

Moses: Prophet of Deliverance

Bible Background • EXODUS 12:28-50; DEUTERONOMY 18:15-22

Printed Text • DEUTERONOMY 18:15-22 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 77:11-20

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will STUDY Moses' role as a prophet of God in leading the Israelites out of Egypt, REFLECT on leaders who guide us through seemingly impossible situations, and completely RELY on God in resolving challenging situations.

In Focus

Ever since she flipped through that pamphlet on youth homelessness from the display stand at her college, Alex felt the urgency of God's call. That summer, she interned with an organization in Chicago that provided services and counseling to LGBTQ kids who had been forced to leave their homes. Once she completed her degree, Alex left her hometown in South Carolina and moved to Chicago, where she took a permanent job with the organization.

For the first few months, everything was perfect. Alex loved her work and could see the difference it was making. On weekends she visited her parents' college friend Winnie, who lived nearby. But over time, gas, food, and bills started to pile up. Alex took on more shifts and had less time to take care of herself. After three weeks with no days off, she ended up on Winnie's couch, sobbing, her hands so weak she could barely hold the tea she was offered.

"I really want to stay here," she cried, "But I can't do this anymore. I'm so tired." "Admitting you need help doesn't mean you have to give up. My sister lives in the city," said Winnie. "She's looking for a roommate. We've been talking, and she'd love to live with you. For you, it would be perfect—half rent, less gas, and an amazing roommate!"

"Thank you, Ms. Winnie," breathed Alex, ducking her head to hide her grateful tears. That evening she called Winnie's sister, and the next week they were roommates. She took a weekend to recover, and when she began working again she was careful to leave enough time in her schedule for the people she cared about.

Sometimes God speaks to us through people we wouldn't expect. Who could you reach out to and be vulnerable with?

Keep in Mind

"Moses continued, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him'" (Deuteronomy 18:15, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Require (Deuteronomy 18:19) darash (Heb.)—To seek; to inquire, consult; to demand

B. Presumptuously (v. 22) zadon (Gk.)—Proudly, haughtily, with misplaced confidence

Say It Correctly

Horeb. HOR-ebb.

KJV

Deuteronomy 18:15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;

16 According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not.

17 And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.

18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

19 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

20 But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

21 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken?

22 When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

NLT

Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses continued, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.

16 For this is what you yourselves requested of the LORD your God when you were assembled at Mount Sinai. You said, ‘Don’t let us hear the voice of the LORD our God anymore or see this blazing fire, for we will die.’

17 Then the LORD said to me, ‘What they have said is right.

18 I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him.

19 I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on my behalf.

20 But any prophet who falsely claims to speak in my name or who speaks in the name of another god must die.’

21 But you may wonder, ‘How will we know whether or not a prophecy is from the LORD?’

22 If the prophet speaks in the LORD’s name but his prediction does not happen or come true, you will know that the LORD did not give that message. That prophet has spoken without my authority and need not be feared.”

The People, Places, and Times

Mount Sinai. Also called Mount Horeb and has been referred to as the “mountain of God” (Exodus 3:1) and “mount of the LORD” (Numbers 10:33). This mountain and the surrounding wilderness was one of the first stops the Israelites made after escaping from Egypt. They stayed there for about a year (Numbers 10:11). It would prove to be a place of national trial and triumph. On Mount Sinai, the Israelites experienced defeat (including making the golden calf while Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments; Exodus 32) and victory (including ratifying the Ten Commandments; Exodus 19–24) while encamped there.

Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is Moses’ last sermon to the people of Israel right before they finally enter the Promised Land. In these three discourses (Deuteronomy 1-4; 5-26; 27-34), he reiterates the Law handed down on Mt. Sinai. Many sections of this sermon repeat what has already been stated (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5; Exodus 32, Deuteronomy 9; Exodus 21:24, Deuteronomy 19:21). Other sections update the Law from a religion to be practiced in the wilderness to one that is practiced in a stable homeland. Moses looks to the future for the nation. For example, Moses promises that another prophet will follow him, and guides the people in how to accept or reject future prophets.

