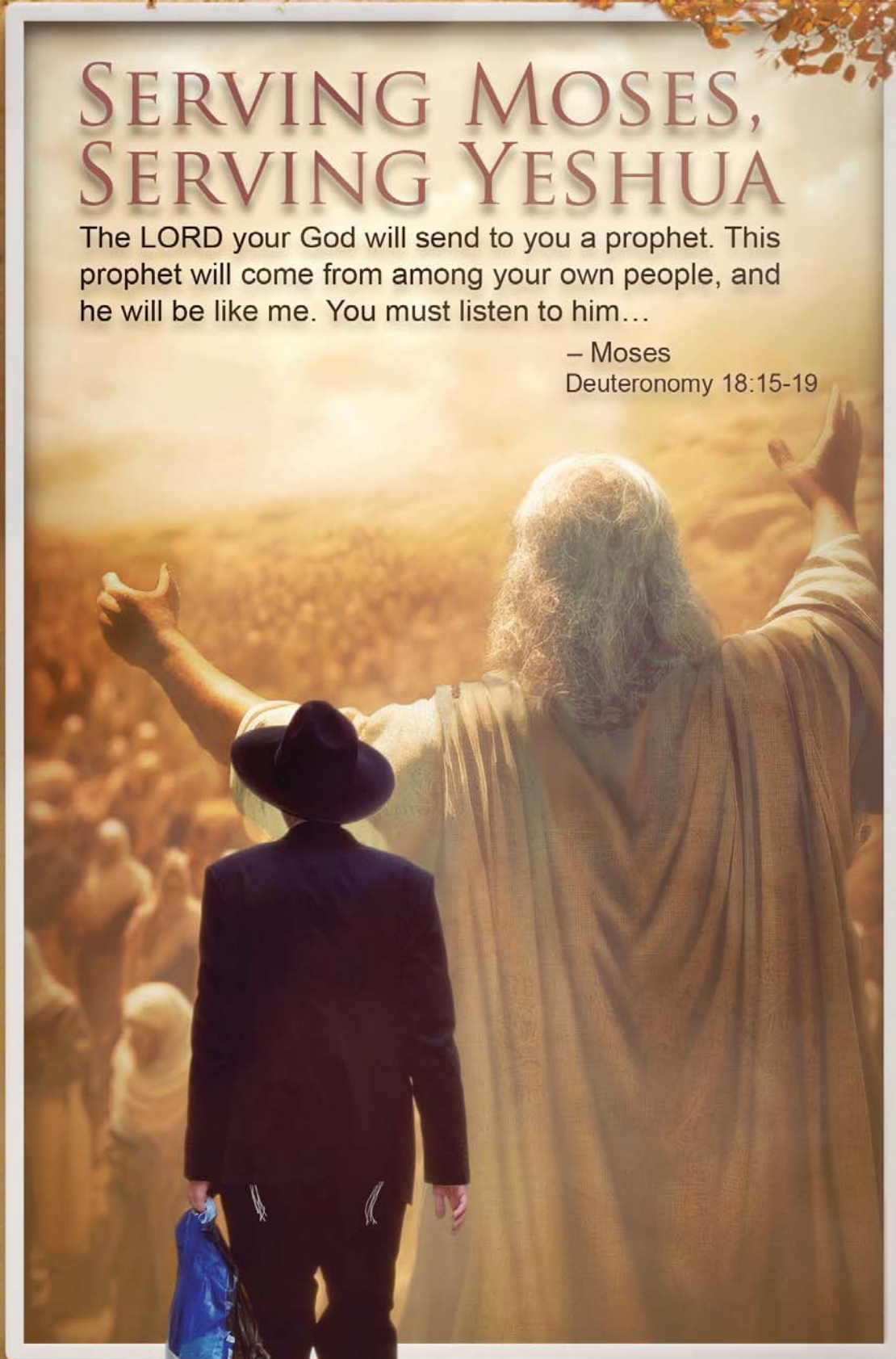




SERVING MOSES, SERVING YESHUA

The LORD your God will send to you a prophet. This prophet will come from among your own people, and he will be like me. You must listen to him...

– Moses
Deuteronomy 18:15-19





In John 9, there is controversy with the Pharisees because of Yeshua's healing of the man born blind. As emotions reached a crescendo in verse 28, the Pharisees reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses."

