

## **Genesis to Jesus: Prophet**

Deuteronomy 18:15-22

June 7, 2026

### **Prayer**

The Bible contains all we need to know but not all we might want to know. There are many stories that make me hunger for more detail. Like in Acts 23 when Paul's nephew foiled the plot to kill his uncle by sharing what he knew with Paul and then the Roman commander.

Who was this kid? How old was he and what sort of relationship did he have with his uncle? How did he hear about this plot? Did he have access to the Sanhedrin? If so, how and why? So many questions.

Or how about this one? Capernaum was an influential and prosperous town. It sat on an international highway, served as a major regional administrative center, housed a Roman military garrison...and was the place Jesus chose as His ministry headquarters.

While he was there Jesus healed the slave of the city's centurion, the guy with significant military muscle. He also resurrected the daughter of the synagogue's leader, the guy with significant religious influence. I wonder what sort of impact this had? Did Jesus and His followers enjoy an extra layer of political and religious protections that made Capernaum a safe and restful haven?

Of all the stories that generate questions there is one that has intrigued me the most. In Luke 24 we read how the resurrected Jesus taught two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus. Luke records, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (Lk 24:27).

Later, when He appeared to all His disciples Jesus said, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures (Lk 24:44-45).

Wouldn't you like to be part of that Bible study! I think we can be. While the resurrected Jesus is with His Father, His Spirit now resides in us. That same Spirit whom Jesus said would teach us all things and remind us of everything He has said to us (Jn 14:26).

How does the Old Testament point to Jesus and what does this tell us about God's heart? We will use this summer to travel from Genesis to Jesus as we consider some of what Jesus must have taught His disciples after His resurrection. Our goal is to gain a clearer picture of who God is and what His heart is like.

Each Sunday can stand on its own, but when you put them together you will begin to see a more detailed portrait of our Lord. Olivia Estep has done a great job illustrating this through the image you will see growing in detail with every sermon.

It is my prayer that every message this summer will help us clarify the image of Christ and God's heart for each of us. I look forward to walking this path together.

The Hebrew Bible has three primary divisions—the Law, the Prophets and the Writings—and Jesus said he is mentioned in each one. Today, we begin our journey with the prophets, who they are, why they exist, and how they point to Jesus.

The starting point is found in the book of Deuteronomy. This is the fifth of the five books of the Torah. It is called Deuteronomy because it is the second giving of the law (*deuteros* = second. *nomos* = law).

At this point in the story the Israelites had been in the wilderness for 40 years, which is enough time for an entire generation to die off and a new one to be born. In other words, this group had no personal memory of what it was like to receive God's law at Mount Sinai. It was a story for them, rather than an experience.

Deuteronomy records how Moses gave God's law to the new generation and called them to be faithful to the covenant God made with them at Mount Sinai. It also helped calm their fears a bit.

They all knew Moses was getting older and the people were concerned. The only leader they knew was Moses. How could they hear from God if Moses was not around to be their prophet? So, in chapter 18 we read:

<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.'

<sup>17</sup> "Then the Lord said to me, 'What they have said is right. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on my behalf. <sup>20</sup> But any prophet who falsely claims to speak in my name or who speaks in the name of another god must die.'

What is a prophet? A prophet is a person chosen by God to communicate His message to His people. Why did God give them a prophet? Because they asked for one. God's presence and voice were so terrifying that they asked for a mediator (Ex 20:18-19; Heb 12:18-21<sup>i</sup>).

So, Moses was appointed by God to be their mediator, their prophet who would communicate God's words and will. Many people today think of a prophet as one who predicts the future. While that was part of what God's prophet did, their primary purpose was to receive God's message and faithfully communicate it to the people.

What is interesting is that this promise of a prophet to come has both singular and plural elements. There is one prophet who is coming but many prophets will come. Each one will be like Moses in that they will give the people the information they receive from God. But none of them will come close to the kind of prophet Moses was.

The last verses of Deuteronomy say that there has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses (Dt 34:10-12). The group of prophets were important, but they were not like the singular prophet. He was seen as being different from the others.

This expectation for the arrival of another Moses-like prophet took on messianic connotations (Jn 1:21, 25, 45; Acts 3:22; 7:37). People were looking for this guy because when he comes you can be sure God is about to do a mighty work.

