

# Prophet of Deliverance

Deuteronomy 18:15-22  
SS Lesson for 02/28/2021

**Devotional Scripture:** John 1:43-45

## OUTLINE

### LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

*Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

*Key Verse: Deut 18:15*

*Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

#### PROPHET OF PROMISE (DEUT 18:15-16)

##### *Promise of future prophets (15)*

Future prophet like Joshua (Deut 3:26-29)

Future prophet like Samuel (Acts 3:22-24)

Future prophet like John the Baptist (John 1:21-23)

Future prophet as the Ultimate Prophet - Jesus (John 1:45)

##### *Promise of future intercessors (16)*

Intercession by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26)

Intercession by Jesus the Christ (Rom 8:34)

Intercession by Jesus the High Priest (Heb 7:23-25)

Intercession by future believers (1 Tim 2:1)

#### PROPHET THAT WILL SPEAK GOD'S WORDS (DEUT 18:17-19)

##### *Words that are good (17)*

Good because they provide a blessing to our work (James 1:25)

Good because they expose sin (Rom 7:7)

Good because the Holy Spirit gives joy when the word is welcomed (1 Thess 1:6)

Good because they were written to make our joy full (1 John 1:4)

##### *Words that are from God (18)*

From God because they are the actual words of God (1 Thess 2:13)

From God because they are truth and they will bear fruit (Col 1:5-6)

From God because they come with the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 1:5)

From God because they are living and enduring (1 Peter 1:23)

##### *Words that must be heard and obeyed (19)*

Hear and obey the Word so that we might not sin (Ps 119:11)

Hear and obey the Word so that we will be able to stand when troubles come (Luke 6:47-48)

Hear and obey the Word so that we will be successful (Joshua 1:8)

Hear and obey the Word so that we will be able to distinguish good from evil (Heb 5:14)

#### TEST OF A TRUE PROPHET (DEUT 18:20-22)

##### *Test of source of prophecy (20)*

Source must be from God (Isa 50:4)

Source must be through the Holy Spirit (Isa 59:21)

Source must be through those who God appoints and sends (Jer 14:14-16)

Source not from God makes them false prophets (Matt 7:15)

##### *Test of accuracy of prophecy (21-22)*

Prophets must be accurate to prove they were sent by God (Jer 28:5-10)

Prophets must be accurate and adhere to God's Word (Deut 13:1-3)

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#### COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

*The Promise of the "Ultimate Prophet" (Deut. 18:15-19)*

*The Prophet and False Prophets (Deut. 18:20-22)*

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

## Lesson Background and Key Verse

### Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Often when people think of the prophets, they think of prophetic books of the Old Testament. These are frequently divided into Major Prophets (5 books) and Minor Prophets (12 books), based on the length of these books (except Lamentations, which is “major” by association with the prophet Jeremiah). There were, however, many other prophets besides those who wrote books that are part of the Bible. Today’s study comes from the book of Deuteronomy, the fifth and final book of what is often called the Pentateuch, the Torah, or the five books of Law. This same book concludes with the declaration that since the book’s writing, “no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (34:10). Thus Moses was a prophet of the Lord as well as the lawgiver to God’s covenant people. The title “Deuteronomy” comes from the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It means “second [giving of the] law.” This is fitting because the book witnesses to Moses’ farewell speech to the second generation of Israelites. He was preparing them to cross the Jordan River and enter the promised land, and they needed to hear the law for the context of their generation (Deuteronomy 1:1-8). In its function as “second [giving of the] law,” Deuteronomy repeats contents from previous instruction to the people (compare Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:1-21). At the same time, some of the material had special relevance to those who were to enter the promised land and drive out its inhabitants (see chapter 20). Deuteronomy 18, from which today’s lesson is drawn, is the climax of a series of instructions concerning various leadership positions that would offer guidance to God’s people. Reading the directives for a king gives a sense of how different a king in Israel was to act compared to those who ruled other nations (17:14-20).

