

"I Will Raise Up for Them a Prophet"

Well, let's cut to the chase here. Christ is the fulfillment of this prophecy. Christ of course brings to fulfillment all God's promises in the Bible. But here specifically we see that God had promised in the Old Testament to send another prophet like Moses. The people had benefited tremendously from the prophetic ministry of Moses. God promises here that this prophetic ministry would continue. God promised that he would send another prophet like Moses to carry on this prophetic ministry.

Well, the New Testament tells us that this was fulfilled in Jesus. He is the promised prophet. And as this prophet he brings to fulfillment and culmination all of the prophetic ministry. This is of great importance of course. The prophetic ministry is how we have the Word of God. They needed to feed on God's Word in the Old Testament, and we still need the same today! And so as Jesus brings to fulfillment this promise and all the prophetic ministry of God, we realize that we have everything we need. We have the Word of God revealed to us. This Word has come through all the holy prophets and apostles; and it has now chiefly come through Jesus Christ, this promised prophet of old. Captured for all time in the Holy Bible, we have all that is necessary for faith and godly living. The Word of God is sufficient for our needs; it is infallible in its promises and power; it is inerrant in its claims; it is clear in its teaching, particularly those that tell us how to be saved in Jesus. And it is authoritative, sharper than a double edged sword, coming as the very Word of God to man. This Word we have because of the prophetic ministry. This prophetic ministry finds its climax and culmination in Jesus.

We now have all that we need to be saved. We now have all that we need to know how to live our life. This is in the Bible. And the Spirit of God has come into our hearts to aid us in understanding the Bible and applying it to our lives. And God has given pastors and teaches to help explain the Word to us.

And so as we dig into this passage today, we're going to think first about the office of the prophet described here. Second we're going to see how Scripture reveals Christ as this promised prophet. Finally, we'll make some application to how this brings fulfillment to the prophetic ministry. This will include the conclusion that the canon of Scripture is complete. That we have the complete testimony of the prophetic ministry here in the Bible.

So let's begin by looking at this office of prophet described here. Notice first the function of the prophet in verse 18. The prophet is a mediator and spokesman. He's a messenger and ambassador. God places his words into the prophet's mouth. In other words, he doesn't speak from his own authority. The prophet of God speaks the words of God. That is how words must be received. That's why when we talk about the Bible being authoritative and without error in its original manuscripts it's because we believe a passage like this. We believe that prophecy is not of human origin, but from God. The prophets bring God's Word to the people. They have a mission of revelation. Revealing God and his Word to the people.

Notice how this prophet is further described here. In verse 18 it says that the promised prophet would be from among the brothers. They'd come from Israel, God's chosen people. In other words, he'd be a human representative from God's people. Though he'd represent God, he'd also represent the people. In verse 15 an additional quality is described of this prophet. He'd be like Moses. With Moses getting older, this would have given the people hope that God's voice wouldn't be ultimately silenced with his passing. Since God used Moses so powerfully, it also gave the people hope of God's continued power to be at work among them.

But in light of this promise of a coming prophet came a danger. There could be people who rise up claiming to be a prophet of God. How would the people know the true prophet from the false prophet? Well this passage gives the people some ways to discern the true from the false prophet. One way to tell a false prophet from a true prophet is given in verse 22. If what they predict doesn't come true, then they are a false prophet. Now this test doesn't cover every situation, but is certainly helpful. For example, there is another way to tell a false prophet from a true one in verse 20. If the person prophesies in the name of another god, then they are a false prophet. This is true even if they met the other test, that what they predict comes true. That's what Deuteronomy 13 had said. If the prophet's message is to lead you astray, then no matter whether it comes to pass or not is irrelevant. You'll know right away that they are a false prophet in that instance.

These tests don't cover every situation. But what they do call for is discernment. This wouldn't always be easy for Israel. There are a number of examples later in the Old Testament where true prophets are faced off against false prophets. Sadly the people often listened to the false ones. In many situations in Israel's history, you couldn't and would want to wait around to see if the prophets words come true before you acted. Like with Jeremiah. He prophesied that the people should surrender to their enemy Babylon lest they be utterly destroyed. He said God had given them into the Babylonians' hand because of their repeated breaking of God's covenant. And yet there were false prophets at that time who said they should not surrender, but fight against the Babylonians and that God would give them victory. In that situation you really needed to make a decision on who to follow, before you waited to see who was right!

