



The Sinaitic Light

Biblical Studies

Moses's Prophet Study Article No. XIX

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This article uses the English terms for Elohim (God), Yah (Father) Yahoshua (Christ).

Objective and Learning Outcome

Objective:

The objective of this article is to understand Moses's prophecy of an *emerging prophet* or perhaps, *emerging prophets* as he seems to suggest in Deuteronomy 18:18-22. This lesson seeks to determine if Deuteronomy 18 is a prophecy about Yahshua the Messiah as a prophet like unto Moses or is it a prophecy pertaining to prophets after Moses as well as prophets in other faiths such as Islam.

Learning Outcome:

Upon completion of this study, the reader will:

1. Understand how Jewish scholars interpreted Deuteronomy 18:18-22,
2. Understand how the apostles and disciples of the first century interpreted Deuteronomy 18:18-22,
3. Understand how classical Jewish writers and the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls interpreted Deuteronomy 18:18-22
4. Understand how Muslims interpret Deuteronomy 18:18-22,
5. Demonstrate how Yahshua was a prophet like unto Moses,
6. Demonstrate how Muhammad was not a Prophet like unto Moses,
7. Analyze the inspirational differences and doctrinal differences between the Bible and the Quran

Introduction

There has been much debate and controversy over Deuteronomy 18:18 - 22 “the prophet”. Throughout history many Rabbis and Jewish commentators expressed their views concerning this prophet: Rashi (1040 - 1105) said that the passages applied to a succession of prophets¹ probably due to the personal pronouns “his, him and he” in verse 18 and the use of the definite and indefinite articles “the” and “a” in vv. 20 and 22. However, Aben Ezra (1093 - 1167) and Bechai (1260 - 1340) interpret the text in the singular, and thus, said that the passages referred to Joshua, which many orthodox Jews and Israelites propagate and defend today. But Abarbanel (1437-1508) postulated that the prophecy referred to Jeremiah² (*Of the Prophecies of Moses relative to a Prophet like unto himself, XIV*). Interestingly, all these Bible commentators chose to ignore some important features within these passages, primarily, that the prophet in question would be *comparable to Moses*.

This prophet would be considered unique in such a way that he could only be compared to Moses by way of the unique relationship he had with Yah and the miracles he would perform comparatively to Moses. Moses writes, “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. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name” (Deut. 18:18-19, NIV). This lesson is designed to identify who the prophet like unto Moses is based upon the attestations of first century Judeans and Jewish scholarship. Islamists argue that Deuteronomy 18:18 - 22 is a prophecy pertaining to Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Their interest in interpreting this passage as such is to lend credence to Islam as a legitimately God ordained religion attested by Moses. Most Jews argue that Deuteronomy 18:18 - 22 is a prophecy pertaining to any prophet after Moses, and others argue that it is a prophecy pertaining to the Messiah of the first century, Yahshua.

We will argue in this lesson that Deuteronomy 18:18 - 22 is not applicable to any generic prophet after Moses, according to first century Judeans, neither is it applicable to Muhammad. We will argue that Moses’s prophecy was and is applicable to Yahshua the Messiah who was born an Israelite like Moses, performed miracles like Moses and had an intimate relationship with Yah like Moses according to what first century Judeans anticipated. Thus, the thesis for this lesson is, “Moses prophesies about emerging prophets that would direct Israel in his absence, which would preclude them from seeking mediums and fortune tellers for spiritual guidance. However, Judeans of the first century BC and first century AD interpreted this prophecy to be applicable to Yahshua.”

¹ These were the sentiments of Kimchi (AD 1160-1235) and Alshech (AD 1508-1600) as well.

² Flavius Josephus, *The Whole Genuine and Complete Works of Flavius Josephus, Also a Continuation of the History of the Jews, from Josephus Down to the Present Time, by... with Marginal References, and Notes* (Gale ECCO, Print Editions, 2010), 671.