Background

In this passage, Moses predicts the coming of Christ. The phrases “prophet like me” (Deuteronomy 18:15, NLT) and “prophet like you” (v. 18, NLT) have immediate reference to the line of Israelite prophets. However, they find their ultimate fulfillment in the prophetic ministry of Christ (see Acts 3:19-23). This is one of the earliest references to the coming of the Messiah. Moses himself was considered a prophet of high stature. This early prediction of another “like me” gave the Israelites a glimpse of God’s plan. It put Moses, God’s servant, in proper perspective in the eyes of the people. As great as the works of Moses were, there was still One greater who would come. Moses’ prediction of a prophet “like me” not only points to the greatness of the future Messiah, but gives insight into what a prophet and leader of God’s people should be.

At-A-Glance

1. He Comes from the People (Deuteronomy 18:15-16)
2. He Speaks God’s Word (v. 17-18)
3. His Words Come True (vv. 19-22)

In Depth

1. He Comes from the People (Deuteronomy 18:15-16) Jesus’ life proves the accuracy of Moses’ prediction that a prophet would arise from “among the people.” This phrase can be understood two ways. The primary reference here is to national origin. Jesus was a Hebrew who came through the line of Abraham. The secondary reference highlights the identification of the Messiah as one of the people. Jesus came from common human stock. His earthly parents were ordinary people; His place of birth was lowly; He was reared with the working class; and His occupation (carpentry) was that of a laboring man. Jesus lived among people, understood them (John 2:25), wept with them, and celebrated with them (John 11:35; 2:1-11). Jesus portrayed the characteristics essential for servant-leadership. A person who has not lived among the people is less likely to understand how common people think and what they need.

How have you seen a leader’s humble origins affect their leadership style?

2. He Speaks God’s Word (v. 17-18) Moses spoke of a prophet who would have a direct relationship with God (v. 18). Those who are chosen to publicly lead God’s people (pastor, missionary, teacher, writer, or Sunday School worker) are called to speak God’s words. Just as Jesus represented God the Father and spoke His words, people in God’s service represent Christ and should speak His words. This can only be done when one maintains a close relationship with God through prayer, worship, and studying the Bible.

As a prophet, Moses spoke on God’s behalf. Moses was not explaining what God had said in the past like a good preacher does. He came with a new message straight from God. God puts His words in the mouth of His prophets (v.18; Jeremiah 1:7-9). When Jesus spoke, He spoke the words of God. He said in His prayer, “I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me” (John 17:8). He assured His disciples “the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.” (John 14:24). This word has been faithfully passed down, protected by the Holy Spirit, through many generations so that we can read it today.

How do you feel about your current relationship with Jesus? What helps keep it strong? What could make it stronger?

3. His Words Come True (vv. 19-22) Moses warns against false prophets (v. 20). The test of a true prophet is whether his words come true, though further tests may also be required (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). The death penalty which Moses warns about is played out in the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal

(see 1 Kings 18:20–40). The false prophets of Baal call on the name of a different god and are put to death after Elijah shows the awesome power of Israel’s true God. Predicting what will come to pass is only one aspect of the prophetic gift. A prophet is one who proclaims the truth, warns, exhorts, and encourages.

Think of a person who is called a modern prophet and consider whether that person measures up to the test in these verses.

Search the Scriptures

1. Where did Moses say a prophet like himself would arise? (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18)
2. What did Moses tell the people of Israel to do about this prophet? (v. 15)
3. What did Moses reveal about the message of this prophet? (v. 18)
4. What test should be applied to a prophet’s words? (v. 22)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why does God use intermediaries like prophets to bring His message to His followers?
2. How does God “deal with” (v. 19, NLT) those who do not listen to His prophets? How have you seen this play out in your own life?

Liberating Lesson

Maybe you’re heard of the phenomenon in today’s society called “call-out culture.” When someone perceives an injustice, they will speak out against it, usually on social media. They will set demands for the person or company to correct their problematic behavior, and call on their friends and followers to boycott them until they do. How is this similar to or different from the work of a prophet of God?