### Key Verse: Deut 18:15

*The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear,*

### Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

The tribe of Levi was divided into three families (Gershonites, Kohathites, and Merarites). Each division originally had different responsibilities regarding the tabernacle (Num. 3-4). The Kohathites were further divided into those who were descendants of Aaron and those who were not (Josh. 21:4-5). Only the descendants of Aaron were permitted to serve as priests (Num. 3:10). They are generally referred to as “the priests” or “the sons of Aaron” (Num. 10:8). The rest of the tribe, those not serving as priests, were designated as Levites. Thus priests were a minority in the tribe of Levi. The Levites served as ministers to the priests (Num. 18:1-7; 1 Chron. 23:28-32), and in general as teachers of the Law in Israel (Deut. 33:10a; 2 Chron. 17:8-9). The priests officiated at the tabernacle and also had other duties. They served as judges (Deut. 17:8-9), guardians of the scroll of the Law (17:18; 31:9), teachers of regulations concerning skin diseases (24:8), and assistants to Moses in the covenant renewal ceremony (27:9).

**18:1-2.** Unlike the other 11 tribes, none of the **Levites** including **the priests** was given an **allotment** of land to settle and cultivate. However, 48 cities were set aside for the Levites (Num. 35:1-8; Josh. 21:1-42). **The priests** (and the Levites who assisted them at the central sanctuary) were to be sustained by the people’s **offerings made to the LORD**. The Levites who did not assist at the central sanctuary were to be sustained by gifts from the people (Deut. 14:28-29; 16:10-11).

**18:3-5.** The people were responsible for supporting **the priests** who officiated at the central sanctuary. The priests were to receive parts of bulls and **sheep** that were sacrificed, **the firstfruits of... grain, new wine, and oil, and the first wool**. This was because **God** had **chosen** Aaron and his **descendants out of all the tribes to stand and minister in the LORD’s name**, that is, on His behalf. The New Testament broadened the priesthood to include all Christians (1 Peter 2:9). The reason for this is that Jesus Christ by virtue of His ministry, death, and resurrection superseded the Aaronic priesthood of the Old (Mosaic) Covenant and became the High Priest of the New Covenant (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:14-5:10; 6:19-7:28). Every Christian has come into the family of Jesus (Heb. 2:10-13) and therefore into Jesus’ priestly line.

**18:6-8.** If a **Levite** wanted to go to the central sanctuary to **minister** there **in the Lord’s name** (on His behalf), he was permitted to do so and to receive equal support along with the other **Levites**. This does not imply that this Levite would minister as a priest as some have suggested. The Levites were to *assist* the priests (1 Chron. 23:28-32). **Even though** a Levite had **received money from the prior sale of his family possessions** (cf. Lev. 25:32-34) before moving to Jerusalem, he was to receive support for his work at the sanctuary. Paul restated this principle for the New Testament church (1 Cor. 9:14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

**18:9-14.** In these verses all the forbidden practices—called **detestable ways** (cf. v. 12) **of the nations** in the land—dealt with either foretelling the future or magic. By the use of magic one attempted to manipulate or force the “gods” into certain courses of action. Child sacrifice was mentioned here because it was used either as a means of foretelling or as magic to manipulate certain events. All these practices are forbidden because they divorce life from morality. Several factors make this clear: (1) The future was “determined” by one’s moral behavior, not by magical manipulation. (2) Using magic to manipulate one’s circumstances was in essence a futile attempt to flee from the Lord’s ethical laws which promoted life and blessing. (3) The use of magic and **divination** (vv. 10, 14) was a refusal to acknowledge the sovereignty of **the LORD**. (4) Reliance on these practices indicated a corresponding failure to trust **the LORD** with one’s life. People who are knowledgeable of the occult and demon possession quickly point out that the practices mentioned in verses 9-14 have led many into satanic bondage. **Divination** (vv. 10, 14), from the verb *qāsam*, “to divide,” means to give false prophecy or seek to determine the will of the gods by examining and interpreting omens. (*Qāsam* is also used in Josh. 13:22; 1 Sam. 6:2; 28:8; 2 Kings 17:17; Isa. 3:2; 44:25; Jer. 27:9; 29:8; Ezek. 13:6, 9, 23; 21:21, 23, 29; 22:28; Micah 3:6-7, 11; Zech. 10:2.) **Sorcery** (*ānan*, Deut. 18:10, 14; cf. Lev. 19:26; 2 Kings 21:6; Isa. 2:6; Micah 5:12, “cast spells”) is the attempt to control people or circumstances through power given by evil spirits (demons). To interpret **omens** is to tell the future based on “signs” such as the movements of birds, fire, or rain. **Witchcraft** (*kāšap*) involves practicing magic by incantations. One who **casts spells** is literally “one who ties knots” (*hābar*), thus one who binds other people by magical mutterings. A **spiritualist** is one who supposedly communicates with the dead but who actually communicates with demons. One **who consults the dead** may mean the spiritist’s attempt to contact the dead to gain advice, information on the future, or help in manipulation. Such **detestable practices** were one reason the Lord used Israel to destroy the Canaanites. Therefore it was understandably **detestable** for an Israelite to become involved in those things. By avoiding them the Israelites would be **blameless** of their terrible sins.

