

The Prophet Like Moses

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[0 : 00] Before we read, actually, a little bit of introduction I'd like to give. So we're in a series leading up to Christmas called Waiting for the Saviour.! And what we're doing together is we're looking at the ancient Old Testament promises written hundreds of years before the coming of Jesus, which look forward to Jesus's coming.

Two Sundays ago, in Genesis 3, immediately after sin entered the world, God promised that a man would come and crush the head of the snake, Satan, and deliver us from evil.

An ancient promise right at the beginning of the Bible that's fulfilled in Jesus, who came into the world to destroy the devil's work. Last Sunday, we read from Genesis chapter 12 of God's promises to a man called Abraham.

And in Genesis 12, God said to him, Go to a land I will show you, and I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and all peoples will be blessed through you, Abraham, and your seed. Genesis 12, the promises on which all of God's plans for human history rest, that through Abraham and the nation that comes from him, God would bless the world. He'd overturn sin and death and restore people to himself.

[1 : 17] Promises fulfilled through the seed of Abraham, who is Jesus. This morning, in a moment, Alan's going to read from Deuteronomy 18, which takes place well over 400 years after God's promises to Abraham.

And just to bring us up to speed, lots has happened. So Abraham's family grew from one man, Abraham. They grew into a nation, the people of Israel. And due to a famine, they'd ended up in Egypt.

They were enslaved. But God kept his promises. And you may know the story in Exodus, where God raised up Moses, who led God's people out of slavery.

They came to Mount Sinai, where God spoke through Moses to the people in the kind of thundering voice. I am your God. I have brought you to myself. You will have no other gods before me.

And from Mount Sinai, the people were led for 40 years through the desert towards the land that God promised to Abraham.

[2 : 20] Until finally, they arrived at the border into Canaan. And it's at this point in history, the history of God's work, as the offspring of Abraham, loved by God, stood ready to cross over into the land God had promised them, about three and a half thousand years ago, that Moses spoke the words of Deuteronomy 18 to the people.

So with that in mind, we're going to listen to Deuteronomy 18 and then John chapter 1. Alan's going to read Deuteronomy 18, verses 9 to 22. Page 190.

When you enter the land the Lord your God has given you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist, who consults the dead.

Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord. Because of these same detestable practices, the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you.

You must be blameless before the Lord your God. The nations you dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination.

[3 : 55] But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from among your fellow Israelites.

You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God, nor see this great fire any more, or we will die.

The Lord said to me, What they say is good. 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.

But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.

[5 : 03] You may say to yourselves, How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord? If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken.

That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed. Okay, now second reading from John chapter 1.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, This is the one I spoke about when I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me, because he was before me. Out of his fullness we have all received grace, in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came true to his Christ.

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God, and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. Now this was John's testimony, when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, I am not the Messiah.

[6 : 30] They asked him, then who are you? Are you Elijah? He said, I am not. Are you the prophet? He answered, no. Finally they said, who are you? Give us an answer to take back those who sent us. What do you say about yourself? John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord.

Super, thank you. Turn back to Deuteronomy 18 with me, if you might, page 196. And here's the question this morning, arising from our Bible readings. Who will you listen to? Who will you listen to? When life gets dark and confusing and you don't know what to do, when your future feels unknown and frightening and you can't see a way forward, who will you listen to? When parenting is a confusing nightmare and you really need help. When you become unexpectedly pregnant and competing voices pile in telling you what you should do. Or say your extended family say awful things about you and you feel vulnerable, you want to get them back and you don't know how. Or maybe you're someone who feels very emotional and far from God and you don't understand why and it hurts and you want guidance. Or say you have six months to live and you're scared of dying and what might happen after. Or say you're in church this morning because you want to hear the truth, you want to know the living God, but there is so many opinions out there. When life is dark and confusing and the future feels unknown and frightening and when you badly want guidance, you want a word you can trust right now, who will you listen to? I start like that because as the people of Israel prepare to enter the land God is giving them, it is exactly this that Moses wants to talk to them about. And it's really struck me this week that these ancient words of warning and promise to them then are not just bang up to date and relevant for us, because they are, but they are here to lead us to faith in Jesus Christ himself. So with Deuteronomy 18 open in front of us, just follow along with me and first in verses 9 to 14, do you see how Moses warns the people, don't copy the ways that God detests.