For too many people—including the Pharisees of Yeshua's day, Rabbinic Judaism of our own day, and sadly, for many of us as well—Moses and Yeshua are placed in antithesis to one another: *You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses*. The irony is that Moses not only pointed to Yeshua but also commanded obedience to Him and warned against disregarding His authority. One of the most significant claims made by early Jewish believers in their witness to Israel is one of the most overlooked claims in our evangelism today.

With that introduction, allow me to present to you the "Cinderella" of Messianic prophecy—that is to say, to one of the most significant Messianic prophecies in Scripture, Deuteronomy 18:15-19, which is also one of the most neglected. Here we find the reconciliation between Moses and Yeshua and a perspective on the Jewishness of the gospel.

The Prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15-19 and 34:10

Listen as Moses addresses the nation on the plains of Moab with this remarkable prophecy:

¹⁵The LORD your God will send to you a prophet. This prophet will come from among your own people, and he will be like me. You must listen to him...

¹⁷"The LORD said to me, ... ¹⁸I will send them a prophet like you. This prophet will be one of their own people. I will tell him what he must say, and he will tell the people everything I command. ¹⁹And 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."² (Deut. 18:15, 17-19)²

In the last chapter of Deuteronomy, which also records the death of Moses, this prophecy is taken up again. In 34:10, the text states, *Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face*. This final chapter was probably added to the Torah when the Hebrew Scriptures were put in their final form, probably under the hand of Ezra. This verse indicates that at the end of the period of the Hebrew Scriptures, this singular individual had not yet come, but He was still anticipated.

The Prophecy in the Hebrew Scriptures

The question is: Of whom does Moses speak? In the storyline of Torah, written by the hand of Moses, mankind's greatest problem is sin, which is universal and alienates humanity from God. This

universal dilemma would be addressed in the call of Abram and in the covenantal promises made to him, his son Isaac, and his 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.

God's Relationship with Moses

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

⁶[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. ⁷Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; ⁸with 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?"³

In this passage, God sets Moses apart from other prophets and accentuates the closeness of their communication. In this context, I want to call your attention to the "frame" of Deuteronomy 18:15-19. In verse 15, Moses says of

¹ This paper is an adaptation and expansion of a contribution in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament*, ed. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), pp. 325-41.

² *The Holy Bible: Easy-to-Read Version* (Crete, IL: Bible League International, 2016).

³ Unless otherwise noted, translations of Scripture are according to the NASB.



the coming prophet, *You must listen to him*. In verse 19, God says, *And 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—in fact, the authority of God Himself.

A New Moses for a New Exodus

So, we return to our question: “Of whom does Moses speak?” Since the Torah has made it 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.⁴ The prophet that God promised to raise up in Deuteronomy 18:15 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.

The only other major passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that can be said to supplement this prophecy of One “like Moses” are the Servant Songs in the book of Isaiah.⁵ Moses was called “the servant of the LORD” on many occasions,⁶ and Isaiah spoke of this coming Prophet-like-Moses as the Servant of the LORD.⁷ In these Servant Songs,

language from the Exodus account is deliberately used to portray a new Exodus—one from captivity to sin. For this new Exodus, we need a new Moses, and He is identified as the Suffering Servant. Certainly, both Moses and Isaiah were directly prophesying about the Messiah whom God would raise up.

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

The Prophet in the Four Gospels

In the Gospels, there is no explicit quotation of the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18 nor is reference ever made to Yeshua as the Prophet “like Moses.” It is clear, however, that the identity of Yeshua as the One of whom Moses spoke is developed by other means.

References to Yeshua as “a prophet” or “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. Due to the constraints of space, I will pass over His birth, the sojourn in Egypt, His baptism (as He picks up where Moses left off),

and temptation in the wilderness, and go to Cana at the beginning of His Galilean ministry.

The First Miracle

In John 2, we read of Yeshua turning water into wine. In verse 11, John specifically draws attention to the fact that this was Yeshua’s 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.”⁸ But how could Torah have been set aside prior to the inauguration of the New Covenant? Yeshua needed to fulfill its demands (Gal. 4:4-5). This interpretation, while ancient, is nevertheless without merit. Instead, it is better to see that Yeshua is introducing Himself as the Prophet-like-Moses. Moses’ first public miracle was turning the water of Egypt to blood, symbolizing judgment and death. Yeshua’s first miracle was turning the water into wine, symbolizing redemption and its accompanying joy.