**18:15-19.** In contrast with the dark magic of Canaanite diviners, witches, and spiritists, Israelites were to **listen to** the Lord’s **prophet**. The Israelites could be sure that a “line of prophets” would follow in succession after Moses because of their original request **at Horeb** (Sinai) that **God** speak to them through Moses as a mediator (cf. 5:23-27). Each prophet **God** would **raise up** would be an Israelite, and because the true **prophet** would only speak the **words of the LORD**, the people were obligated to obey (**listen to**) those **words**. The ultimate **Prophet like** Moses (18:15, 18) is Jesus Christ—the One who spoke God’s words and who provides deliverance for His people. Not even Joshua could be compared to Moses, for since Moses “no prophet has risen in Israel like” him (34:10) with such power before men and intimacy with God. However distinguished a future prophet’s role might be in Israel, none would be like Moses until the Mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ, came. Moses set the standard for every future prophet. Each prophet was to do his best to live up to the example of Moses until the One came who would introduce the New Covenant. During the first century A.D. the official leaders of Judaism were still looking for the fulfillment of Moses’ prediction (cf. John 1:21). Peter said their search should have stopped with the Lord Jesus (Acts 3:22-23). (Other early and clear predictions of the Messiah may be found in Gen. 49:10-12; Num. 24:17-19.)

**18:20-22.** Since the people were to obey God’s **prophet** without question (v. 19), to prophesy falsely was in effect to usurp the place of God. For this the false **prophet** was to **be put to death**. Two tests could be used to determine whether a prophet was speaking God’s words. First, the prophet’s message had to be in accordance with God and His Word. If he spoke **in the name of** (on behalf of) **other gods** then he contradicted the objectively revealed Word of God and was therefore a false prophet (cf. 13:1-5). Second, his prophecy must **come true**. If neither of these conditions was met, then no matter how powerful the would-be **prophet** seemed to be, the people were **not to be afraid of him** or of any reprisals he might predict against them.

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Prophet of Promise (Deut 18:15-16)**

15 "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear,

16 according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.'

### **Promise of future prophets (15)**

*Future prophet like Joshua (Deut 3:26-29)*

26 But because of you the Lord was angry with me and would not listen to me. "That is enough," the Lord said. "Do not speak to me anymore about this matter. 27 Go up to the top of Pisgah and look west and north and south and east. Look at the land with your own eyes, since you are not going to cross this Jordan. 28 But commission Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, for he will lead this people across and will cause them to inherit the land that you will see."

*Future prophet like Samuel (Acts 3:22-24)*

22 For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. 23 Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.' 24 "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days.

*Future prophet like John the Baptist (John 1:21-23)*

21 They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." 22 Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

*Future prophet as the Ultimate Prophet - Jesus (John 1:45)*

45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

### **Promise of future intercessors (16)**

*Intercession by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26)*

26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

*Intercession by Jesus the Christ (Rom 8:34)*

34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

*Intercession by Jesus the High Priest (Heb 7:23-25)*

23 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

*Intercession by future believers (1 Tim 2:1)*

Pray for All Men 2 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,

## **Prophet that will Speak God's Words (Deut 18:17-19)**

17 "And the Lord said to me: 'What they have spoken is good.