The Prophet of Deuteronomy 18

Deuteronomy 18:18 - 22 has drawn much interest in Jewish scholarship and neo-Christianity because of how various theologians have interpreted or perhaps misinterpreted the passages and built biblically indefensible doctrines from it. Dr. Eugene H. Merrill, Professor of Old Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary writes,

This does not mean that Israel would have had no means of access to their God and no way to determine his purposes for them. They were not to emulate the divination of the peoples whom they would dispossess (v. 14), but in the stead of these purveyors of lies there would be an order of God's own prophets who would speak true revelation (v. 15). This order was first spoken of in the singular—"a prophet like me" and "listen to him"—but the continuing context makes it clear that the term was being used in a collective sense to refer to prophethood as an institution (cf. "a prophet" and "that prophet" in vv. 20,22). There is nonetheless a lingering importance to the singular "prophet," for in late Jewish and New Testament exegesis there was the expectation of an eschatological prophet par excellence who would be either a messianic figure or the announcer of the Messiah (cf. John 1:21,25; Acts 3:22; 7:37). The ambiguity of the individual and collective both being expressed in the grammatical singular is a common Old Testament device employed to afford multiple meanings or applications to prophetic texts.³

Merrill states that the passage reflects the idea of a single prophet that would emerge like Moses and then the general characteristics ascribed to any prophet. This is how the Israelites of the New Testament interpreted the passage. They viewed the passage as a prophecy of a unique prophet that would emerge from amongst the Israelite community with every characteristic of an ordained prophet. John writes, "Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph'" (John 1:45). Moses wrote about a prophet in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut. 18:18-22) and a king in the book of Genesis (Gen. 49:8-12). In the NT it appears that most Judeans felt they had identified the much-anticipated prophet. John writes that the priests and Levites came to John to inquire about who he is. "They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No'" (John 1:21).⁴ In this passage one can see that the Israelites of the first century were expecting Elijah the prophet based upon Malachi 4:5 and the prophet from Deuteronomy 18:18.

Additional passages that support this thesis continue to be found in John as well as Acts. John writes, "After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world'" (John 6:14, NIV). John continues, "On hearing his words, some of the people said, 'Surely this man is the Prophet.'" Others said, "He is the

³ Eugene H. Merrill, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 4, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 297.

⁴ Emphasis added.

Messiah” (John 7:40-41, NIV).⁵ Peter writes, “For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you’” (Acts 3:22, NIV). Peter continues, “This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people’” (Acts 7:37, NIV). The New Testament is an eyewitness to the fact that Israelites in the first century were not only expecting the Messiah to appear, but they were also looking for the prophet spoken of in Deuteronomy. Extra biblical attestations such as *The Works of Philo* and the *Dead Sea Scrolls* written before the emergence of the Nazarene faith (primitive Christianity) corroborate this fact.

Philo Judaeus (BC 20-50 AD), Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria, in the Roman province of Egypt demonstrates in his writing how first century Jews outside of the New Testament interpreted Deuteronomy 18:15-19. His understanding according to his treatise is that the prophet in Deuteronomy had yet to be revealed, that he would appear suddenly. In most cases this appears to be Joshua who succeeded Moses (Deut. 34:9; Joshua 1:1-4; 3:1-17; 10:12-14) and succeeding prophets such as Elijah (1 Kin. 17:1,4,14,22; 18:38,45; 21:22-23; 2 Kin. 1:4,10,12; 2:8,10-11) and Elisha (2 Kin. 2:14,21,24; 3:17; 4:4,16,34,41,43; 5:14,26-27; 6:6,9,17-18,20; 7:1; 8:1,10; 13:21), which would also include Yahshua. Philo writes,

And since there is implanted in all men a desire of the knowledge of future events, and as, on account of this desire, they have recourse to sacrifices and to other species of divination, as if by these means they would be able to search out and discover the truth (but these things are, in reality, full of indistinctness and uncertainty, and are continually being convicted by themselves). He, with great energy, forbids his disciples to apply themselves to such sources of knowledge; and he says, that if they are truly pious they shall not be deprived of a proper knowledge of the future; *but that some other Prophet will appear to them on a sudden, inspired like himself*, who will preach and prophesy among them, saying nothing of his own (for he who is truly possessed and inspired, even when he speaks, is unable to comprehend what he is himself saying), but that all the words that he should utter would proceed from him as if another was prompting him; *for the prophets are interpreters of God, who is only using their voices as instruments, in order to explain what he chooses*. Having now then said this, and other things like this, concerning the proper idea to be entertained of the one real, and true, and living God; he proceeds to express in what manner one ought to pay him the honours that are his Due⁶ (Special Laws I, XI. 64-65).