Interestingly, Exodus 7:19 says that this plague of turning water into blood affected rivers, streams, pools, reservoirs, and even the water in *vessels of wood and in vessels of stone*. Yeshua’s first miracle should be seen as His presentation of Himself as the promised Prophet and as further signaling that

⁴ See 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).

⁵ See Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12; and perhaps 61:1-3.

⁶ Num. 12:7; Deut. 34:5; Josh. 1:1, 2, 7; 8:31; Heb. 3:5.

⁷ See also, e.g., *b. Sota* 14a.

⁸ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), p. 36.



the time had come for a new Exodus, an exodus from the bondage of sin.

Yeshua “Passes By” (Mark 6:48).

One of Mark’s purposes in his Gospel was to present Yeshua as the Prophet-like-Moses “who inaugurates the new exodus.”⁹ In Mark 6:45-52, we come to the episode of Yeshua walking on the surface of the Sea of Galilee. A storm has come up; He has seen that the disciples are in trouble, and He is coming to their aid. Yet verse 48 says, *He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them.* Doesn’t that sound strange?

In Exodus 33 and 34, Moses had been put in a cleft of the rock (33:22) so that God could reveal Himself to Moses as He caused His glory to

“pass by.” Four times in this passage, the same verb is used (*avar*), and it is only used of the LORD who passes by. In Exodus 33:19, God says, *I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you.* Exodus 34:6-7 states: *Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.”* In these passages, the Lord passes by to reveal Himself as a gracious and compassionate Savior.

When we turn to Mark 6 and to this episode on the Sea of Galilee, we need to understand that whereas God revealed Himself to Moses as He

passed by, on this occasion, Yeshua revealed Himself to His disciples as the divine Prophet and as the LORD God Himself. God told Moses, *I AM WHO I AM* (Ex. 3:14), and Yeshua said to the disciples, *Take courage, I AM* (although it is usually translated, “it is I”).

There is not space to examine the many other allusions to Yeshua as the Prophet-like-Moses in the Gospels, but I want to conclude with one more feature.

Yeshua and the Jewish Leaders

In many of the encounters Yeshua had with the religious authorities, He was presented as an authoritative teacher of Torah. He knew the Scriptures and the Mosaic Law better than they did. In Mark 2:28, He claimed to be *Lord even*

⁹Dane Ortlund, “The Old Testament Background and Eschatological Significance of Jesus Walking on the Sea (Mark 6:45–52),” *Neotestamentica* 46 (2012), p. 321.





of the Sabbath. Yeshua's authoritative proclamation and the hostility it would engender are characteristics of the Prophet-like-Moses. Yeshua exercised His authority out of a genuine concern for the Temple and its holiness. In His authority, He is seen to be like Moses. It was Moses who instituted the Tabernacle (which, of course, was the precursor of the Temple), and he oversaw the establishment of the priesthood.

Moses' authority did not sit well with the Israelites in his day, nor was Yeshua's authority accepted by the Sanhedrin. The attitude of Israel's leadership toward Moses was expressed in the words of Exodus 2:14: *Who made you a prince or a judge over us?* Likewise, the refusal of the religious leadership to recognize the authority of Yeshua resulted in an increasing level of hostility, which ultimately led to the crucifixion.

The response to Yeshua 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 harden as He teaches and performs miracles. On two separate occasions, Moses faced the prospect of death by stoning at the hands of the people.¹⁰ This was the sort of resistance that they both faced.

On one of these occasions,¹¹ God asked Moses, *How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will*

they not believe in Me despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst? The wording is very similar in John 12:37, *But though He [Yeshua] had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him.* In the account of the healing of the man born blind in John 9, the irony of the position in which the religious leadership finds itself is beautifully highlighted. The formerly blind man testifies to the religious leaders that Yeshua is *the Prophet* (i.e., like Moses; v. 17).¹² Yet even as they are rejecting Him and His disciples, they are claiming to be the disciples of Moses!

Each of the Gospels bears witness to this hostility, and the resistance results in Yeshua's seven-fold pronouncement of woe against the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23.¹³ The response of the leaders is in sharp contrast to that of the crowds, who were saying, *This is the prophet Yeshua, from Nazareth in Galilee* (Mt. 21:11). The hostility of the priests and Levites is suggestive of the rebellion of Korah and the Levites in Numbers 16. This same antagonism was extended to the apostles and the disciples of Yeshua as well.