18 I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.

19 And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.

### **Words that are good (17)**

*Good because they provide a blessing to our work (James 1:25)*

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

*Good because they expose sin (Rom 7:7)*

7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

*Good because the Holy Spirit gives joy when the word is welcomed (1 Thess 1:6)*

6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

*Good because they were written to make our joy full (1 John 1:4)*

4 We write this to make our joy complete.

### **Words that are from God (18)**

*From God because they are the actual words of God (1 Thess 2:13)*

13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

*From God because they are truth and they will bear fruit (Col 1:5-6)*

5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

*From God because they come with the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 1:5)*

5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

*From God because they are living and enduring (1 Peter 1:23)*

23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

### **Words that must be heard and obeyed (19)**

*Hear and obey the Word so that we might not sin (Ps 119:11)*

11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

*Hear and obey the Word so that we will be able to stand when troubles come (Luke 6:47-48)*

47 I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. 48 He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.

*Hear and obey the Word so that we will be successful (Joshua 1:8)*

8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

*Hear and obey the Word so that we will be able to distinguish good from evil (Heb 5:14)*

14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

### **Test of a True Prophet (Deut 18:20-22)**

20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'

21 And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?' —

22 when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

### **Test of source of prophecy (20)**

*Source must be from God (Isa 50:4)*

4 The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.

*Source must be through the Holy Spirit (Isa 59:21)*

21 "As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the Lord. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever," says the Lord.

*Source must be through those who God appoints and sends (Jer 14:14-16)*

14 Then the Lord said to me, "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds. 15 Therefore, this is what the Lord says about the prophets who are prophesying in my name: I did not send them, yet they are saying, 'No sword or famine will touch this land.' Those same prophets will perish by sword and famine. 16 And the people they are prophesying to will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and sword. There will be no one to bury them or their wives, their sons or their daughters. I will pour out on them the calamity they deserve.

*Source not from God makes them false prophets (Matt 7:15)*

15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

### **Test of accuracy of prophecy (21-22)**

*Prophets must be accurate to prove they were sent by God (Jer 28:5-10)*

5 Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord. 6 He said, "Amen! May the Lord do so! May the Lord fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the Lord's house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. 7 Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: 8 From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. 9 But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true." 10 Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah and broke it

*Prophets must be accurate and adhere to God's Word (Deut 13:1-3)*

1 If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, 2 and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," 3 you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.

*Prophets are accurate when God reveals Himself through visions and dreams (Num 12:6)*

6 he said, "Listen to my words: "When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams.

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

#### The Promise of the "Ultimate Prophet" (Deut. 18:15-19)

15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, 16 according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.' 17 And the LORD said to me: 'What they have spoken is good. 18 I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. 19 And it shall be *that* whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require *it* of him'" (NKJV).

This passage is one of the great Messianic prophecies of the Pentateuch. It compliments other prophecies, such as these:

14 So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, You *are* cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. 15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:14-15).

"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people" (Genesis 49:10).

Some have understood this promise of a "Prophet like Moses" to include a line of prophets, up to and including the Messiah. That may be, but the emphasis of this prophecy falls on the "Ultimate Prophet," our Lord Jesus Christ. Twice this coming Prophet is referred to as a prophet "like Moses" (verses 15, 18). In what sense is our Lord "like Moses"? There may be a number of parallels between Moses and Christ, but I don't think this prophecy was meant to call attention to them all. I believe this prophecy was meant to underscore the likeness of our Lord to Moses in a more focused way, which is spelled out in our text.

This coming Prophet will be a Jew, like Moses, One raised up from His brethren. This One who is like Moses is, like Moses, to be heard and obeyed. It is at this point that we come to the main similarity between Moses and the Messiah, I believe. Moses indicates that this coming Prophet will play a role similar to his own. The Jews should therefore respond to the "Ultimate Prophet" as they were supposed to respond to Moses. They are to fear Him and to hear Him. The reason for this is now explained.

Moses goes back to the time when God first appeared to the nation Israel on Mount Horeb (or Mount Sinai). When God appeared on that mountain, it was an awesome sight. More than this, it was a terrifying sight:

18 Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood afar off. 19 Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." 20 And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." 21 So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God *was* (Exodus 5:18-21, NKJV).

