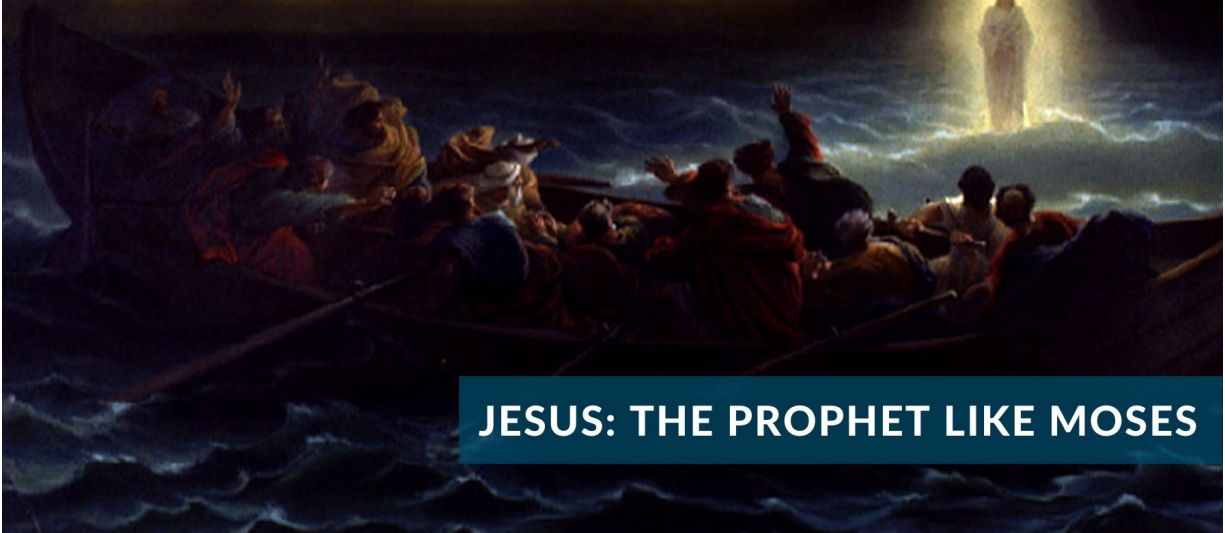


# THE STORM OF REVELATION



## JESUS: THE PROPHET LIKE MOSES

*Why does the text say that Jesus intended to pass by his frightened disciples on the lake, and how does that have to do with Moses' divine encounter on Sinai? Part of our ongoing series "Jesus, the Prophet Like Moses."*

BY DR. JIM SIBLEY

A growing number of New Testament scholars recognize the importance of the Jewish context of the Gospel of Mark.[1] Mark presents Jesus as the Prophet like Moses, who inaugurates a new Exodus—an exodus from slavery to sin to redemption through faith in him.[2] This is seen throughout Mark but especially in Mark 6:45–52, the episode of Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus and his disciples had left Capernaum for a deserted place (v. 32), yet it was a place where there were “villages round about” (v. 36). Jesus miraculously fed the 5,000, and as the day comes to a close, Jesus sent the disciples to “cross over” to Bethsaida by boat (v. 45), while he climbs a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee to pray. There are different reconstructions of their movements based on these clues, but it is possible that the deserted area was between Magdala and Gennesaret on the northwestern shore.

The Sea of Galilee is only about four miles wide, so even though it was at night, with the light of the full moon and with his vantage point, he could see that they were not making any progress for the wind was against them. By the time he saw that they were in trouble, it was probably around midnight.

### **He Intended to Pass Them By**

Jesus left the hilltop to go to their aid. Mark tells us that Jesus came to them at about the fourth watch of the night, which was between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. It is worth noting that God destroyed the Egyptian army



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in the Red Sea during “the morning watch” (Exod 14:24), which would have been between 2:00 and 6:00 a.m.

To the disciples’ surprise, Jesus was walking on the stormy sea. In fact, Jesus’ power over the waters of the Sea of Galilee is reminiscent of the Lord’s power through Moses to conquer the Red Sea (Exod 14:21). As Moses divided the sea and walked through it on dry ground, Jesus was “walking on the lake” (v. 49). Just as Moses shouted to the people “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today” (Exod 14:13), so Jesus tells his terrified disciples, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid” (v. 50).

To our surprise, however, we read that Jesus is intending to pass them by! This could not have been the intention of Jesus, for it was because of their need that he had come to them in the first place (v. 48). So how are we to understand this?

### **He was the Prophet Like Moses**

The Greek literally reads, “He wanted to pass by them.”<sup>[3]</sup> The verb “pass by” should be taken in the sense of “pass before them.” What Mark described was a revelation by Jesus of his deity. In Exodus 33:19–34:7, Moses asks God to show him his glory, and God responds by hiding Moses in a cleft of the rock as he caused his glory to “pass by.” Four times in this passage the same verb is used (Heb., עבר, *avar*), and it is only used here of the Lord who passes by. In these passages, the Lord passes by to reveal himself as a gracious and compassionate Savior. <sup>[4]</sup>

Whereas God revealed Himself to Moses as he passed by, on this occasion, Jesus revealed himself to his disciples as the Prophet like Moses, as the Lord God Himself. God told Moses, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exod 3:14), and Jesus literally said to the disciples, “Take courage, I AM.”<sup>[5]</sup> He is greater than Moses. He is the God who revealed himself to Moses.

But the disciples did not understand. John Sailhamer comments, “Once again, Jesus’ miracle seems to go beyond that of the events of Israel in the desert. As is the case of the desert narratives in the Pentateuch, Mark’s conclusion here highlights the unbelief and hardness of heart of the disciples: ‘They had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened’ (6:52).”<sup>[6]</sup> The passive here suggests that the Lord may have prevented them from understanding at that time, even as the eyes of the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:16 “were kept from recognizing him”. In this, they were very much like their forebears who accompanied Moses in the Exodus from Egypt.

This episode reveals Jesus as the Prophet like Moses, but it actually shows us more about his disciples. Remember, it is the disciples who receive the revelation. In this, they are in the role of Moses, and Jesus is revealed as the God of Israel.

The Feast of Shavuot (Pentecost) is traditionally associated with the giving of the Law. Here we see Jesus as the promised Prophet like Moses who reveals himself as the God of Israel and with his death will bring a new Torah, a new covenant, and a new power to live the life God intends—on the Feast of Shavuot.

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### **Footnotes**

1. E.g., cf. Barry Blackburn, *Theios Anēr and the Markan Miracle Traditions: A Critique of the Theios Anēr Concept as an Interpretive Background of the Miracle Traditions Used by Mark*, WUNT 2/40 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990).

2. Dane Ortlund, “The Old Testament Background and Eschatological Significance of Jesus Walking on the Sea (Mark 6:45–52),” *Neotestamentica* 46 (2012), 321. See also Kenneth E. Bailey, “A Banquet of Death and a Banquet of Life: A Contextualized Study of Mark 6:1–52,” *Theological Review* (Beirut) 29 (2008): 78–82.

3. καὶ ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς.

4. Ortlund also points out, “The first time Jesus calmed the sea in Mark, the account ends with the disciples asking, ‘Who then is this?’. In Mark’s second account of Jesus calming the sea, two chapters later, this question is answered.”

5. ἐγώ εἰμι.

6. John Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 459.