Rejection was always a result of the ministry of God's prophets and would be supremely evident in the death of the Prophet-like-Moses. Even as Moses had offered himself as an atoning redeemer (Ex. 32:32), the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15 must have included Messiah's willingness

to offer Himself. Only in this manner could atonement be made not only for Messiah's own people but for *all the families of the earth* (Gen. 12:3). The opposition that Moses experienced extends through the prophets to John the Baptist, Yeshua, and the believer today.

The Prophet in Acts

When we turn to the book of Acts and look at the birth of Jewish evangelism, we find that a presentation of Yeshua as the Prophet-like-Moses was an important tool. Indeed, the only explicit New Testament citations of Deuteronomy 18:15 come from the book of Acts.

Preaching about Yeshua 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 Yeshua and Moses are adversaries but that Moses is actually a witness to the identity of Yeshua—more than that, Moses is actually the prosecuting attorney, demanding obedience to Yeshua and warning that the only alternative is destruction.¹⁴ The Jewish people must listen to Yeshua or suffer the judgment of God, even as their forefathers did in the wilderness, since Yeshua is the Prophet-like-Moses.

¹⁰ See Ex. 17:4 and Num. 14:10.

¹¹ Num. 14:11.

¹² Although the definite article is not present, the grammatical construction requires invoking Colwell's Rule. This means that "prophet" here should not be translated as an indefinite noun simply because of the absence of the article. After the blind man's confession, the leaders threaten to expel anyone who confesses Yeshua as Messiah from the synagogue (v. 22). The absence of the article may, counterintuitively, draw more attention and emphasis than its presence.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 269-397.

¹⁴ The warning here comes from Lev. 23:29 but is consistent with the warning in Deut. 18:19.



In Acts 7, Stephen quoted the prophecy from Deuteronomy 18 just before his martyrdom. He insisted that Yeshua was the Prophet-like-Moses and explained that the leaders had not heeded the warning to listen to Him but instead had offered Him up for crucifixion. In Acts 7:37, Stephen 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 Acts, as Jacob Jervell states, "Israel has not rejected the gospel, but has become divided over the issue."¹⁵

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, Yeshua. 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 nor did they twist Scripture to conform to their faith in Yeshua. When they saw fulfillment of this prophecy in Yeshua, it was because they were reading Torah correctly. To truly follow Moses is to follow Yeshua. To be a disciple of Moses is to take on the yoke of Yeshua. To serve Moses is to serve Yeshua.

In our current context, where Jewishness is often defined as a rejection of faith in Yeshua, does His role as the Prophet-like-Moses and the rejection that both Moses and Yeshua suffered offer a message we may have overlooked? Might evangelistic materials developed around this theme not lead

to fruitful opportunities to share the gospel? By serving Yeshua, we are also serving Moses, for he spoke of the One who would come after him.

Messiah is most often conceptualized as a king. Habad posters proclaim Menachem Mendel Schneerson as "king Messiah." Was Yeshua a king? Of course! But first, He was to come as the Prophet like Moses.



Jim R. Sibley, PhD, is Research Professor at Israel College of the Bible in Netanya, Israel. He and his wife, Kathy, lived in Israel for 16 years and have served in Jewish ministry for many years.

¹⁵ Jacob 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), p. 49.

¹⁶ The translation is the author's, with assistance from Golan Broshi. This passage is not found in the English translations of the Rabbinic Bible.



The Prophecy in Judaism

Traditionally, rabbinic literature denies any Messianic interpretation of Deuteronomy 18:15-19 or 34:10. An important exception to this consensus may be found in Rabbi Levi ben

Gershon (1288–1344). When he comments on 34:10, which he himself links to the earlier passage, he says:

He is King Messiah... and he is the one about whom the prophet said, "*and he will delight in the fear of the LORD not by the sight of his eyes will he judge nor by the hearing of his ears will he rebuke*"; but by his signs and his wonders, HaShem will change [the languages of the nations] to a clear language to call everyone in the name of the LORD and to worship him with one intent, just as HaShem took Israel to be raised up to His worship by tremendous signs and wonders which He showed them in Egypt and at the sea and in the desert. And here I would think that the most wondrous sign will be the resurrection from the dead, He will be revealed, and He will be seen to the ends of the earth; and at this all the Gentiles will believe that the LORD is God, and they will say that their fathers had inherited a lie and nothing that they had is of any value.¹⁶