplished among us" (Luke 1:1) should set the stage for the events which followed. In the last chapter of Luke, we have the account of the Emmaus road encounter. Feiler says of this story: "Luke . . . through Cleopas' summary of Jesus' earthly ministry, prepares the reader for the explicit identification of Jesus as the prophet like Moses in Acts 3:22–23."⁶⁰ Indeed, the only explicit citations of Deuteronomy 18:15 come from the Book of Acts.

Preaching about Jesus in the courts of the Temple, Peter proclaimed, "Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people'" (Acts 3:22–23). Here, it is not that Jesus and Moses are adversaries, but that Moses is actually a witness to the identity of Jesus—more than that, Moses is the prosecuting attorney, demanding obedience to Him and warning that the only alternative is destruction.⁶¹ As Feiler says, "The quotation bases a soteriological imperative upon a Christological claim."⁶² The Jewish people must listen to Jesus or suffer the judgment of God, even as their forefathers in the wilderness, since Jesus is the prophet like Moses.

Then, in Acts 7, Stephen quoted the prophecy from Deuteronomy 18 in his sermon, just before his martyrdom. He made the point that Jesus was the prophet like Moses, and the leaders had not heeded the warning to listen to Him, but instead had offered Him up for crucifixion. In Acts 7:37, he said, "This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.'" In this context, it is important to understand that the Prophet like Moses does not *reject* Israel, but He has *divided* Israel. In the Book of Acts, as Jacob Jervell says, "Israel has not rejected the gospel, but has become divided over the issue."⁶³

Conclusion

The prophecy of the Prophet like Moses, found in Deuteronomy 18:15–19, is a messianic prophecy that speaks directly and solely of the coming Deliverer, later known as the Messiah. He is evidenced in Isaiah's prophecies of the Servant of the Lord, "but," as Paul says, "when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal 4:4–5). Those who were the human instruments in the production of the books that comprise the Scriptures of the New Covenant were not ignorant of the original intent of Torah, neither did they twist Scripture to conform to their faith in Jesus. When they saw fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus, it was because they were reading Torah correctly.

⁶⁰Feiler, 188.

⁶¹The warning here comes from Lev 23:29, but is consistent with the warning in Deut 18:19.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 47.

⁶³Jacob Jervell, "The Divided People of God," in *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, MN; Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 49.

Unlike the prognostications of the false prophets, this prophecy of Moses has come true! This is a witness, not only concerning Jesus' identity, but also Moses' validity as a true prophet of God. The unjustified abandonment of a messianic reading of this passage not only robs believers in Jesus of precious truth, but concedes valuable ground to those who oppose the gospel altogether. To paraphrase a remark of Allison: I do acknowledge that in more than one recent work the directly messianic interpretation of the prophecy of the Prophet like Moses has in fact, for whatever reason, suffered interment. But the burial is premature.⁶⁴ It is to be hoped that a restored confidence in the directly messianic interpretation will revive the messianic hope that first animated the remnant of Israel and later the early believers in Jesus.

⁶⁴Allison, 267.