



THE PROMISED ONE | THE PROMISED PROPHET

December 14, 2025

One of the questions that I am asked more than any other is simple but poignant: How do I know? How do I know that God is real, that God is there, that God cares about me? And if all of that is true, how do I know what God wants from me? How does God speak? How does God lead us? How does God guide us? How do I discern God's will for my life?

I believe, whether people are willing to admit it or not, that every human heart longs for a God who speaks. We long for God to guide us. To provide us with answers to essential questions like: Who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose? How do I find fulfillment? How do I fulfill my own destiny? And even those who deny the existence of God are nevertheless drawn, sometimes mysteriously, sometimes inexorably, toward transcendent truth.

We want to believe that the arc of the universe bends toward justice, even though we can't prove it. We want to believe that love is real and it's not just a chemical reaction in our brains. And why might that be? I would suggest it is because we are created by a God who speaks and a God who desires to be known. And what's more, he's made a promise. He's made a promise not to leave us in the dark but to speak clearly and unmistakably.

During this Advent season, we are considering how the Bible tells one long unfolding story that centers on Jesus and that finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus. And if you miss that overarching storyline, you rip the heart out of the Bible, and you forfeit the power that is available to you. So over these few weeks of advent, we're going to explore how Jesus fulfills the ancient promises of Scripture. And today we turn to Deuteronomy 18, where God promises to speak through a prophet greater than Moses.

I'd like us to consider three questions: Why do we need a prophet? Who is this prophet? And what difference does he make? To give you a little preview of where we're headed, as we work through these questions, we'll see that Jesus speaks God's Word, Jesus stands in the gap, and as a result, Jesus transforms our lives. As the promised prophet, Jesus brings the ultimate revelation, the ultimate mediation, and the ultimate transformation. So again, we'll consider: 1) *Why do we need a prophet?* 2) *Who is this prophet?* And 3) *What difference does he make?*

¹⁵The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—¹⁶just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die." ¹⁷And the Lord said to me, "They are right in what they have spoken. ¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his

mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. ¹⁹And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.”

Deuteronomy 18: 15-19

The season of Advent is a season of waiting. We're waiting for God to speak again, because we're living in between the times. We're living in between the time of Jesus' first coming in humility and weakness as a child, and his promised second coming in power and strength as the risen and reigning king. And in this in between time, we long for God to speak. We long for God to speak in the midst of our doubt and our confusion, our waiting and our wondering.

That's why Deuteronomy 18 is such an appropriate passage for Advent, because here God makes a promise to a waiting people. The people here in Deuteronomy 18 were also living in between the times. They were living in between God's rescue of them in Egypt and when he would finally lead them into the land that he had promised. You see, God had already raised up Moses as the leader who would initiate the Exodus, the great deliverance, where he would rescue his people from their bondage in Egypt.

Through Moses, he leads his people to Mount Sinai, where he enters into a special covenantal relationship with them. And at Sinai, he gives them the law. He spells out how he wants them to live. He shows them how to live in response to his love and grace. And then over the course of 40 years, he guides them through the wilderness and now brings them right up to the very edge of the promised land.

But here they are now, on the eastern edge of the Jordan River. They haven't yet crossed the river into the land that God has promised. They're waiting. And they're wondering, well, how is God going to lead us and guide us after Moses is gone? And so to address that question, God makes this promise in the midst of their waiting: He promises to raise up a prophet like Moses. In verse 15 and then again in verse 18, “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” But what do we mean by a prophet?

I think to the average American, we assume that a prophet is someone who foretells or predicts the future. That's what a prophet is. But actually, in the Bible, telling the future is secondary. It's peripheral. It's not the most important thing. In the Bible, a prophet is not primarily someone who foretells the future, but rather someone who forth tells God's Word. A prophet in the Bible is not necessarily someone who predicts the future but someone who speaks God's Word clearly and authoritatively.

Let me give you an interesting example of this. If you turn to Exodus 7, this is the place where God first calls Moses to confront Pharaoh in Egypt. But Moses doesn't want to go because he doesn't think he's a very good public speaker. And so God says to Moses, don't worry about that. Your brother Aaron will speak on your behalf. And he says in verse 1, you, Moses, will be like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be like your prophet. So Aaron is a prophet to Moses in the same way that Moses is a prophet to God, meaning Aaron and Moses just speak on behalf of another:

Aaron speaks on behalf of Moses, and Moses speaks on behalf of God. A prophet is simply someone who forth tells — who delivers God's Word.

Moses, of course, was the greatest of all the prophets in the Old Testament. No one enjoyed a more intimate relationship with God in the Old Testament than Moses. There's this fascinating place in Exodus 33 where we read that the Lord spoke to Moses face to face in the same way that a man speaks to his friends. Can you imagine God saying that of you? I don't hide anything. I speak to you face to face. I share everything that's on my heart and mind. I speak to you the same way that I would speak to a friend.

And at the end of the book we're in today, Deuteronomy, in the very final chapter, we're told that at the time of its writing, no one had arisen in Israel who was as great of a prophet as Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. So there was direct communication between God and Moses — communication that was unique, even among all the prophets down through history.

Why do we need a prophet?

And so what does a prophet do? A prophet doesn't say, well, let me throw out some ideas, and then we can kind of kick 'em around together and see what sticks. No, a prophet says, "Thus says the Lord." The prophet is simply speaking on God's behalf. And when those words — the words of God, through the words of the prophet — are written down for us, well then that is God's Word to us so that we can trust that whatever the Bible says, God says.