Application for Activation

List the characteristics of an effective leader. Which of these characteristics do you possess? Which would you like to acquire? Select a quality. This week, read Philippians 4:13, and seek opportunities to demonstrate the quality you desire.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Deuteronomy 18:15-22

It is evident from the Old Testament and particularly Deuteronomy 18:9–22 that one of the most dangerous expressions of the waywardness and ignorance of many people is to seek God’s help by the wrong means and from the wrong sources. The Canaanites— whose lands were to be occupied by Israel— were preoccupied with evil practices such as divination, sorcery, and witchcraft. They were given to all kinds of magical and superstitious practices to discover the will of the gods and, sometimes, even to compel the gods to act in certain

ways. Their unacknowledged guilt led to God's judgment and expulsion from the land. All such practices were forbidden in Israel and were to be an abomination in the land. Israel is called to be blameless of such practices and conduct; otherwise, they too would incur God's wrath. The privilege of God's chosen people did not entitle them to a different standard of morality and ethics. If they turn to divination and witchcraft, they too will be expelled from the land. Against this backdrop, God promised to raise a Prophet from among the people. Today spiritualism, astrology, palm-reading and other forms of divination are widely practiced. These injunctions to Israel are as important and relevant now as they were then.

15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;

Because Israel will soon enter a land filled with abominable practices, Moses clarifies for Israel the means of discerning a true messenger of God, that is, a true prophet. The Lord will provide a succession of prophets from among the Israelites for their benefit. The true prophet will function as Yahweh's mouthpiece, just as Moses has done. Moses, the model prophet, exhorts his fellow Israelites to pay close attention to the message of any true prophet. In contrast to the surrounding nations, God will raise a Prophet from the midst of His people.

God's will is to be discovered or discerned through a prophet and not through a diviner, a magic worker, or a spiritist. It is important to note that although the New Testament portrays Jesus the Messiah as the ultimate fulfillment of this verse, the Hebrew word nabi' (naw-BEE) in this and the following verses is a collective noun which suggests that it represents a type of individual. How are God's people to know who the true prophet is when there are competing claims regarding access to the Word of God? The case is easy when we are dealing with a prophet who represents another god. The true prophet is the Mosaic prophet, the one who speaks the Word of God in the tradition of Moses himself. In other words, the ultimate test is the course of actual events in time to come; for the word of the true prophet comes to pass.

Moses gives the first characteristic of an authentic prophet—he or she is not self-appointed. The Lord Himself is to raise up such gifted people and equip them for their strategic work. Their place in the ministry of the Word would be due entirely to God's initiative. The lesson is instructive. No one must pursue Christian ministry unless he or she is sure of God's calling for the task. The authority of the minister and the right to be listened to derive from an assured presence of divine call.

16 According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. 17 And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.

The place of the prophet in Israel is to be understood in light of the incident at Horeb. When God in His manifested glory terrified the people (v. 16). They could not bear to look upon his radiant presence, nor could they listen to His words because of their transcendent quality. They recognized their own limitations, physically and spiritually. Therefore, what was needed was a mediator who could approach God for them and who then could transmit the divine revelation to them. Moses stepped into this role at Horeb. As he stands now on the edge of the Promised Land it is clear that generations after the departure of Moses would also need such spokesmen to bear the message of heaven. This would be particularly the case when the peculiar role of Moses (and of Joshua after him) as a covenant mediator came to an end. The new situation would require someone to carry on the ministry of revelation and covenant enforcement. This would eventually fall to the order of prophets. Note that Joshua is not a prophet, even though he is Moses' successor. Joshua was Moses' successor as a political and military leader of the Israelites. No longer would Israel combine their political leader with their spiritual leader. For better or worse, this distinction came about after Moses' death.

18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

Here Moses reveals a second mark of an authentic prophet. The authentic prophet is one who receives and welcomes God's Word. Even though now it is considered rude to "put words in someone's mouth," this is just the image God uses for how He equips prophets to speak. Jeremiah provides a clear example. The Lord spoke to the initially reluctant prophet saying, "I have put my words in thy mouth" (Jeremiah 1:9; 5:14, etc.). It is God who commissions and sends forth the prophet. It is only by divine initiative that God's Words could be proclaimed or expressed through a human mouth, even when it is done reluctantly. This is why the prophet could declare, "Thus says the Lord." The prophet does not only receive the Word but also, more importantly, is tasked with declaring it. God's message is not for the prophet's exclusive possession. The truth is given to the prophet to be shared with God's people. There was no room for a special, elitist, highly favored individuals who receive "hidden" messages for themselves that were not to be communicated to other people. God's Word was for everybody, regardless of status. The prophet must not hold back but speak all that God shall command. The Moses-like prophets, called by God from among the people of Israel, would receive and speak only those things committed to them by the Lord (v. 18).