When God appeared at Sinai, the people begged Moses that they not be required to come near God, in order to hear His commands. They asked Moses to serve as their mediator and to stand before God, and then to convey

His words to them. When Moses refers to the fear of the people and their petition, he does so from the account found in Deuteronomy 5:23-33:

23 “So it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders. 24 And you said: ‘Surely the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he *still* lives. 25 ‘Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God anymore, then we shall die. 26 ‘For who *is there* of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we *have*, and lived? 27 ‘You go near and hear all that the LORD our God may say, and tell us all that the LORD our God says to you, and we will hear and *do it.*’ 28 Then the LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me: ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right *in* all that they have spoken. 29 ‘Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever! 30 ‘Go and say to them, “Return to your tents.” 31 ‘But as for you, stand here by Me, and I will speak to you all the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe *them* in the land which I am giving them to possess.’ 32 Therefore you shall be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. 33 You shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and *that it may be* well with you, and *that* you may prolong *your* days in the land which you shall possess” (Deuteronomy 5:23-33, NKJV).

Recently, a terrible storm passed through the city of Dallas, Texas, causing considerable wind damage. But this was nothing compared to the devastation caused by the tornadoes that were spawned later on as the storm passed into Oklahoma and Kansas. Those who witnessed that massive tornado (a level 5, with winds up to 260 miles per hour!) said they had never seen anything like it before. They also said they hoped they would never see anything like it again. It was terrifying. Think of what it must have been like to witness the awe-inspiring evidences of God’s presence on Mount Sinai. Those who looked on had never seen anything like that before, and they did not want to see or hear it again. They feared for their lives. And so they begged that Moses become a mediator on their behalf.

We might have expected God to rebuke the Israelites for wanting to keep their distance from Him, but this is not the case at all. God commends the Israelites for their fear, and for their request: **“And the LORD said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be *that* whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require *it* of him”** (Deuteronomy 18:17-19, NKJV). In the Old Testament, men had to keep their distance from God. Boundaries were established around the base of Mount Sinai, and the people were commanded to stay back, lest they die (Exodus 19:12-13). When Moses reached the top of the mountain, God sent him back down, to warn the people again not to get too close (Exodus 19:20-25). It was right for a sinful people to keep their distance from a holy God. In the Old Testament, the operative principle was not “Draw near,” but “Stay back” (see Exodus 3:5).

It was also right for the Israelites to ask that Moses serve as their mediator. It was he who went up and drew near to God on that mountain. It was he who was the mediator of the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. And this is where the Lord Jesus Christ comes in, as the “Prophet like Moses.” Since sinful men cannot enter into the presence of a holy God, they need a mediator between themselves and God. Our Lord became the Mediator of a new covenant. Our Lord came from the presence of God, and He spoke the Father’s words to men:

No one has ever seen God. The only One, himself God, who is in the presence of the Father, has made God known (John 1:18).

41 Then the Jews who were hostile to Jesus began complaining about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven, . . .” (John 6:41).

So they said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus replied, “What I have told you from the beginning. 26 I have many things to say and to judge about you, but the Father who sent me is truthful, and the things I have heard from him I speak to the world” (John 8:25-26).

“I am telling you the things I have seen while with my Father, . . .” (John 8:38a).

49 “For I have not spoken from my own authority, but the Father himself who sent me has commanded me what I should say and what I should speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is eternal life. Thus the things I say, I say just as the Father has told me” (John 12:49-50).

24 “The person who does not love me does not obey my words. And the word you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me” (John 14:24).

14 “You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I no longer call you slaves, because the slave does not understand what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have revealed to you everything I heard from my Father” (John 15:14-15).

Jesus became the Mediator of a new and better covenant than the covenant mediated by Moses:

19 Then he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 20 In the same way he took the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:19-20).

5 For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the Man* Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Timothy 2:5-6, NKJV).

6 But now Jesus has obtained a superior ministry, since the covenant that he mediates is also better and is enacted on better promises. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, no one would have looked for a second one (Hebrews 8:6-7).

13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow sprinkled on those who are defiled consecrated them and provided ritual purity, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to worship the living God. 15 And so he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the eternal inheritance he has promised, since he died to set them free from the violations committed under the first covenant (Hebrews 9:13-15; see also Hebrews 12:24).