Of course the false prophets who put the people in this quandary were especially at fault. God says that they would especially face judgment for this. We see God's heart right here when he calls for the death penalty for these false prophets. This has a good application to those who are false teachers in the church; that God will ultimately call them to account who speak presumptuously; who teach as God's Word things that aren't. But the point here is that the people would need to employ discernment on what the prophets teach. You'd have to analyze the truth of their claims, in at least two ways. Are they true in that they come to pass? And are they true in that they are consistent with what God has already commanded and revealed about himself, or do they look to lead astray from these things?

Now when you think about this promise of another prophet here in Deuteronomy 18, we have to recognize two levels of fulfillment. On the one hand, you have a lot of prophets that God raised up after Moses. God spoke through many prophets after Moses and that was indeed a continuation of the prophetic ministry in Israel. And yet as time went on you see Israel recognize that this promised ultimately looked to a single prophet that would come. One

that would be like Moses, as it says here. You see, the many prophets that came after him never quite attained to the status of Moses, as promised here. You can jot down Numbers 12:6-8 to read about how even at that time God had distinguished Moses from the rest of the prophets. God said he didn't speak to Moses in riddles and visions and dreams like he did the other prophets, but that he spoke clearly and directly to him. The end of Deuteronomy notes this as well; it has an appendix that was obviously added at a later date, that basically says that since Moses there had not arisen a prophet like him who God spoke to so directly.

And so this passage looks beyond all the many different prophets that God would raise up to one specific prophet; a prophet who would be like Moses. I think it's fair to say that the closest candidate for a prophet like Moses in the Old Testament would be Elijah. He came with power and spoke God's Word in hard times. The Bible describes much of Elijah's prophetic ministry in ways reminiscent of Moses. Certainly Elijah's significance is recognized when the later prophet Malachi predicted that Elijah would come back before the great day of the Lord. And yet Elijah's ministry was not quite of the same status as Moses. God used Moses to deliver the law of God to the people and to establish a covenant with the people. Elijah but called the people to keep the covenant God had already established through Moses. And so the hope is still there, even when we get to the start of the New Testament that God would still send the promised prophet. That's the question they asked of John the Baptist in John 1:21, "Are you the Prophet?" But he said, "No."

This leads us then to our second point. To recognize Christ as the promised prophet. The New Testament makes this clear. Jesus is the prophet promised in this passage in Deuteronomy. His disciples identify him as this. Peter in Acts 3:22 identifies Jesus as this promised prophet quoting this verse. Stephen mentions this same prophecy in Acts 7. Philip in John 1:45 speaks of Jesus being the one Moses wrote about; likely referring to this prophecy. Jesus says that Moses wrote about him as well in John 5:46. But the best testimony I think is God the Father's testimony in Matthew 17. That's the passage about the transfiguration of Jesus. Moses and Elijah show up with Jesus on a mountain in front of some of the disciples. There God said of Jesus, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" "Hear him." Those are words reminiscent of verse 15 of this passage. When the promised prophet like Moses came, the people must hear him. With Jesus, that promised prophet had come. God affirms this on that mount of transfiguration. It wasn't Elijah. Elijah and Moses instead witnessed right there who the real prophet was. It was Jesus Christ, God's very own son, who had become man.

Of course think about how wonderfully Jesus fulfills this passage. This passage says that the promised prophet would be like us. He'd be like his brethren. Well, Jesus is. Jesus is fully man. He was born of the virgin Mary. He represents mankind perfectly. And yet we also know and affirm that Jesus was God. He was fully divine. So Jesus as the final, ultimate, prophet is both like us and not like us. He is both human and divine. As such, he's the perfect mediator; the perfect prophet; the perfect bridge between God and man!

And then think about how this passage says that this prophet must be like Moses. Well, certainly Jesus had many parallels with the significance of Moses' ministry. Moses was used by God in power through mighty miracles. That obviously describes Jesus' ministry as well. God used Moses to establish a kingdom and deliver a covenant. Jesus came announcing the coming

kingdom of heaven and the ratification of the new covenant in his blood. Moses delivered the law from Mount Sinai. Remember the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus helped bring out the full significance and demand of God's law.

Jesus is like Moses, thus fulfilling this prophecy. But wonderfully we realize that he is even better than Moses. Of course being better than Moses is still consistent with fulfilling this prophecy. The reason why none of the prophets before fulfilled this prophecy is because their ministry kept falling short of Moses' ministry. But there's nothing lacking in this fulfillment if Christ is not only like Moses but even better than Moses, in terms of his ministry as a prophet.

