

DEUTERONOMY 18:15–20

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, February 7, 2021

Smith

A Prophet

It was February 1406 BC. Moses stood on the slopes of Western Moab across the Jordan from Jericho where the land drops down in steep banks along the river. And there Moses preached a series of sermons, his final sermons, to the people of Israel. This is the context of the Book of Deuteronomy, including our text:

15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. 16 For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.” 17 The LORD said to me: “What they say is good. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. 19 I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name. 20 But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.”

Before Moses, there were just a few men who were called prophets, men like Abraham and Noah, but there had been no one like Moses himself. Moses was something new, something different. Moses was Israel’s leader, judge, lawgiver, the one who God used to **deliver** them from Egypt. Through Moses, the Ten Commandments had come, and all of Israel’s laws. The priesthood, the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the separation of Moses’ family, the Levites, as the special servants of God.

Before Moses, there were preachers like Enoch and Eber, Noah and Abraham, Jacob and Joseph. **Noah** rescued his family from the flood that destroyed the world. There should be gigantic statues and memorials to Noah today, but instead most people think he’s just a myth—maybe because they can’t imagine a destruction so terrible, a need so desperate, and a man who did so much for his people.

Abraham rescued his family and many other people from war. **Joseph** rescued a whole nation and all the family of Israel from famine. The severity of the trouble and size of the group hardly matters; they saved their people.

Then came Moses, who did one more thing that the others had not done. God used him to save his people, but then he also **wrote it all down** at the command of the Lord. Now he was 120 years old. In the closing months and days of his life, Moses told his people that God would replace him.

When The Lord describes this replacement in verse 18, there is even a hint of the work of the **Holy Trinity**, where the Lord says, “I will raise up a prophet” – the work of the Father. “I will

put my words in his mouth” – the work of the Holy Spirit. “He will tell them everything” – the work and ministry of God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

But let’s back up a little. This one coming would be a **prophet**. The Hebrew word for prophet means a go-between, someone who carries the prayers of the people to God, and who brings back God’s word to the people. Moses did this in a very athletic, physical sense, by actually walking up and down the mountain of God, Mount Sinai, to carry the stone tablets down from God to the people.

But now there would be another prophet. There were times when Israel asked for things that didn’t please God. When they wanted a king, it was for the wrong reason. It was because the other nations had kings. But when they asked for a man to go between God and them, a prophet like Moses, the Lord said that was a good idea. In their sinful state, they were terrified to approach God or to have God approach them.

So now, for the next years and centuries, the Lord would raise up many prophets. Beginning with Joshua and continuing through men like Elijah and Elisha, God sent prophets to his people to lead them spiritually by example and by calling the people to repentance. God also sent certain other prophets to write down his word as well as proclaim it, and men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, all the way down to Malachi, they gave the people the word to take to heart and also to read, to research, to study, and to memorize.

All of these prophets pointed ahead to the ultimate prophet that Moses was truly pointing at: The Messiah, the Savior Jesus Christ. In fact, all of the other prophets who came after Moses were inferior to Moses. They did not bring any new message or word from God. They all held up Moses as the word, as the law, as the final say. In all of those other prophets, from Joshua to Malachi, there was only a continuation of Moses and servants of Moses. But this new Prophet, the ultimate Prophet, would teach greater things than Moses.

Jesus is like Moses in certain things:

1. called by God. The father proclaimed this at Jesus’ baptism.
2. gives only God’s word. Jesus said “These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.” (John 14)
3. go-between. Paul said, “There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ.” (1 Tim. 2:5)
4. from among the Israelites. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, of the house of David.
5. rescued God’s people. Peter preached directly to the Sanhedrin: “God exalted Jesus Christ to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that we might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel” (Acts 5:31).

But Jesus is greater than Moses:

1. Jesus perfect and without sin (Moses was a murderer, and disobeyed about circumcision in his own family & sinned in the giving of the water in the desert (Number 20).
2. Jesus gave the gospel in its clearest, purest, and most perfect way.
3. Jesus made the perfect sacrifice, not just commanding sacrifices. He gave himself for our sins on the cross.

4. Moses and the other prophets only pointed ahead to Christ, but Christ is the one we all look to.
5. Finally, Jesus rescued all people, not just a few or a certain family or even a certain nation. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. “

It is a little oversimplifying to say the Moses brought the law and Jesus brought the gospel. But it also makes the difference between the two crystal clear: Because Moses pointed to Jesus, and Jesus is the fulfillment of everything in Moses. This is true in every way and in hundreds of details. A few years ago we looked at so many of those details in our email study of Leviticus and every aspect of every single sacrifice that pointed to the perfect **culmination, fulfillment, and resolution** in Jesus and the one sacrifice, once for all sins of all people for all time and all eternity.

But let's look just now at one detail, one piece of fabric. The curtain in the tabernacle showed how man is separated from God because of man's sin and God's holiness. Only an atoning sacrifice for our sins can achieve access to God. Through Moses, a process was made that allowed that atonement once a year, so that only the people's high priest could enter through the curtain. It was death for anyone even to attempt to go through for any other reason.

Think of any sin on your conscience. Think of the sins Moses describes in our text: “Anyone who does not listen to my words that the Prophet Jesus speaks in my name,” God says, will be called to account. When we set up our own agenda or our own opinion or our own interpretation of the Word of God that does not match what God has said and what God has explained, will be held accountable for that sin—a sin against the **First Commandment**, which sets **the self** above God—a sin against the **Second Commandment**, which sets **my name** above God's name—and a sin against the **Third Commandment**, which sets **my word** and my opinion above God's holy Word. All of these and all of our other sins keep us on this side of the curtain, away from God's holiness.

But when Jesus died on the cross, that curtain was torn in half from top to bottom, and it never needs to be remade, restitched or repaired, because it is no longer necessary. Hebrews 10 says. **“We have confidence to enter the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain.”**

This is what our Prophet Jesus has done, so much more than a Prophet. He has given us forgiveness for all the things Moses warned about and commanded us not to do. Whatever our sins, whatever our temptations, whatever our failures, they are covered here, now, today, and forever, for all eternity, by the blood of Jesus our Savior.

Live to thank him, and know that your stumbles along the way are covered still. The curtain remains torn. The way remains open. And the way is and ever shall be our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.