The Dead Sea Scrolls 4Q175 Deuteronomy 18:15-22 – Qumran (BC 200).

In the Dead Sea Scrolls the Qumranic community wrote about the coming of the prophet. Based upon the text, it appears that they were expecting the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:18-19. This supposition derives from the DSS manuscript labeled 4Q175. The late Dr. Geza Vermes

⁵ Emphasis added.

⁶ Philo, *The Works of Philo Judaeus, the Contemporary of Josephus (Volume 3)* (University of Michigan Library, 1854), 189-190 [emphasis added].

(1924 - 2013), Professor Emeritus of Jewish Studies at the University of Oxford and one of the world's greatest experts on the *historical Jesus*, *Christian beginnings*, and the *Dead Sea Scrolls* writes in the chapter titled *Testimonia or Messianic Anthology* (4Q175)

This short document from Cave 4 (4Q175), dating to the early first century BCE and similar in literary style to the Christian *Testimonia* or collections of messianic proof-texts, includes five quotations arranged in four groups. Only the last of them is followed by an interpretation. *The first group consists of two texts from Deuteronomy referring to the prophet similar to Moses*; the second is an extract from a prophecy of Balaam about the Royal Messiah; the third is a blessing of the Levites and, implicitly, of the Priest-Messiah: ‘The Lord spoke to Moses saying: You have heard the words which this people have spoken to you; all they have said is right, oh that their heart were always like this, to fear me and to keep my commandments always, that it might be well with them and their children forever! *I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren*. I will put my words into his mouth, and he shall tell them all that I command him. And I will require a reckoning of whoever will not listen to the words which the Prophet shall speak in my Name” (Deut. XVIII, 18-19).⁷

In another section of the DSS called the *Community Rules* the Qumran secretary lists a series of rules that each member must abide by. The DSS says, “As for the property of the men of holiness who walk in perfection, it shall not be merged with that of the men of injustice who have not purified their life by separating themselves from iniquity and walking in the way of perfection. They shall depart from none of the councils of the law to walk in all the stubbornness of their hearts but shall be ruled by the primitive precepts in which the men of the Community were first instructed *until there shall come the prophet* and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.”⁸

Arguments continue to abound about *this prophet*, although first century Israelites, as recorded in the New Testament, and *extrabiblical Jewish literature were still looking for the prophet Moses spoke of*. The NT Israelites affirmed that Yahshua was this prophet as we have demonstrated herein. Levi ben Gershon (1288 - 1344), renowned medieval French Jewish Philosopher, Talmudist and mathematician writes about *the prophet* whom he says is the Messiah.

It follows necessarily from this verse (Deut. xxxiv. 10) that no prophet whose office was restricted to Israel alone could ever arise again like Moses; but it is still quite possible that a prophet like Moses might arise among the Gentile nations. *In fact the Messiah is such a prophet*, as it is stated in the Midrash on the verse, Behold my servant shall prosper, etc., *that he will be ‘greater than Moses,’ which is explained to mean that his miracles will be more wonderful than those of Moses; Moses, by the miracles which he wrought, drew but a single nation to the worship of God, but the Messiah will draw all nations to the worship of God*, as it is written (Zeph. iii.9), ‘Then will I turn to the people

⁷ Géza Vermès, ed., *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, ed. Géza Vermès (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 1997), 527.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord,' etc. *And this will be affected by means of the marvelous sign, to be seen by all nations even to the ends of the earth, viz. the resurrection of the dead.*"⁹

Fourteenth century Jewish theologian Levi ben Gershon understands that the only prophet that would emerge amongst Israel's economy that would be like Moses would be the Messiah. This is what Israelites deduced in the first century from the Messiah's miracles as Gershon points out. Moses did bring a nation to Yah, but as Gershon points out hypothetically, *the Messiah would bring nations to Yah*. His proposition has been realized today as one can see. The whole world has been exposed to Yahshua, although his doctrine has been skewed by neo-Christians and Muslims, yet almost every ethnic group has become acquainted with Yahshua and seek salvation in his name. The premise that one can assert at this juncture is that arguments surrounding who this prophet is, "the one like unto Moses" has been answered in the first century BC and AD and centuries thereafter. The prophet like unto Moses according to first century Jewry is Yahshua the son of David. The next section will demonstrate how Yahshua is the prophet like Moses in contradistinction to some of the most powerful and prominent prophets before him like Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha.

