

I Will Raise Up a Prophet Like Moses
Deuteronomy 18 (Part 1 of 2)
Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

I. Background

- a. The **Book of Deuteronomy** consists of a few speeches that Moses gave to the Israelites near the end of their 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness.
- b. Here we continue in Moses' second address, which provides some interesting instructions for the Jews to follow after Moses dies and they move into Canaan, the Promised Land.
- c. In this lesson, we will give an overview of **Deuteronomy chapter 18**, in which we will find:
 - i. Better insight into why the Lord insisted that the Canaanites be wiped out.
 - ii. A famous test through which the Jews could determine whether someone was a true prophet of God, versus a false prophet.
 - i. One of the greatest prophecies about Jesus.
 - 1. This one 5-verse prophecy (in **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**) provides more specific details (about the birth, miracles, ministry, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus) than any other single prophecy in the entire Old Testament, in my opinion.
 - 2. It is quoted twice in the New Testament and alluded to in several other places. However, few Christians today are aware of its significance.
 - 3. In the current lesson (part 1 of 2), we will introduce this prophecy. In the lesson that follows (part 2), we will take a deeper dive into this prophecy and explain it more fully.

II. Taking Care of the Priests and Levites

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 18:1-2**.
 - i. When the Israelite tribes enter Canaan under Joshua, every tribe will get a large tract of land as an inheritance, except for the tribe of Levi.
 - ii. The Levites will have a place of special honor among all the tribes. It says "the Lord is your inheritance". The special role set apart for the Levites was discussed in **Numbers 3-4** and **Deuteronomy 10:8-9**.

1. All of the priests will come from the tribe of Levi.
2. The Levites will have a special role in ministering at the tabernacle/temple.

b. Summary of **Deuteronomy 18:3-8**:

- i. Members of the other tribes were to share a portion of their offerings with the Levites and priests who were serving before the Lord.

III. Do Not Pick Up the Occult Practices of the Canaanites

a. Read **Deuteronomy 17:9-14**.

- i. This tells us some important things about the Canaanites, those who were living in the land that the Jews would inherit.

1. They were involved in evil practices involving the occult.
 - a. This included human sacrifice of children, sorcery, casting spells and using mediums to communicate with the dead.
2. Recall that the Lord had told Abraham that his descendants would be captive in a foreign land, but return and inherit the land of Canaan *after four generations*, because “the sin of the Amorites is *not yet filled up*” (**Genesis 15:13-16**).
3. These wicked practices of the Canaanites are discussed in greater detail in **Wisdom of Solomon 12**. There, it also explains that even to these extremely wicked people, the Lord showed mercy and gave them an opportunity to repent. However, the Canaanites were hard-hearted and refused to repent.

- ii. This is the reason the Lord called the Israelites to wipe out the inhabitants of the land. Also, they were forbidden to intermarry with them. The Lord was concerned that His people would be corrupted through association with such evil people and copying their sins.

1. As Paul reminds us: “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’” (**1 Corinthians 15:33**, NKJV)

iii. **Lessons for Us:**

1. Have nothing whatsoever to do with the occult.
 - a. Fascination with the occult is nothing new. The Israelites were warned about this over 3,000 years ago.

- b. Also recall that sorcery is one of the sins for which Paul says, “those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (**Galatians 5:19-21**)
- 2. Be extremely careful about unthinkingly absorbing the wicked practices of the world around us. Be careful regarding who we have close relationships with.
 - a. Even Solomon, the wisest man, fell into these sins because of this. (**1 Kings / 3 Kingdoms 11:1-10**)