Prophets were never self-appointed. To be a prophet meant that God brought you into His presence to commission you as His spokesperson. It also meant that God's Spirit would come upon you and that from time to time you would be invited back to God's presence so you could hear what is going on and learn what God wants to do.<sup>ii</sup>

Prophets had God's calling, God's Spirit, and God's presence. They had access to information that brings life. But God's prophets were not alone in the world. Other cultures professed other gods and these gods had their own spokespersons.

In that day and age people went to the different gods to learn how they could limit their difficulties and expand their successes. Every god had authoritative influencers who filled social media space with what their god said was true and what needed to be done. Each leader sought to increase their influence by growing the number of people who subscribed to their message.

The people of Israel had access to all these other voices and were given the choice. Who would they listen to? Would they listen to YHWH or to one of the influencers of the surrounding culture? It is an important question.

God thought it was important too. In the passage just before this one Moses told this new generation, "When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there" (18:9). Don't listen to them or do what they do. Do what my prophet tells you to do.

Before God's words were written down, a human prophet was the means God used to bring His word to His people. This led to a new industry, the arrival of false prophets, influencers who were trying to gain subscribers to their message.

We are so saturated in words that we might not think this is much of an issue. It is just another voice in the crowd. But God saw it differently. This false voice was such a big deal that anyone who falsely claimed to speak in God's name, or spoke in the name of another god and so encouraged people to submit to a different authority, should be put to death.

This makes me squirm a bit. Death penalty? Really? For a moment, put aside the discomfort you may feel and let the importance sink in. Drawing people away from what God wants them to know is so serious it is viewed as a capital offense.

But the speaker is not the only one who holds responsibility. The one who hears the prophet is required to listen to him. Did you catch verse 19? God said, "I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on my behalf." What does it mean to listen?

The *Shema* is a foundational declaration of faith for the Jewish people that many recite at least twice a day. It gets its name from the opening line. "Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." The word "hear" is the word *shema*, but it means much more than perceiving a sound.

To hear is to listen. It is a command to pay close attention and respond with obedient action. If you don't do something about what was said, then you really didn't hear what was said. You didn't listen.

This helps us better understand Jesus' familiar words. After a parable He would often say, "Those who have ears to hear, let them hear."

Moses told them that listening to God's words leads to life but following any other words will lead to death so leading someone away from God's words was considered a capital offense. It makes sense, then, that they developed a way to tell the difference between a true and a false prophet. There are four key criteria.

First, do the prophet's words align with what God has already revealed? God will not contradict Himself. So, if the prophet's words do not align with something God has already said, don't believe him.<sup>iii</sup>

Second, if the words are predictive or speak of a coming judgement, does it come to pass? This is a tough one because the prediction could be years in the future. So, this criterion could not be rigidly applied. It would be pointless if a call to repentance was only believed after the predicted judgment was fulfilled.

Third, was this person's life accompanied by some wondrous things? It could be miracles or signs or some profound personal sacrifice that was made to help communicate the message God wanted to send.

Finally, what is the prophet's life like? Here is where the other criteria come together. Do they worship YHWH alone. Is their message aligned with His? Did what they proclaim come to be? Is their message accompanied by miracles or personal sacrifice?

When seen together over time, these criteria forged a prophet's reputation. When the criteria consistently lined up over the years you could trust the prophet's words. If not, then don't fear what he says.

Jesus addressed this same topic in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:15-20). He said that false prophets are wolves in sheep's clothing. They look harmless but they are actually death in disguise. The only way to identify them is by looking at the fruit their lives produce. That takes time and thoughtful observation. If you want to know what that fruit looks and tastes like, read the rest of the Sermon. He's pretty clear about it.

God said, "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." "You must listen to him." While there were many prophets to come, only one would be like Moses and whenever he arrived you could be certain God was about to do a great work.

- Moses inaugurated the Kingdom of Israel. Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of God.
- Moses mediated a covenant that set up God as King. Jesus mediated a new covenant that set up Christ as king.
- Moses led them out of bondage to Egypt. Jesus leads people out of bondage to sin.
- Moses gave the bread from heaven. Jesus is the bread from heaven.
- Moses satisfied the Jews in the wilderness. Jesus satisfied Jews and Gentiles in the wilderness.
- Moses was servant in God's house. Jesus is son over God's house.
- Moses went up a mountain to meet with God. Jesus went up a mountain to meet with Moses and Elijah.
- Moses set up the sacrifice. Jesus is the sacrifice.
- Moses gave the law. Jesus fulfilled the law.