19 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. 20 But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

The very character of God stands behind the prophetic message (and messenger). To reject the message of a true prophet represents a rejection of God Himself. In other words, the prophets would be vested with such authority by God that whoever is disobedient to their words would not be counted guiltless before God. Rather, the disobedient would incur God's wrath and displeasure. The disobedient listener who merely hears the Word but does not act on it will be accountable to the Lord for his or her stubborn resistance to the truth. So great would be their prophet's authority that anyone who disobeyed their word would have disobeyed the Word of the Lord and accordingly would be made accountable (v. 19). The word translated "require" (Heb. darash, daw-ROSH) is used in phrases like this frequently enough for Moses to know his audience would understand: the "it" the Lord is requiring is the unbeliever's life (Genesis 9:5; Ezekiel 33:6).

Having enumerated the marks of the true prophet, Moses goes on to warn the people against false prophets. Moses defines two kinds of falsehood. First, and with an insidious threat, is the person who claims or presumes to speak in the name of the Lord but whose words were his or her own. Second, any people who profess to speak for the Lord but in fact do not, but speak in the name of other gods, would be recognizable as a serious violator of the covenant. Such is a false prophet and must be severely punished by execution (v. 20).

21 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? 22 When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

One of the major problems associated with the whole prophetic movement then and now was the false prophet, although it is clear that the true prophet had a deep sense of divine commission, not all who claimed to be true prophets were genuine prophets of the Lord. It is much easier to claim being a true prophet than to authenticate it. Furthermore, there would have been occasions when it would have been difficult to judge the falsity or authenticity of a given prophet. As far as those who prophesied in the names of other gods were concerned, there would be no question (v. 20b; cf. 13:1-18).

However, what would be the criteria when a man or woman issued a word in the name of the Lord? The answer in the text is very much to the point: the fulfillment of the prophesied message. Anything short of that would brand the prophet as false and unreliable. He had not spoken from God, but have spoken zadon (Heb. zaw-

DONE; “presumptuously”; proudly). Therefore the Israelites “should not be afraid” of that person as an envoy of the Lord (v. 22). But this evidence could sometimes be matched by the false prophet. Chapter 13 shows that false prophets could indeed produce remarkable predictions and still lead the people astray. It remains therefore that such a litmus test should be somewhat nuanced. Although nonfulfillment would of itself suggest a falsehood, fulfillment could not by itself prove authenticity. This is an important caution to bear in mind when evaluating remarkable apparent successes of soothsaying and prediction in any age, including our own. The passage as a whole provides a clue to making a distinction between true and false prophets. The prophet whom God would raise up would be like Moses. Without doubt, this is an important and qualitative criterion. There was a standard by which the moral and spiritual credentials could be measured. Those who prophesied smooth paths and pandered to the wickedness of the nation and prophesied for their own material and personal gains were definitely not “like Moses”. Those who posed no challenge to the oppressive and immoral governments were not “like Moses.” Those who were immoral in their own lives and consumed by self-seeking ambitions were not “like Moses.” Today, when we have a multiplicity of “prophetic ministries.” Believers should once again take a closer look at Deuteronomy 18:15–22 and take caution before jumping on the bandwagon of any prophetic ministry. However, we must also be careful to not throw out the baby with the bathwater. Both Old Testament prophecy (Joel 2) and several passages in the New Testament (Acts 2:16-18; 11:27-28; 21:8-9) show that there could still be authentic prophets and prophecy in our own time.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Remember God's Acts of Deliverance
(Psalm 77:11-20)

TUESDAY

Listen to Moses, Witness with Authority
(Luke 16:24-31)

WEDNESDAY

Instructions for Observing the Passover
(Exodus 12:43-50)

THURSDAY

Aliens and Unclean Share Passover Meal
(Numbers 9:9-14)

FRIDAY

Consecrate All Firstborn to God
(Exodus 13:1-2; Deuteronomy 15:19-20)

SATURDAY

Observe Festival of Unleavened Bread
(Exodus 13:3-10)

SUNDAY

God Leads through Prophets
(Deuteronomy 18:15-22)