This is the point Hebrews 3 makes in comparing Moses with Jesus. Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant. But Jesus is faithful over all God's house as a son. We see this come through at the Sermon on the Mount, actually. There Jesus very clearly interacts with prophecies Moses had given. He clarifies and expounds them, showing their full ramifications. At points it sounds like he's almost correcting Moses, though certainly there was nothing incorrect with these earlier prophecies. But Jesus explained their full significance.

But what amazed the people when Jesus did this was his authority. He did not say, "Thus says the Lord." That's how the other prophets spoke. That made sense because they were speaking on behalf of God; they were just servants. It was God's authority that carried the clout. But Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount, "But I say to you." He spoke in his own name and with his own authority. Matthew's gospel says that astonished the people. That illustrates the difference between Moses and Jesus. Moses spoke out of God's authority as a servant. Jesus spoke out of his own authority as the Son. Both spoke God's Word. But clearly the prophetic ministry of Jesus was superior as the Son of God who had become man; who was in the most intimate communion with the Father.

Jesus was the promised prophet. He was the prophet *par excellence*. All the prophets of old look forward to him. They all spoke of him. Now that he had come, Jesus had brought to fulfillment all the prophetic ministry. He had brought it to a climax. He had brought it to its completion. The prophetic ministry looked forward to Christ and his saving work. Christ came to announce that and to accomplish that. Having done that he sent out his apostles to announce it. Now the prophetic ministry had been fulfilled in this Great Final Prophet.

What I'd like to do now in this third final point then is make the case that this means the Bible we now have is complete. I want to make the brief case today that since Christ fulfilled the prophetic ministry that he has now completed it. In other words, my point will be that we should not expect to see more official prophets or more official apostles today anymore. This is obviously a point of disagreement and some controversy in the broader Christian church today; though not really a controversy in our denomination.

Some Christian groups would see an ongoing ministry of prophets and apostles today. And yet what's interesting is that the most ardent supporters of this are also the ones quick to qualify this claim. Most are willing to affirm that we are not going to receive any more books of the Bible; that the canon of Scripture is closed. Most are not saying we should put to death those who give prophecies that clearly end up not coming true. In fact, those in the church today who want to claim ongoing prophesy generally acknowledge a

different sort of prophecy in the New Testament than what they had in the Old. They call it fallible prophecy. I am thinking now of people like Wayne Grudem who make this case. By the way, Wayne Grudem is a brother in the Lord who has been used by God to bring some amazing contributions to the church in various books and articles; I would just disagree with him on this one particular point. And so some, like Grudem, acknowledge the clear facts; that Scripture would lead us to see that the Bible has been complete. That we shouldn't expect more books of the Bible. They acknowledge that many who claim today to be prophets give a lot of false prophecy. They don't want that prophecy to be, "Thus, says the Lord," in terms of authority in the church. They don't want authoritative prophecy like that; people like Grudem are not claiming that. They are actually claiming the opposite. That the prophecy that supposedly exists today in the church is *fallible prophecy*; it could be wrong; so we must closely discern it.

Well, I question what value there is in that. If the value of a prophecy today would only be that which can be discerned, and we only discern that by the Word, then what's the difference with that and just a good pointed sermon based on God's Word. But if what we want is the predictive or personal part of this prophecy, but that's the part that's fallible, which can't really be discerned or even trusted, then what value is that in the church?

Well, I think the simple answer to all this is that Scripture says that Christ is the promised prophet, and his ministry brings the prophetic ministry to completion with the close of the apostolic age. Let me offer a few brief arguments from Scripture. The first is the parable of the wicked tenants in Matthew 21. There Jesus describes how the owner of a vineyard kept sending servants to his tenants to collect the rent basically. The wicked tenants kept killing the servants. The text then is clear to say that "finally" the owner sent his son, that they would respect his son. Of course in the parable they go on to kill the son. The analogy is clear though. Jesus is the son in that parable that they killed. The previous servants are the prophets before. This may seem like too simplistic of an example, but a clear point in the parable is that the Son was the final messenger being sent. Jesus is the final prophet because he was ultimately the prophet that was promised here in Deuteronomy.

I think of 1 Peter 1:10 as well here. There it talks about all the prophets who prophesied about the Christ to come, looking forward to the coming of Christ. The clear implication of this verse is that the prophets' purpose was to serve Christ, until Christ. That passage strongly implies that there's no need for the prophets after Christ appears, because the whole purpose of the prophets was to predict the coming of Christ. That's just what Moses did here in Deuteronomy 18. Predict the coming of Christ, the final, ultimate, prophet.