Let me read again verses 9 to 14. When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord. Because of these same detestable practices, the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God. The nations you will dispossess, listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so. I wonder what you make of that paragraph. Some of us might say, that sounds bonkers crazy. I've never come across anything like that. Others of us will say,

I know about this kind of thing. In a confusing and a scary world, human beings alienated from God can be tempted to grab onto anything we can to help us know the future, get guidance for

decisions, protect ourselves from others. And that is what this is here, three and a half thousand years ago. Humans devising kind of twisted dark arts. Do you know what this stuff is about? Practices divination or sorcery interprets omens are kind of magic-like rituals as you look for knowledge and help. Back then a diviner read the liver of a sacrificial animal to gain insight or predict the future. A soothsayer, sorcerer, claimed an instinct to see the truth. Or if you mix oil and water, watch the play of light, you see if it's a good or a bad omen. In the UK, in my experience today, I have not seen much liver reading of sacrificial animals. But you can go on the internet and check out your daily horoscope. You share your zodiac sign, and you find out apparently what's in store for you today and in the coming week to guide you.

And the sale of tarot cards, which promise secret insight into your life, if you know this, have surged in the past five years, especially to Generation Z, 15 to 24, as people grab onto what they can for and you're going to be able to do. And you're going to be able to do this. And you're going to be able to do this. And you're going to be able to do this. And you're going to be able to do this.

[11 : 48] It's not about guidance, actually. It's about control, where you try to hex someone, give them the evil eye, or curse them somehow. Or in the UK today, you just want to be protected and have good things come to you.

So go find today's moon spell at spells8.com and light some sage incense and chant, I have the strength to succeed. Do some manifesting. You cast a mental spell and think your goals into reality. Or English folk religion.

You say, touch wood, touch wood, I'll be okay. And hopefully I'll be magically kept safe and not tempt fate. Mediums, spiritists and consulting the dead here, that is necromancy, where you try to communicate with the dead so that you might know the future or be told what to do. So in Cambridge then, order yourself a Ouija board and get into that. Or go visit the medium, just beyond Stairbridge Common, who advertises to people who are grieving that she can give you messages from your loved ones in the spirit world.

Do you think this stuff is up to date? It is. It really is. Or think beyond my personal British man experience.

I feel I should have come and talked to some of you about this this week before saying what I'm going to say. And I didn't. Forgive me if I've misunderstood what I've read about divination and rituals and magic and witchcraft and spellcasting around the world today. But it is everywhere. And some of us will know this firsthand.

[13 : 39] We'll experience the scary uncertainty, the kind of trapping power of Jamaican obeyer practices, or Haitian voodoo. If I've understood this correctly, Gong Tao is a type of witchcraft in Southeast Asia, where you summon spirits and perform curses. And within Chinese culture, if I understand rightly, the four pillars of destiny, Bazi, analyze your birth date to reveal your fate.

And certainly across Africa, divining rituals and evil eye spells and interpreting omens and communing with ancestors everywhere.

And has such a controlling power. Both through history and today, men and women are held in fear, grasping vainly for guidance and protection in a confusing world, tempted to listen to anyone who says, I can see, I have the power, I will share secret knowledge with you.

Unless you're like a kind of superior feeling white English man who thinks to himself, I'm like, I don't need guidance and protection from imaginary gods or anyone else.

A kind of superior feeling English person who instead just listens to the godlike voice inside themselves. I'll be guided by my heart. And while all the time lacking any direction in life and desperately checking their health statistics so that they can try and ward off death in their own power.

[15 : 31] What does God say about all this stuff? All these human devised ways to cope in a confusing, scary world? When it comes up time and time again here, they are, verse 9, detestable.

God hates it. And verse 12, anyone who does these things, detestable to the Lord. Firstly, I think, because they dishonour him.