IV. True Prophets from God, How to Test Them

- a. Rather than copying the occult practices of the Canaanites in the land they are about to inherit, God instructs the Israelites to pay attention to one specific prophet who will come after Moses.
 - i. Also, they need to heed *all the true prophets of God* who will speak on His behalf.
 - ii. Then the Lord explains the distinguishing characteristics of a true prophet of God (as opposed to false prophets who also would come).
- b. Read **Deuteronomy 18:15-22**.
 - i. First, we will address the second part of this reading (about prophets in general, from **Deuteronomy 18:20-22**). After that, we will consider the first part of the passage (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19**) about “*the* Prophet” who will come.
 - ii. Three marks of a false prophet. EITHER:
 - 1. He speaks something in the name of the Lord that *does not come from the Lord* (the false prophet makes it up himself); OR
 - 2. He speaks on behalf of other “gods” (like the 850 false prophets who went up against Elijah at Mount Carmel in **1 Kings / 3 Kingdoms 18**); OR
 - 3. He prophesies that something is going to happen, but it does not happen as foretold.
 - a. In professional baseball, someone who bats 0.400 (getting a successful hit, getting on base 40% of their at-bats) is considered a fantastic hitter.
 - b. However, the Lord’s standard for a prophet is that he must ‘bat a thousand’ (he must prove to be correct 100% of the time in his prophecies)!

- i. That impossibly high standard will weed out the pretenders from the true prophets who speak under the authority of the Spirit of God.
- ii. This is why they (and we) can put full confidence in what the prophets proclaim when they are speaking on behalf of the Lord.

V. The Prophet to Come, Who Would Be Like Moses

a. Read **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**.

- i. Please pay very close attention to every phrase, even every word, in this important passage.
 - 1. We will see that there is a tremendous amount packed into what we just read.
- ii. This speaks of one special prophet who would come after Moses.
 - 1. The people *must listen to him* when he comes!
 - a. They would be *called to account* by the Lord if they failed to heed what this future prophet said.
 - 2. He would be “from your brethren/brothers”.
 - a. The word “brother” can have a range of meanings, generally determined by the context.
 - b. In the context of this passage (considering a parallel statement regarding future rulers, in **Deuteronomy 17:15**), this means *he cannot be a foreigner*. This future prophet *must be from among their fellow Israelites*.
 - 3. He would be “like Moses”.
 - a. In the next lesson (**Deuteronomy 18**, part 2 of 2), we will consider the significance of this statement in detail.

b. **Question:** Who did this unusual promise refer to? Who was to be “the prophet” that Moses spoke of?

- i. Some might think this could refer to ‘Joshua’, since he succeeded Moses in leading the Israelites.
 - 1. However, in **Deuteronomy 34:9-10**, in the account of Joshua taking over leadership of the nation after Moses dies, it says: “Now *there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses*, whom

the Lord knew face to face..." (and showed us the wonders and signs that Moses did).

2. Therefore, this promise *could not* have been referring to Joshua.
- ii. In **John chapters 1-7**, over 1,000 years later, people are wondering if *John the Baptist or Jesus* might be "the prophet" Moses promised would come.
1. "Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' *'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.'*" (**John 1:19-21**, NKJV)
 - a. Recall that in **Psalm 2:2**, **Psalm 132/133:10** and elsewhere, we find prophecies that "the Christ" (the Anointed One) would come.
 - b. In **Malachi 4** (**Malachi 3** in the LXX) it said that "Elijah" would come "before the Day of the Lord".
 - c. And here in **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** it spoke of "the prophet like Moses" who would come.
 2. "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found *Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote*—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'" (**John 1:45**, NKJV)
 3. Jesus said, "...if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; *for he wrote about Me.*" (**John 5:46**, NKJV)
 4. "On the last day, that great day of the feast [= *Feast of Tabernacles*], Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, 'Truly *this is the Prophet.*' Others said, 'This is the Christ.' But some said, 'Will the Christ come out of Galilee?'" (**John 7:37-41**, NKJV)
 - a. The people knew Moses had given God's people water from the rock. Jesus was now promising them living

water. They are thinking that Jesus might be the prophet who would be “like Moses”.

iii. Peter answers the question (of who this prophecy of Moses refers to) definitively, in his speech in **Acts 3**.

1. Background: Remember, Peter had been present with the other 10 apostles when Jesus opened their minds and explained how “all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning [Him].” (**Luke 24:44-45**)

a. One might suspect that the **Deuteronomy 18** prophecy was among the things Jesus helped Peter (and the others) understand!