Jesus Christ is the One of whom Moses spoke, when he said that a Prophet, like him, would come. It is not surprising then, that Jesus would later say that it will be Moses who will condemn those who reject Him:

36 “But I have a testimony greater than that from John. For the deeds that the Father has assigned me to complete—the deeds I am now doing—testify about me that the Father has sent me. 37 And the Father who sent me has himself testified about me. You people have never heard his voice nor seen his form at any time, 38 nor do you have his word residing in you, because you do not believe the one whom he sent. 39 You study the scriptures thoroughly because you think in them you possess eternal life, and it is these same scriptures that testify about me; 40 but you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life. 41 “I do not accept praise from people, 42 but I know you, that you do not have the love of God within you. 43 I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me. If someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. 44 How can you believe, if you accept praise from one another and don’t seek the praise that comes from the only God? 45 “Do not suppose that I will accuse you before the Father. The one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have placed your hope. 46 If you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. 47 But if you do not believe what Moses wrote, how will you believe my words?” (John 5:36-47).

Like Moses, who spoke with God “**face to face,**” our Lord came from the very presence of God. How interesting that when our Lord came to the earth, claiming to be one with the Father, the Jews compared Him to Moses, and they found Him unacceptable. To the Jews of our Lord’s day, Moses was the ultimate prophet. They were also looking for “the Prophet like Moses.” They first asked John the Baptist if he was “**the Prophet,**” and John indicated that he was not:

19 Now this was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” 20 He confessed—he did not deny but confessed—“I am not the Christ.” 21 So they asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No” (John 1:19-21).

Those whom Jesus called as His disciples recognized Him as the One of whom Moses had spoken:

43 On the next day Jesus wanted to set out for Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” 44 (Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the town of Andrew and Peter.) 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law, and the prophets also wrote about—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:43-45).

After Jesus commenced His public ministry, it did not take some people long to conclude that He was “**the Prophet.**” When He fed the 5,000, the crowd concluded that Jesus was “**the Prophet,**” and they purposed to make Him their king:

14 So when the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus performed, they began to say to one another, “This is certainly *the Prophet who is to come into the world.*” 15 Then Jesus, because he knew they were going to come and seize him by force to make him king, withdrew again up the mountainside alone (John 6:14-15).

Later on, when Jesus appeared in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles, some of the people there concluded that Jesus was, indeed, “**the Prophet**”: “When they heard these words, some of the crowd began to say, ‘This is really the Prophet!’” (John 7:40).

Others were not so sure (John 7:41-44). By and large, the Jewish religious leaders were convinced that Jesus was an imposter. They compared Jesus with Moses and found Him wanting. In part, the reason was because they failed to understand in what way “**the Prophet**” was to be “like Moses.” They expected “**the Prophet**” to agree with their interpretation of the Law, and He did not. Jesus had not come to reject the law as the Jews accused, but to fulfill it. The problem with the Pharisees was that they neither taught the law correctly, nor did they keep it. The law did not prove the Pharisees to be righteous and deserving of heaven; it exposed them as sinners, in need of salvation, the salvation our Lord Himself accomplished at Calvary:

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter will pass from the law until everything takes place. 19 So anyone who breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do this, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches others to do so will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness goes beyond that of the experts in the law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-20).

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For no one is declared righteous before him by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. 21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God, which is attested by the law and the prophets, has been disclosed— 22 namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. 24 But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:19-24).

The Pharisees were convinced that the law (as they interpreted it) condemned Jesus, and proved them right. After all, hadn't Jesus broken the Sabbath on numerous occasions (see Matthew 12:1-2; Luke 6:6-11; 13:10-14; John 5:2-18; 9:16)? Jesus insisted that Moses testified of Him, and that it was Moses who would accuse them in the judgment:

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44).

45 “Do not suppose that I will accuse you before the Father. The one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have placed your hope. 46 If you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. 47 But if you do not believe what Moses wrote, how will you believe my words?” (John 5:45-47).

Moses was not the problem. Moses testified about the coming of Jesus, the Christ. In the Gospels, Moses himself testifies that Jesus is the Christ. He was there, you recall, at the transfiguration of our Lord (Matthew 17:1-4). And yet the Pharisees repeatedly sought to pit Jesus against Moses (John 8:5).