Because he is the good creator. He the one who provides and protects us. He the one who numbers our days and knows our futures. Our lives are in his hands. So you think, how offensive to turn from the true God and in our fog and fear grab onto some kind of false religion, really?

But it's not just that it dishonours him. God also detests these practices because they're deceptive. And they don't work. And in the first century, they lead to people sacrificing their children in the fire.

And actually, I wasn't going to say this, but in a 20th century world where our God is sexual freedom and personal liberty, we sacrifice a lot of children in the womb, in our darkness.

[16:48] All these practices, they leave you living in darkness and trapped in fear. And verse 14, the nations you will dispossess, listen to those who practice sorcery or divination.

But as for you, the Lord God has not permitted you to do so. So ask this then. Who should we listen to? Who should we listen to for guidance and life and truth?

And first, verses 9 to 14, don't copy the ways God detests. Instead, 2nd, verses 14 to 22, listen to the prophet God raises up.

I remember jogging up a hill in Scotland last winter, and I started before dawn in the grey, swirling fog and darkness. Kind of a stupid thing to do. Before, with a few metres of elevation up Ben Lomond, the day dawned, the rising sun just cut through the fog and cleared it.

And I can see. In verse 14 onwards, we move from foul, dark fog into clear, wonderful light. Who should we listen to in God's world?

[17:59] Let me read verses 14 to 18. Listen to this promise. Moses says, This voice.

This person who the people should listen to. What are we told about him? Four things. First, in verse 15, God will raise him up. Our world is full of self-appointed experts, influencers, prophets, diviners, mediums, who are self-appointed, self-centred, and spouting what they want.

Don't listen to them. This person God will raise up. God's initiative. God's man. That is good.

Second, verse 15 again, he will be a prophet like me, says Moses.

And verses 16 and 17 explain. This is what the Israelites asked of the Lord at Horeb on the day of the assembly. Horeb is Mount Sinai. It's the place where 40 years before this moment, God met with his people.

His voice so overwhelming that the people said, Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God, nor see this fire, or we will die. And what they did was demand that Moses go near to God and listen, and then bring God's message to them.

[19:57] So there is God and them, and for Moses to act as the mediator in the middle. But with Moses not far off dying, who should they now listen to?

God will raise up a prophet like Moses, who will speak God's words. That's in verse 18.

Look, 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 can't overstate how important that is. You might be better at me than this. I don't know what you're like at relaying conversations that you have had.

In our house, Meg comes home from school. We chat about how our day's been. I say, I was on the phone to my mum, and Meg says, What does she say? And I say, She's doing all right.

[20:57] Because I can only partly, vaguely remember the kind of things that my mum, whom I love said to me. The prophet like Moses here will not partly, vaguely remember what God said and just relay something.

It's so important. Look, middle of verse 18. I will put my words in his mouth. Amazing. The living God will speak.

God will put his words in the mouth of that person. And then he will tell them everything I command him. So as you listen to the prophet, you don't hear summaries or vague thoughts.

You hear God's voice. Truth from God. Guidance from God. Promises from God. Spoken through the mouth of the prophet.

Imagine meeting him. You so want to listen. Like not only you'd want to, but also here in Deuteronomy, you must listen to him.

[22:01] Because in verse 19, the Lord says, I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words, that the prophet speaks in my name. And there's other important things to say in verse 20 onwards.

If a prophet presumes to speak in God's name, but says God's stuff God didn't say, put them to death. It's that serious. If a prophet says stuff, but it doesn't come true, don't be alarmed.

That won't have been a message from the Lord. But you get the big thrust, do you? Of these ancient verses. Written three and a half thousand years ago, in an often dark and confusing and frightening world, don't copy the dark ways God detests.

Don't listen to other voices. In his kindness, God will raise up a prophet. That is a promise. He will raise up a prophet like Moses who will speak God's words.

Listen to him. To which maybe you say this morning, in the 21st century, I see that. I see this promise.

[23 : 08] I want to listen to God's words. I want clarity and truth for life now. So who is this prophet like Moses whom I can listen to? You know what I'm going to say.