2. “For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19**) Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ To you first, God, having *raised up His Servant Jesus*, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.” (**Acts 3:22-26**, NKJV)

a. Stephen makes the same point (that “the prophet” promised by Moses in **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** was fulfilled by Jesus) in **Acts 7:37**.

b. Note the point that Peter makes here. He says that Moses promised the Lord would “raise up” a prophet (**Acts 3:22**) and then concludes that God did, in fact, “raise up” His servant Jesus (**Acts 3:26**), just as promised in the prophecy!

i. Therefore, the statement that God would “raise up” a prophet was meant *literally*. He was, in fact, raised from the dead.

1. The Greek word translated “to raise up” in **Acts 3:22** and **3:26**, as well as in

Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18:18 (in the LXX) is: *anistami* / ἀνίστημι.

2. This Greek word is used in several places in the New Testament in a literal sense to refer to the *resurrection* of Jesus.
 3. As is the case with our English term “*raise up*”, this Greek word has a range of meanings, determined by context. It is also sometimes found in the Scriptures used in a figurative sense. (For example, in **Exodus 1:8** in the LXX it says, “Another king *rose up* over Egypt who did not know Joseph”.)
- ii. Therefore, this prophecy foretells the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
 1. We can know that he was the prophet promised by Moses because He was the one who was (*literally*) *raised up*.
 - iii. There are four prophecies which speak of someone being “*raised up*” (a future king, priest, shepherd or prophet):
 1. In **2 Samuel 7** and **1 Chronicles 17**, it says that the Lord would *raise up a king* from the seed of David, who would reign over the eternal kingdom.
 - a. Peter explained that this prophecy from Nathan applied to Jesus, in **Acts 2:39-33**.
 2. In **1 Samuel 2:25**, it says that the Lord would *raise up a faithful priest* over the faithful house of God.
 - a. This is alluded to in **Hebrews 3**, where it is applied to Jesus.
 3. In **Ezekiel 34:23**, it says that the Lord would *raise up a good shepherd* who would protect the Lord’s flock.

- a. Jesus explained that this applied to Himself in **John 10**. He is the good shepherd who has the power to lay down His life *and the power to take it up again*. (**John 10:18**)
- 4. And here in **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**, the Lord promised He would *raise up a prophet like Moses*.
- iv. These four wonderful prophecies about the resurrection of Jesus tie together all four aspects of His role in our salvation. He combines in one person the promised prophet, priest, king and good shepherd, who would be “raised up” miraculously by the Lord!

VI. Jesus, Like Moses, Brought New Laws from God

- a. **Question:** Is there anything *highly unusual* or even *unique* about Moses that made him different from all the other prophets?
 - i. Eusebius was a bishop of the church in Caesarea in Palestine, who lived c. 260-339 AD. He is well known as an early church historian, the author of *Ecclesiastical History*. In another of his works, *Proof of the Gospel, Book 3* (one of the greatest apologetic writings we have from the early church). There, Eusebius addressed this question about the **Deuteronomy 18** prophecy and discussed several remarkable ways in which Jesus was *like Moses*.
 - ii. The first point Eusebius made was that Moses was unique among all the prophets in that he was *the only one who brought a new Law*. All the other prophets who followed Moses simply called the people back to *following the Law that Moses had previously delivered*. Eusebius then challenged his readers:
 - 1. “Was then any of the prophets after Moses... Isaiah say, or Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, or Daniel, or any of the twelve... like Moses in being a lawgiver? Not one.
 - 2. “Did any of them behave like Moses? One *cannot* affirm it. For each of them from the first to the last *referred their hearers to Moses* and based their rebukes of the people on their breaches of the Mosaic law; and did nothing but exhort them to *hold fast to the Mosaic enactments*.
 - 3. “You could not say that any of them was like him: and yet Moses speaks definitely of *One who should be*. Whom then does

the oracle prophesy will be a prophet like Moses, but *our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and none other?*"