A Prophet Like unto Moses

How is Yahshua like Moses? What would distinguish him from any of the preceding prophets (Gen. 20:7; Num. 11:24-30; 12:2; Josh. 10:12-14; 1 Kin. 17:1-4; 2 Kin. 4:34)? It is apparent that the first century Israelites felt that no prophet had arisen in Israel that was like unto Moses. The compiler of Deuteronomy¹⁰ writes, "And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, *none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel* (Deut. 34:9-12).¹¹

The compiler says that a prophet has not emerged amongst the nation that performed miracles like Moses. The author is not interested in similarities in the emerging prophet, such as Moses's birth, popularity and acceptance, marital status, progeny, civil authority, cause of death, etc., which is what Muslims submit to contrast Moses and Muhammad, thereby, disqualifying

⁹ Adolf Neubauer, *The Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters* (London: J. Parker, 1877), 568 [emphasis added].

¹⁰ Many Scholars believe that the book of Deuteronomy was completed in the reign of Josiah (7th century BC). Thus, parts of Deuteronomy reflect how the Judeans understood Yah's prophecies during their era, some 800 years after the death of Moses (Bruckner, 2012:64). Others have placed it during post exilic Israel in the fifth century BC. "Deuteronomy – was completed in the first half of the fifth century B.C., and was not added to the previous compilation until after its publication by Ezra in 444 B.C. (*Review*, 1910:469)

¹¹ Emphasis added.

Yahshua as the prophetic prophet. His point of reference is centered around his power and intercessory commission from Yah. The prophet like unto Moses can be contrasted in several respects, which shall be enumerated briefly and juxtaposed against Islamic claims, which argue that Muhammad is the prophesied prophet.

1. Yah confirms Moses as His messenger by speaking to him in front of the nation of Israel as witnesses (Ex. 19:9). Yah confirmed Yahshua as His messenger by endorsing him in front of witnesses at his baptism, the same circumstances that Moses was confirmed under (Matt. 3:13-17).
2. Yah spoke to Moses from Mount Sinai in a cloud (Ex. 24:12-18). Yah spoke to Yahshua out of heaven (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; John 12:28).
3. Moses was in the mount for forty days communing with Yah (Ex. 24:18). Yahshua was in the mount forty days being tried by Yah (Luke 4:1-2).
4. Moses was shining with radiance after being in the presence of Yah (Ex. 34:27-35). Yahshua was transfigured in radiance (Matt. 17:1-2).
5. Moses was the mediator of the OT (Ex. 24:3-8). Yahshua served as the mediator of the NT (Matt. 26:26-28; Heb. 8:6; 9:15).
6. Moses performed miracles to confirm him and Yah's message (Ex. 4:1-9). Yahshua performed miracles to confirm him and Yah's message (Luke 7:11-16).
7. Moses escaped genocide (Ex. 1:15-22). Yahshua escaped genocide (Matt. 2:13-19).
8. Yah raises Moses to deliver the nation of Israel after 400 years of bondage (Ex. 12:40-41). Yahshua was raised up to deliver the nation of Israel from spiritual bondage after 400 years of inactivity (Luke 4:16-19).¹²
9. Moses was regarded as a very humble man (Num. 12:3). Yahshua exemplified humility (John 13:12-15).
10. Moses was willing to die to atone for the sins of the people (Ex. 32:32). Yahshua died to atone for the sins of his people (John 11:50).

Moses and Yahshua have identical roles in the economy of man's righteousness, holiness, and salvation. Both are articulating Yah's will without any incongruence between the testaments. What Moses have been instructed to say regarding the will of Yah, Yahshua reiterates (John 10:35). Muhammad on the other hand introduces a different spiritual narrative of holiness, sanctification, and righteousness, ordinances that are not biblically sustainable such as the

¹² The time lapse between Malachi, the last OT prophet and Yahshua's birth is estimated to be about 425 years.

dietary laws (Surat Al-Maidah 5:3-5). Islam, under the direction of Muhammad allows its believers to eat shellfish, fish with skin, and pork if necessary. Yet, the laws that Moses and Yahshua received and enforced prohibits such practices (Lev. 11:1-47).