As history moved on, the people of Israel entered the land God was giving them. And prophets arose, they did, who spoke God's words.

And yet the sense was that there was something lacking. Since his death, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, Deuteronomy 34 verse 10 said.

And so the people waited. And they waited. Until at the start of the first century AD, the final Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist, came.

And the people approached him and they said, are you the prophet? Are you the one we've been waiting for? And he said, I'm not. But look for the one who comes after me.

[24 : 08] Do you know who that is? Don't copy the prophet God raises up. Who is Jesus? It's Jesus.

Testified to by John the Baptist, Jesus comes into the world as the prophet like Moses. And he speaks God's words.

From his own lips, publicly. My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me, he says.

The father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. So whatever I say is just what the father has told me to say. Jesus comes into the world and he speaks with God's authority. He says what will happen in the future. He teaches the confused. He comforts the fearful. And he declares, whoever obeys my word will never see death.

[25 : 14] Jesus is more than the prophet. Because he is the divine son of God. But he is no less than the prophet like Moses. I mean, the months after Jesus' resurrection, Peter the apostle spoke words of warning to Jews who were refusing to listen to Jesus.

His warning to them. He quotes Deuteronomy 18. 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. And anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from his people. He says to them, you've got to listen to Jesus.

Because Jesus is the one Moses spoke about. You can be absolutely sure of it. A final word from Hebrews chapter 1.

In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son.

[26 : 22] Do you see that? The final word in these last days, spoken by the prophet. Not me, not anyone else, not Muhammad.

The final word spoken by the prophet, who is his son. This is such good news. And we asked at the beginning, who will you listen to in your life?

And when life is dark and confusing and the future feels unknown and frightening, when you badly want guidance, a word you can trust right now, who will you listen to? I simply want to say, would you hear the good news this morning?

That we don't need to remain in the dark and the fog. We don't need to, if you're tempted to, to desperately grab onto horoscopes, tarot cards, mediums, diviners, or listening to the voice inside. We really don't need spells manifesting amulets or obsessing over health stats. None of that will work. None of that will calm your fears. None of that will guide you rightly.

[27 : 35] None of that will keep you safe. And it's all detestable to the God who made us. In fulfillment of his promises, God has raised up a prophet like Moses. He was born into the world 2,000 years ago.

And through this prophet, you can hear the words of God spoken to you, words of truth and comfort and life. And this prophet's name is Jesus, God's son.

And so, listen to him. His words are here now in the New Testament, from God and for us.

If there is some way today in which you are in some particular way in the dark, or confused or scared even, and you want a word to trust, well, do you want to know how to live?

With your kids? With your unexpected pregnancy? With the biting words of your family? You listen to the words of Jesus, and allow his commands and his wisdom to shape you.

[28 : 44] Do you feel emotional and far from God, and you don't understand why, and it hurts, and you want guidance? There is only one to whom you should go. Listen to Jesus, for only he can guide and hold you.

And do you know you may not have long to live, and you're scared of dying, and what happens after? Listen to the words of Jesus, who promises life beyond the grave to all who turn to him. Are you not yet a Christian, but you want to hear the truth, and know God? Whatever you do, don't ignore God's prophet, God's son.

You've got to ditch all other voices, and you've got to listen to Jesus, because he is the prophet whom God has sent into the world, and he alone has the words of eternal life.

Let me pray. I'm going to lead us in a prayer together, and then we're going to sing. Let me pray. The first disciples said, to whom shall we turn?

[29 : 55] You alone have the words of eternal life. Almighty God and Father, we praise you that all your promises and plans for our good find their fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you that he came into the world to destroy the devil's work. Thank you that he is the seed of Abraham, come to bless the world. Thank you that the Lord Jesus Christ is the prophet like Moses, speaking truth from you.

Please would you help us in our lives, not to turn to or listen to other voices that will lead us astray, ways that you detest.

Make us those who hang on every word of your precious son, Jesus Christ. May we listen to him, and trust him, and know him, and know that we will not see death, but enjoy life eternal.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.