The list goes on but the point is clear. Jesus is the prophet like Moses. The one we must listen too. It begs the question. Why should we consider Jesus' words as more authoritative than any of the other voices clamoring for our attention these days? Let's run it through the criteria.

His words align with all God has said. Several times Jesus said "I only do what my Father tells me to do and only say what my Father tells me to say." (Jn 5:19; 7:16; 8:28; 14:10). He said, "If you've seen me you've seen the Father." "I and the Father are one." Jesus spoke with authority that amazed those who heard Him. Jesus speaks God's word to us without fail.

What He predicted, from his arrest, trial, abuse, crucifixion, resurrection and the destruction of Jerusalem, have all come to pass. Other promises—like His second coming—are certain to happen.

And what can we say about signs and wonders? No one did the number or scope of miracles like Jesus and His own resurrection from the dead is the one that stands above them all. These wondrous works confirm the truth of what He said. Finally, consider the fruit of His life. Look at how he lived. Consider the consistency of His life and teaching. Put any other voice next to Jesus and it does not even come close.

Can you feel it? Can you see it? From the very start God's heartfelt desire has been to speak to His people. He wants you to know and listen to His words of life. But that's not all. His heart is also to empower His people to speak on His behalf.

Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He said, "As you go about your day, make disciples of anyone from any nation." Paul expressed his understanding to the Corinthians (2 Cor 5:19-21).

And [God] has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

You and I have been commissioned to carry God's word to the world. We are God's messengers, His ambassadors. He called us, gave us His Spirit and sent us out as if God were making His appeal through us!

I am convinced that Deuteronomy 18:18 is one of the passages the resurrected Jesus shared with His disciples.<sup>iv</sup> Jesus is the prophet like Moses who communicated God's words that show us the way to life, predicted what was to come, displayed signs and wonders, and lived a life which produced fruit that touches us today.

And there is something else Jesus did as a prophet. He offered a personal sacrifice that went far beyond any sacrifice any other prophet ever made.

Moses mediated the old covenant. Jesus mediated the new. On the night before the Lamb of God sacrificed His life to pay for the sins of the world, Jesus took the bread and said, "This bread is my body, broken for you. This do in remembrance of me."

After they had finished the meal he took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant, made in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of your sins."

The apostle Paul adds that whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Can you see the connection? We receive God's word of life through the bread and the cup and prophetically proclaim God's word of life through the bread and the cup. What we give away is only what we have received.

Life is so very full of messages that we spend most of our day managing or being distracted by what we hear. I encourage you to carve out the next few moments of quiet as a space to listen to the voice of God.

Is there a scripture passage He has led you to? Was something said today that grabbed your attention? Take them to the Lord and ask Him to give you more information.

Or maybe nothing comes to mind or you have been too distracted to hear God's voice speaking to you. If that is the case, take this time to just be quiet before the Lord. As you block out the other voices that usually grab your attention, become aware of the topics or worries or emotions that surface and take them to the Lord. What dominates your thoughts or emotions? These, too, are things the Lord wants you to see. Ask Him about them today.

Let us listen for the Lord as we share in this sacrament.

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<sup>i</sup> <sup>18</sup> You have not come to a physical mountain, to a place of flaming fire, darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai. <sup>19</sup> For they heard an awesome trumpet blast and a voice so terrible that they begged God to stop speaking. <sup>20</sup> They staggered back under God's command: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." <sup>21</sup> Moses himself was so frightened at the sight that he said, "I am terrified and trembling."

<sup>ii</sup> God addressed Moses from the Burning Bush and sent him to Pharaoh with a message, "Let my people go." Isaiah was in Jerusalem when God brought him into the heavenly throne room and sent him out with the message, "Go and tell this people..." Jeremiah was visited by a physical manifestation of God who said, "I have put my words in your mouth." Ezekiel was in exile when God came to him. God spoke to Jesus at His baptism before sending Him out into the wilderness and then sending Him back to the people to announce the good news.

**Jeremiah 23:18, 22:** "For who has stood in the council of the Lord to see and to hear his word? Who has listened and heard his word? ... But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds."

**1 Kings 22:19:** The prophet Micaiah describes a vision of actually entering the council: "Micaiah continued, 'Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left.'"

<sup>iii</sup> But this pushes us into how different groups interpret God's word. Jesus ran into this a lot. He was often accused of breaking the Sabbath regulations, but He was not breaking God's law. He was only breaking their additions to God's law. Assessing this point can lead to some vigorous discussion.

<sup>iv</sup> Acts 3:22-23