Islam forbids the consummation of alcohol. Initially in Muhammad's revelation the prohibition was against drunkenness because there was considered benefits to alcohol (Surat Al-Baqarah 2:21; An-Nisa 4:43). Later, apparently, the angel Gabriel rescinded this vision and gave a command prohibiting alcohol (Surat Al-Maidah 5:90-91). The incongruency of these passages in the Quran is that it defies what Moses gave and what Yahshua practiced. Both Moses and Yahshua along with the apostles were consumers of wine with the only prohibition being against inebriation (Lev. 10:9; 23:18; Num. 6:3; Deut. 14:26; 1 Sam. 16:20; 25:18; Prov. 23:20; 31:6-7 John 2:3-11; Matt. 11:19; 1 Tim. 3:8; 5:23; Titus 2:3; Eph. 5:18). These passages demonstrate how Yah ordained wine to be offered with His sacrifices, the priests could drink wine but not before they executed their duties in the Tabernacle, and on the festive occasion worshipers could purchase wine. The first miracle Yahshua performed was turning water into wine and he consumed so much of it he was perceived to be a winebibber. Paul tells Timothy to drink wine for its medical properties and warns congregants about consuming too much wine that leads to drunkenness.

Muhammad commissioned that there be five prayers performed daily (Surat Hud 11:114). The Torah does not instruct worshipers to pray at any set time. Normally prayers were done by the people during the hours of sacrifice (morning and evening) at the *third* and *ninth* hours. However, David appears to have started the tradition of praying three times a day, *morning*, *noon*, and *night* shall he praise Yah (Ps. 55:17). This practice became a custom in Israel, but it was not revealed or made compulsory by Yah (Dan. 6:10; Acts 3:1, 10:3,9,30). Paul said pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17; Eph. 6:18).

The previous analysis reflects the fact that Moses's doctrine was incongruent with Muhammad's doctrine. It reflects that Yahshua operated within the confines of Yah's law as it was revealed by Moses while Mohammad amended Moses's doctrine. So, not only do we not see congruency in divine revelation between the Bible and the Quran, but we do not see Muhammad meeting the expectation's set forth by Yah. Yah said, "Look to God's instructions and teachings! People who contradict his word are completely in the dark" (Is 8:20, NLT).

Dissimilarities between Muhammad and Moses:

1. Muhammad was not a Hebrew Israelite, Moses and Yahshua were (Ex. 6:16-20; Heb. 7:14). As a leader, the prophet must be amongst the brethren qualified by Deuteronomy. 17:15.
2. Muhammad did not perform miracles to affirm his anointing, commission, or ordination (other than allegedly splitting the moon, which has no verifiable witnesses. Surat Al-Qamar 54:1-4), Moses and Yahshua did (Deut. 34:11; Acts 2:22).

3. Muhammad did not introduce or confirm Yah's covenants, Moses and Yahshua did (Heb. 9:15-20).
4. Muhammad did not direct his people to the law and the prophets, Moses and Yahshua did (Deut. 11:26-28; Matt. 19:17).
5. Muhammad was not willing to die for his people, Moses and Yahshua were (Ex. 32:32; Matt. 20:28).
6. Muhammad was not anointed with the spirit of Yah, Moses and Yahshua were (Num. 11:17; Luke 3:22).

Conclusion

Moses was a servant and ruler over Yah's house. But Yahshua, as Yah's first begotten son was the heir of Yah's house (Heb. 3:1-6). Yahshua is a servant like unto Moses but far better than Moses because not only has he served as a Messiah as Moses was, but he was a deliverer as Moses was of the children of Israel but also of humanity. We see that Yahshua had an intimate relationship with Yah as Moses did, he was the mediator of the covenant as Moses was and was confirmed by Yah through miracles and by divine proclamation as Moses was. Yahshua brought all nations to Yah through his ministry, thereby, completing a greater work than that of Moses. Yahshua was viewed by the Judeans of the first century as the prophet Moses spoke of prior to the miracles he performed, and after his death, his identity as the prophet Moses spoke of was only ratified by the authority and power vested in him by Yah. There are far too many internal, extrabiblical witnesses and similarities between Yahshua and Moses to dismiss that Yahshua is the prophet like unto Moses. Finally, these attestations negate Muhammad from any consideration as the prophet whom Moses spoke of.

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