- a. (Source: Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*, book 3, chapter 2)
4. Eusebius pointed out that *Jesus alone* was like Moses in that He brought in a new set of laws, ones that superseded those of Moses. And His laws set *even higher moral standards* than the ones brought by Moses.
 - a. Jesus brought in new rules or laws, or modified the ones handed down by Moses, in many areas. Consider what Jesus taught that superseded the Law of Moses. For example:
 - i. Jesus' new laws regarding anger and hatred.
 1. "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' (*Here alluding to the Law of Moses, Exodus 20:13 and elsewhere. - CP*) But I say to you that *whoever is angry with his brother* without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And *whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!'* shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire." (**Matthew 5:21-22**, NKJV)
 - ii. Jesus' new laws regarding sexual purity and lust.
 1. "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that *whoever looks at a woman to lust for her* has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (**Matthew 5:27-28**, NKJV)
 - iii. Jesus' new laws regarding divorce and remarriage.
 1. "Furthermore, it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that *whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to*

commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”
(Matthew 5:31–32, NKJV)

- iv. Jesus’ new laws regarding vengeance and retribution.
 - 1. “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ *But I tell you not to resist an evil person.* But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” **(Matthew 5:38–39, NKJV)**
- v. Jesus’ new laws regarding how we treat others, including even our enemies.
 - 1. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, *love your enemies*, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,” **(Matthew 5:43–44, NKJV)**
- vi. Jesus’ new instructions regarding how and where we should worship God.
 - 1. Recall what Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, when asked if she should be worshipping God in Jerusalem as the Jews did. He replied to her: “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ...the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...” **(John 4:21–23, NKJV)**
 - 2. No longer would God’s people be called to pray facing the tabernacle or temple in Jerusalem as the focal point of their prayer and worship, as Solomon had said when he dedicated the first temple in **1 Kings 8**.

vii. Jesus' new instructions regarding what God's people are permitted to eat.

1. In **Leviticus 11** we see that the Law of Moses prohibited God's people from eating things like pork and shellfish.
2. However, Jesus said "...whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" (**Mark 7:18-19**, NKJV)
3. The apostles affirmed this loosening of the old dietary requirements of the Law of Moses in many of their writings (at the Council in Jerusalem in **Acts 15**, **Colossians 2:16-23**, **1 Corinthians 10:23-33**, etc.)

b. Some Christians may struggle with the idea of Jesus' commands being called "*laws*" by Eusebius. Doesn't Paul teach that Christians have been *freed from the law*? However, consider what Jesus said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount:

i. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." (**Matthew 7:21-27**, NKJV)

1. Jesus calls those believers who do not obey his commands "lawless" and tells them, "*I never knew you*"!
2. Jesus most certainly did not call his followers to a lawless way of life. Instead, He replaced the Law of Moses with His own, much better law. These are laws that are suitable to follow, for anyone on earth in any nation.

3. Jeremiah prophesied that in the future God would usher in a new covenant, at which time He would put His laws into the hearts and minds of the people. (**Jeremiah 31:33-34**, found in **Jeremiah 38:33-34** in the LXX; also quoted in **Hebrews 10:16-17**)
 - a. According to this prophecy, under the new covenant, we clearly would have “laws”. However, those laws would be different from the ones introduced by Moses.
4. As Christian writer and teacher David Bercot has often reminded us, the kingdom of God is a *real kingdom*. Similar to every other real kingdom, it has:
 - a. a ruler (who is Jesus),
 - b. citizens or subjects (Christians),
 - c. boundaries, and...
 - d. laws (the commands of Jesus).
- c. Eusebius also explained that this is why Jesus had said, at the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy *but to fulfill*.” (**Matthew 5:17**, NKJV)
 - i. Jesus *fulfilled* the Law of Moses. He supplied the missing piece, like a capstone that is installed as the final component in an arch. There had been something lacking and incomplete in the Law of Moses.
 - ii. That was why the Lord told Moses at Mount Sinai, on the very same day the Ten Commandments were given, that in the future He would raise up another Prophet, who would be like Moses.
 - iii. There would be one more law-giving Prophet who would complete and fulfill what had been begun by Moses.
 - iv. Moses here explains that this instruction from the Lord, that there would be another prophet “like Moses”, was given to him about 40 years earlier, *at Mount Sinai*.
 1. That terrifying encounter with the Lord is described in more detail in **Exodus 19-20** and **Deuteronomy 4-5**.
 2. In **Deuteronomy 4**, this event is referred to as “the day of the assembly”.
 3. After the Lord descended upon the mountain in fire and smoke, with the sound of a trumpet, shaking the mountain, He spoke

the Ten Commandments in the hearing of all the people. The people are frightened by this encounter. Their leaders approach Moses and beg that they no longer hear the voice of the Lord. They insist that Moses go up the mountain and bring back instructions from the Lord. The people say that they will then do whatever the Lord says (through Moses).