Don't forget Ephesians 2:20. There it describes the church as being built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. You see that passage tells us the foundation is laid. The foundation is chiefly connected with Christ, and includes all the Word of God revealed through the prophets and even the apostles. But the foundation it says has been laid. The clear implication again is that there are no more official prophets to come, and no more official apostles to come.

Think of how that applies to apostles. We shouldn't think that there is an ongoing raising up of new apostles, in terms of this special office at the start of the New Testament church. Just remember the beginning of Acts.

They replaced Judas Iscariot with a new apostle. They believed Scripture called them to that, that there needed to be this number of twelve apostles in a foundational ministry of witnessing to the world about the risen Lord. They didn't appoint lots of apostles, or look for God to appoint lots of them. They recognized the foundational aspect of their ministry and appointed one.

And then don't forget Paul and how he describes his special apostleship and his own encounter with the risen Lord. 1 Corinthians 15:7:

"Then he [Christ] appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Notice how he says "last of all" after referring to "all the apostles," as one untimely born. He can refer to all the twelve apostles, because they were a special one time in history group. Then he can refer to his own appointment as one untimely born in this group, the least and last of them all. Paul didn't expect more official apostles. Why should we?

Well, we do have to acknowledge the fact that some in the New Testament church had the gift of prophecy. There's even one prophet mentioned by name in Acts 21, Agabus. What about these? That's a good question. Well, Scripture doesn't say definitively one way or another that we should expect these supernatural gifts to continue beyond the age of the apostles when God was working other miracles and establishing the New Testament church. We could assume that God would, but that's not what the early church fathers assumed. The early church fathers write that these supernatural gifts were only for a time. They coincided with the supernatural ministry of the apostles; they served as miracles to testify to this work. But in the early church writings the orthodox said these supernatural things had ceased. It was those who were recognized as heretics back then that made the claim that they continued.

The Bible doesn't tell us that we will always have the special offices of prophets and apostles in the church. Instead I've begun to make the case today that the prophetic ministry came to a climax in Christ. The prophets of old looked forward to Christ. The apostles afterward testified, with miracles, to the risen Christ. But now the foundation has been laid. We shouldn't expect a new foundation. We shouldn't expect new books of the Bible. We shouldn't expect new prophets or apostles.

At first glance, it might seem exciting if we did. But I ask, what would they give us that we don't already have? The prophets pointed forward to Christ. We have seen his coming and we believe. The apostles have testified to his ministry and resurrection. We have heard and believed. You see, what more could they give? Especially if we were to understand the popular position that this new prophecy is just fallible prophecy? You see, the concern is what we read here in verse 22. We don't ever want to speak presumptuously on behalf of God. Nor does God want you to have to wonder about how to live your life or how to serve him. We have everything we need right here in the Bible. Yes, you might have to make some tough prayerful decisions in life based on its teachings. But the Spirit will lead you in this.

Let me close brothers and sisters with two final points of application. Both are given in light of the Hebrews 12 passage we read earlier. First, notice verse 19. God would require the people's obedience to the words spoken by his prophets. If that was true back then, how much more true is it now? Don't miss the message of Christ. This Word is chiefly the gospel. That Christ calls all men to come to him in faith, trusting in him for salvation and forgiveness of sins. If you believe in Jesus, you will have eternal life. If not, God will require this of you. You will be guilty for rejecting the greatest gift of all. Those who deny his Christ will be given the eternal punishment of hell. So the application I'm talking about is to believe. Believe in Christ's words. Believe in the gospel and receive life.

The second application comes in light of verses 16-18, where God praises the people's idea of having a prophet. God basically says that the idea of having a mediator is partly their idea. The people were scared at the prospect of God approaching them directly. And yet Hebrews 12 contrasts that with the prophetic ministry of Christ. The events at Mt. Sinai may have left the people trembling, looking for someone to go in between them and God. But when Christ came to us, it was God coming to us; and yet he doesn't speak any longer with the terrors of Sinai to us. No, he speaks the loving words that call us to come to him and find his yoke easy and his burden light. He calls us in love to his sweet words of grace. Words that should cause us not fear but delight. Words of greatest joy. Let us respond in worship and reverence and awe, even as we live a life lived by his words, according to all the scriptures. Amen.

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