

# Deuteronomy 18:15-22

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*Moses then told the Israelites that after his death, the LORD would raise up prophets like himself. The people were to turn to these godly prophets for communication with God. God also predicts Jesus will be a prophet like Moses.*

This section contrasts the previous one in which Moses asked the Israelites not to “imitate the detestable things” of the Canaanites and other tribes who listened to magicians and diviners. Instead, the Israelites were commanded to listen to the prophets who spoke the truth according to the revelation received from the Suzerain God.

The prohibition against using the pagan sources mentioned earlier does not mean that the LORD would not provide a way to access Him or receive His guidance. Moses promised the people that *the LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him* (v.15).

The term *prophet* (Heb. “nābî”) can be used for true and false prophets alike ([Jeremiah 6:13](#); [26:7-8](#); [27:9](#); [28:1](#); [Zechariah 13:2](#)). A true prophet was someone who received a call to be God’s spokesman. He was an authorized envoy for God with a message that originated from God. Such a prophet would come from your *countrymen*, a term which literally means “brother” ([Deuteronomy 17:15](#)). The people of God were commanded to *listen to* God’s spokesman, instead of listening to those who practiced witchcraft and sorcery.

Moses explained that *this is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly*. This statement reminded the Israelites of their frightening experience at Mount Sinai (called *Horeb* in Deuteronomy) when the LORD was about to deliver the Ten Commandments to them in a supernatural manifestation ([Exodus 20:18 – 19](#); [Deuteronomy 5:23 – 27](#)).

At Mount Horeb, the LORD asked Moses to gather the people to Him so that they could hear His words in order to learn to fear Him all the days of their lives ([Deuteronomy 4:10](#)). As the people of Israel assembled to hear the divine truths, they became afraid when they *heard the voice* of the LORD

“from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire” ([Deuteronomy 5:23](#)). The people cried out from fear, saying, *Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.* Then, the people stood at a distance while all the leaders and elders of their tribes drew near to Moses in order to urge him to serve as covenant mediator between God and His people.

Moses then reminded the Israelites of God’s response to him when they were at Mount Sinai (Horeb). He recalled that *the LORD said to him, ‘They have spoken well.’*

Therefore, God not only provided the Israelites with Moses as the mediator but promised to *raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like Moses* (v. 18). The ultimate fulfillment of this came in the form of Jesus Christ. He was from Israel, of the tribe of Judah, so *from among their countryman*. Jesus not only had God’s *words* in His *mouth*, He was a physical manifestation of God in flesh, the very Word of God. God said Israel had *spoken well* to ask for a better way to see and hear God, rather than the scary and intimidating presence on Sinai. And God promised to send a human to speak as God spoke on Sinai. When Jesus came in the flesh, He fulfilled this promise. This is likely why the word *prophet* in verse 17 is singular, to signal that this is a Messianic prophecy.

As such, it refers to a special prophet who was to come, Jesus Christ, who was the second Moses, just as He was the second Adam ([Romans 12-14](#)). This is made apparent in [Acts 3:22](#) and [7:37](#), where this verse is quoted by those proving that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah (anointed one) promised by God to deliver Israel.

As with many other prophecies, this probably has a double fulfillment. The term *prophet* likely also represents a collective noun referring to a group of prophets.

Therefore this also answered the question about whether the LORD would provide another mediator after Moses died. The *prophet* who would come after Moses would occupy the same function, acting as covenant mediator between Yahweh and the Israelites. The idea of God putting words in the mouth of prophets is also said of Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 1:9](#)). True prophets only said those things that were true, things they heard from God.

The idea of a double fulfillment is also supported by the last two verses of this chapter which make a clear distinction between true prophets and false

prophets. In its immediate context, the verse refers to a group of prophets (such as Samuel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel) who would come after Moses. Then, in the ultimate fulfillment, a greater prophet (Jesus the Messiah) who was God Himself would come to speak the word of God in person, as a human, in a manner that would not compel people to hear and obey, as on Sinai. This second Moses would serve as the mediator between God and humans ([John 6:14](#); [7:40](#)) through His death on the cross. The predecessor prophets to Jesus would have similar qualities to Moses. But Jesus would have the *words* of God *in his mouth*, be the Living Word, and inaugurate a new covenant between humans and God, through the sacrifice of His own body.