28 They heaped insults on him, saying, “You are his disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses! We do not know where this man comes from!” (John 9:28-29).

Here is where the Jews went wrong in regard to Jesus and Moses. They expected Jesus to be another Moses, that is, to be just like Him. And, to be just like Moses, Jesus would have to agree with them completely. This assumes, of course, that their interpretation of the law of Moses was the *true* interpretation of the law. Because their interpretation of the law was distorted by their traditions, they constantly were in conflict with Jesus and Moses. But even beyond this, the Jews of Jesus' day failed to understand those very significant ways in which Jesus was not “**like Moses.**” Jesus was not entirely “**like Moses**” because He was vastly superior to Moses. Like Moses, Jesus would speak God's Word to men. But while Moses spoke to God on the mountain, Jesus was God. Moses spoke to men for God; Jesus spoke to men *for* God and *as* God. Like Moses, Jesus mediated a covenant. But our Lord's “new covenant” was vastly superior to the “old covenant” mediated by Moses. Our Lord's superiority to Moses is the core of the message of the Book of Hebrews:

1 Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, partners in a heavenly calling, take note of Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess, 2 who is faithful to the one who appointed him, as Moses was too in God's house. 3 For he has come to deserve greater glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house deserves greater honor than

the house itself! 4 For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. 5 Now Moses was **“faithful in all God’s house”** as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken. 6 But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. We are of his house, if in fact we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope we take pride in. 7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Oh, that today you would listen as he speaks! 8 “Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of testing in the wilderness. 9 “There your fathers tested me and tried me, and they saw my works for forty years. 10 “Therefore, I became provoked at that generation and said, ‘Their hearts are always wandering and they have not known my ways.’ 11 “As I swore in my anger, ‘They will never enter my rest!’” (Hebrews 3:1-11).

Notice the argument the writer to the Hebrews develops. Moses was great in God’s house; Jesus the Messiah was far greater. Moses was a servant in God’s house; Jesus was the builder of the house. And, as a result, we should surely heed His words. We should listen as He speaks. This is precisely what God meant for Israel to understand from Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 5 and Deuteronomy 18. And the writer to the Hebrews makes a point of this:

15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God, that no one be like *a bitter root springing up* and causing trouble, and through him many become defiled. 16 And see to it that no one becomes an immoral or godless person like Esau, who *sold his own birthright for a single meal*. 17 For you know that later when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no opportunity for repentance, although he sought the blessing with tears. 18 For you have not come to something that can be touched, to a burning fire and darkness and gloom and a whirlwind 19 and the blast of a trumpet and a voice uttering words such that those who heard begged to hear no more. 20 For they could not bear what was commanded: *“If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.”* 21 In fact, the scene was so terrifying that Moses said, **“I shudder with fear.”** 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the assembly 23 and congregation of the firstborn, who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous, who have been made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks of something better than Abel’s does. 25 Take care not to refuse the one who is speaking! For if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less shall we, if we reject the one who warns from heaven? 26 Then his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, **“I will once more shake not only the earth but heaven too.”** 27 Now this phrase *“once more”* indicates the removal of what is shaken, that is, of created things, so that what is unshaken may remain. 28 So since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us give thanks, and through this let us offer worship pleasing to God in devotion and awe. 29 For **“our God is indeed a devouring fire”** (Hebrews 12:15-29).

When the Israelites beheld the awesome holiness of God on Mount Sinai, they were terrified, and rightly so. They begged not to see or hear God any more, lest they die, beseeching Moses to mediate with God on their behalf. God commended their fear and their recognition of their need for a mediator. Through Moses, God communicated to Israel that He would raise up another prophet, like Moses. At the moment, the Israelites did not realize that this **“Prophet”** would be vastly superior to Moses. If Israel was to fear God and to hear Moses, surely they should fear God and hear “the Prophet like Moses,” who was none other than the promised Messiah. They should fear Him, hear Him, and heed His words. Instead, they refused to hear Him, and they had Him crucified for breaking the Law of Moses.