4. Here in **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**, Moses recounts that it was at that time (after the people begged to hear no more from the Lord, and the Lord confirmed that request) that the Lord gave him this promise of a future prophet.
5. However, unlike the Ten Commandments (which everyone in the assembly heard the Lord speak), this special promise was told only to Moses. Now, as the end of his life approaches, Moses shares this promise with all the people, that the Lord will in the future “raise up” a prophet “like Moses” whom the people must listen to (heed and obey).
6. In other words, God had explained on the same day that the Ten Commandments were given that there was ‘more to come’. The new prophet, if he were to be “like Moses”, would *fulfill* what we might call the ‘Eleventh Commandment’ (obey everything the prophet like Moses will tell you when he comes).
 - a. This new prophet, therefore, will *complete* what had been given to Moses, which is fully consistent with what Jesus said in His introduction to the Sermon on the Mount.
 - b. “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy *but to fulfill*. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till *all is fulfilled*.” (**Matthew 5:17-18**, NKJV)
7. Jesus was that promised prophet. Therefore, we should not be surprised that throughout the gospels, Jesus introduced various changes to the Law that had originally been delivered by Moses.
 - a. At Moses’ time, the people were not yet ready to hear the ultimate teaching/laws that God would give them. According to Jesus, at the time of Moses the hearts of the people were too hard to receive the full teachings

that would be later revealed by Jesus (consider, for example, **Matthew 19:7-9**).

- b. The complete teaching, including new laws, would be introduced by Jesus, the promised prophet who would be “like Moses”!
- d. With this clarification of Jesus’ role in relation to the Law of Moses, I see two opposing challenges to the modern Christian worldview.
 - i. The first challenge is that while the old Law of Moses has been cancelled by Christ, being “nailed to the cross” (**Colossians 2:14**), that does NOT mean that there are no longer any laws for us to follow, as Christians.
 - 1. Now that Christ has come, we are under new and better laws, the ones He brought.
 - 2. He will reject those who claim to follow Him but are lawless, refusing to obey the laws of His kingdom!
 - ii. The second challenge: I have also noticed another problem in the modern Christian world (opposite of the one where Christians claim there are no longer any laws with Christ). There are ‘conservative’ Christian teachers and sects popping up who claim that Christians must still follow the Torah, the Law of Moses (and need to understand Jewish customs and practices as well).
 - 1. Sometimes these people are also identifying with Jewish nationalism and Zionism.
 - 2. One of their favorite passages is **Matthew 5:17**, which they misunderstand.
 - a. “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” (**Matthew 5:17-18**, NKJV)
 - b. However, Jesus fulfilled the Law by fulfilling the ‘Eleventh Commandment’, the extra one the Lord gave Moses on the Day of the assembly at Mount Sinai. He promised to send another prophet like Moses, who would therefore bring NEW LAWS. Consequently, the old Law of Moses has been replaced, just as the Lord foretold to Moses at Mount Sinai.

- c. Therefore, as explained throughout the New Testament (including in **Colossians 2**, **Acts 15**, **Ephesians 2** and **Galatians**), we are no longer bound to follow the old Law of Moses. The old Law was nailed to the cross and replaced by a better one, a law that all people, everywhere, can be called to follow.
- e. In the lesson that follows this one (part 2 on **Deuteronomy 18**), we will take a more careful look at the statement that the prophet to come will be “*like Moses*”.
 - i. With that in mind, we will explore the many unusual ways that the life of Moses foreshadowed that of Jesus Christ.