After promising to provide a prophet, the LORD issued a warning to His people saying that *it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he (the prophet) shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him* (v. 19). The phrase *I Myself* is emphatic in the Hebrew text. All those who would fail to obey the words of God's envoy, God's prophet, would be held accountable by the LORD Himself.

Similarly, another warning was given to all those who would presume to be the LORD's prophets but utter false prophecies in order to deceive the people. It was said that *the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die* (v. 20). To proclaim to be God's prophet and then speak false doctrine resulted in a death sentence from the LORD.

This biblical law condemned two categories of false prophets: those who spoke *a word presumptuously* in God's name and those who spoke *in the name of other gods*. Later revelations gave us an example of each of these categories. For instance, in [Jeremiah 28](#), Hananiah prophesied falsely in God's name saying that the people of Judah would return to their homeland within two years ([Jeremiah 28:3](#)).

However, the message was not from the LORD. That is why the LORD sent the prophet Jeremiah to confront Hananiah, "Listen now, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This year you are going to die, because you have counseled rebellion against the LORD.' So Hananiah the prophet died in the same year" ([Jeremiah 28:15-16](#)). This is a clear example of someone who prophesied falsely in the name of Yahweh, Israel's God.

An example of prophets speaking *in the name of other gods* is found in [1 Kings 18](#). In this chapter, Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal and told them to “choose one ox for yourselves and prepare it first for you are many, and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it.” Then the false prophets took the ox and prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, “O Baal, answer us.” But they received no answer from Baal. Then after Elijah had mocked them, “they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. When midday was past, they raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention” ([1 Kings 18:25-29](#)).

So, whether the prophet spoke falsely in God’s name or spoke *in the name of other gods*, the punishment was death. To twist the truth in the name of God was to create a false god. And speaking in the name of a false god was to lead the people to follow in the ways of the false god. In either case, the people would follow the ways of envy, self-seeking, and exploitation rather than God’s ways of mutual service and love toward one another. This cancer was to be removed as soon as it arose.

Reasonably, the people of God might ask *how will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?* The answer is given in the following verse. Moses told them that *when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken* (v. 22). Here a criterion was put in place to distinguish a true prophet from a false prophet speaking in God’s name to deceive the people of God ([Jeremiah 28](#)). As far as the prophets who spoke in the name of other gods were concerned, there was no doubt they were not sent by God because their messages did not originate with God. In other words, the prophets’ appeal to other gods would classify them as false. However, it was more difficult to detect those false prophets speaking in God’s name.

Thus, the people of God would detect a false prophet when his prophecy did *not come about or come true*. This implies that the Israelites needed to wait for some time until the prophecy took place. In this case, the Israelites would be suspicious of any prophet until some of his predictions actually came to pass. When the prophet’s message did not come to pass, God’s people would know he had spoken it presumptuously. Thus, the Israelites were not to *be afraid of him*. In this case *to be afraid* means to care about what he says, and the consequences he can create.

This passage teaches that the LORD will supply prophets to Israel that would proclaim His revealed word to His people. Eventually, He will send the ultimate Prophet, Jesus Christ. This can be seen in passages such as [John 1:45](#), [5:46](#), and [12:49 – 50](#). Peter applies this passage to Jesus Christ in [Acts 3:22](#). Stephen likewise applied this passage to Jesus in [Acts 7:37](#). Given these New Testament verses, it is valid to consider this passage (especially [Deuteronomy 18:15](#)) as a Messianic Prophecy.

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>15</sup> The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. <sup>16</sup> This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.’ <sup>17</sup> The Lord said to me, ‘They have spoken well. <sup>18</sup> I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. <sup>19</sup> It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him. <sup>20</sup> But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ <sup>21</sup> You may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’ <sup>22</sup> When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.**