Were the Hebrew Christians contemplating drawing back from Christ, rather than drawing near? Was this their solution to suffering persecution for His sake? Then they were moving in the wrong direction. The Old Testament saints were to keep their distance from God. When Jesus Christ came to this earth, He came as Immanuel, God with us (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). In truth, the Hebrews would not be drawing back; they would be falling away. The Hebrew saints needed to rekindle a deep sense of fear and reverence for the Lord Jesus. If the sights and sounds of Mount Sinai terrified the Israelites of old, then a realization of who Jesus is and what He has accomplished should inspire even greater fear, fear that should prompt them to draw near, to hear Him, and to obey His Word. This, I believe, is the message of Hebrews, not to mention the rest of the New Testament.

#### **The Prophet and False Prophets (Deut. 18:20-22)**

20 “‘But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ 21 “And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’—22 “when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

The Israelites were to fear God, and to obey the commands God gave to them through the great prophet, Moses. But they were also to look for a coming Prophet, a “Prophet like Moses,” who would speak for God, and who should be heard and obeyed. In addition to watching for this coming “**Prophet**,” the Israelites were to watch out for false prophets. These false prophets would speak presumptuously, as though God were speaking through them. They would seek to “bring God near,” but it would not be the true God with whom they were “in touch.” How was Israel to discern between “**the Prophet**” and these false prophets? If the “**prophet**” spoke “**in the name of other gods**” (verse 20), it was obvious that he was a false prophet. No further test was required. But what of the “**prophet**” who spoke presumptuously “**in the name of the LORD**” (verse 22)? Such a prophet is to be tested by his own words. If what he speaks in the name of the Lord comes to pass, He is a true prophet.<sup>20</sup> If what he says does not come to pass, he is a false prophet and is to be put to death (verse 20).

The final command in our text is not that the false prophet be executed (which has already been stated in verse 20), but rather that he not be feared. This whole passage is about fear. The Israelites are to fear God, as did the previous generation, who stood terror-stricken at the base of Mount Sinai. And because they feared God, they were to hear Moses and to obey him. When the “Prophet like Moses” appears, He is to be feared and obeyed. But the false prophets are not to be feared; they are to be put to death.

*(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/false-prophets-part-ii-deuteronomy-181-22>)*

### **Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

The retirement of a trusted leader can be a time of great stress. If succession plans are not put into place or are not carried out with wisdom and integrity, the organization experiences undue stresses that can spell its demise. God did not want this for His people, and so Moses was given a word by which to reassure them that they would still be led by the Lord and His chosen prophets even after the 40-year tenure of Moses. That leadership had spanned two generations. Moses had taught the Israelites what they needed to know in living as God’s covenant people. Moses wanted to make certain that the people would not engage in practices that would enslave them to the gods of the peoples around them. He wanted the people to be delivered from those influences and fully committed to the Lord as their only God. This is no less true for Christians. The apostle John gave this warning in Revelation 22:18-19:

### **Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary**

God's Mouthpieces - The world is a noisy place filled with screens, phones, talk shows, chat rooms, social media, and so many avenues calling for attention. Nevertheless, God continues to call out for humanity to pay close attention, listen to His voice. He desires for His messages to be heard above all the others. In Old Testament times, the prophets operated as God's mouthpieces. Still, first they needed to hear what the Lord had to say to communicate accurately. God spoke to Moses from a burning bush, capturing his attention. He became one of the Father's initial messengers.

Be Careful - The Bible makes it clear: be extremely careful when calling yourself a prophet. If you make bold statements like "God told me to tell you../" these pronouncements should not then be your own opinions or thoughts. The Bible also warns those who make such spiritual declarations with their roots in a false god or philosophy. No one should blurt out personal opinions or statements claiming to represent God without really knowing Him.

Questions to Ask - How can we be sure if what's being heard is definitely from the true and living God? We ask, "Are the prophecies they are proclaiming coming to pass? Do these statements line up with Scripture?" The apostle John adds that a faithful minister of God's Word confesses Jesus came in the flesh and is absolutely the Son of God; a prophet's words will exalt Christ (1 John 2:18-27).

Listen - Daily, God pleads with all human beings, "Please look in my direction and listen to what I have to say." How can we be sure it's His voice? The key is continually asking the Holy Spirit for His counsel and insight about what is being shared.