Now as a result of that, there are some pretty important implications. We may not always know what the truth is, but the Bible suggests that there really is such a thing as Truth with a capital T. This challenges us as New Yorkers. This seriously challenges us, because I think you could divide most contemporary New Yorkers into two different groups.

On the one hand, you have the materialists. Those are the ones who say there is no God, and therefore there's no voice above us. There's no Truth that transcends our human existence. All we really have for certain are scientific facts. The only thing that we can really know are the things that we can see and touch, the things that we can measure and weigh. Everything else is just a matter of personal opinion. So there are scientific facts, and then everything else is a value — something that's driven by your own subjective experience. There is no Truth, no voice above you, that explains who we are — the essence of who we are as human beings. There's no voice that tells us how to tell the difference between right and wrong or what our purpose in life is. So that's the materialist view.

On the other hand, you have a more mystical way of thinking about it. You might call this the relativistic view. The materialist says there is no God; the relativist says God is everywhere and in everything. We are God. We're part of God. There may not be a voice above us, but there's also no voice outside of us, and the way that we find truth is by looking deep within ourselves. We have to listen to the God within, which means that in essence, we construct our own truth. It's just a matter of our own experience.

Now, those two views are very different. There is no God; God is everywhere in everything. There's no voice above us; there's no voice outside of us. But do you know what both of those views have in common? Both of them say that when you get up in the morning, there is no one that you need to obey. There's no voice outside of you to which you need to submit yourself, which means whichever view you take, you are your own prophet.

Now, on the one hand, you might say, well, that's good. That's what I want. I want freedom. I want autonomy. But to be your own prophet also might explain some of the problems that we wrestle with — like our analysis paralysis (inability to make important decisions), the anxiety that we feel over our identity, or our moral confusion — because we don't have a voice above us or outside of us. But God's answer to that is, oh, no, there is a Truth with a capital T. There is a voice outside of you and above you — a voice that is for you.

And we should want that to be the case. We should want there to be a Truth that is outside of us, that isn't just limited to scientific facts or personal subjective experience but is an absolute Truth. Because without it, we really can't answer those fundamental, essential questions: Who am I? Why am I here? What is the purpose of my life? See, without that Truth, we're left alone with our own thoughts, feelings, fears, and insecurities, and all we can do is guess. But no, we have a God who speaks.

Who is this prophet?

So if that's why we need a prophet — to deliver God's Word to us — then who is this prophet? Well, as I've said, the Bible is one long unfolding story, and we could break it into three different stages when it comes to this promised prophet. There's: 1) *expectation*, 2) *recognition*, and then finally 3) *fulfillment*.

Expectation

It starts with expectation. There's a long line of prophets through the story of the Bible, beginning with Moses, and then Elijah, and then Isaiah, all the way to Malachi. All of these prophets are pointing forward to the ultimate prophet, the prophet of prophets, this new Moses that God promises in Deuteronomy 18. And that's why, when you turn to John 1 in the beginning of the New Testament and John the Baptist appears on the scene, everybody wants to know, is he the one? They ask in John 1, are you the prophet? And he says, no, no, no. He deflects the attention away from himself. But then, when people meet Jesus, they start to put the pieces together, and expectation now begins to give way to recognition.

Recognition

For example, in John 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman beside a well. They've never met before, and yet Jesus knows everything about her — even the most intimate and embarrassing parts of her life story. And so she says to Jesus, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet." And she's more right than she knows. Then again, in John 6, after Jesus feeds the 5,000, the crowds say, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" This recognition then sets up the fulfillment.

Fulfillment

People soon realize that Jesus doesn't just deliver a message; he is the message. Jesus doesn't just deliver a word; he is God's Word. He's the one all the prophets were talking about. Everything the prophets said has come true in Jesus. And the author of the book of Hebrews sums this up beautifully in chapter 1, verses 1-2: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."

What the author of Hebrews is saying is that, yes, in the past there was this long line of prophets, and God spoke in many different ways at many different times. But now he has spoken fully and finally in his Son. He's not just speaking in bits and pieces now, but he's speaking in an ultimate sense. And therefore, what that means is that Jesus is not just one more prophet in that long line of prophets, but he is the promised prophet who was to come. Therefore, Jesus doesn't just speak God's Word; Jesus is God's Word. He is the Word made flesh.

There's a great place in John 14 where one of Jesus' disciples, Philip, is feeling a little exasperated. He's kind of overwhelmed by all the theology he's getting from Jesus. It's a little bit too much for him. It's going over his head. And so he just says to Jesus at one point, look, Jesus, help a guy out. Just show us the Father. Just tell us what God is like, and that'll be enough for us. And I love Jesus' response, because he basically says, Philip, buddy, where have you been? Where have you been this whole time? Don't you realize after all the time that you have spent with me that if you have seen me, you have seen God? If you have heard me, you have heard God? Because I and the Father are one.

And this is what separates Christianity from every other religion, every other philosophy, every other worldview in the world. Because every other religious teacher basically gives you principles, but Christianity gives us a person. Unlike every other religious teacher, Jesus doesn't show you the way; he is the way. He doesn't tell you how to live; he is the life. He doesn't just bring God's Word; he is God's Word. He doesn't just bring the truth; he is the Truth. And here's why this is so important: Moses spoke for God, but Jesus spoke as God.

This ties back to that opening question: How do I know? How do I know what God wants from me? How do I discern his will? You see, we're constantly faced with decisions. We don't always know the right answer. Should I get a new job or should I go back to school? Should I change apartments or should I stay put? Should I get married to this person or should I break up? Should we start having children or not yet? And see, we want to be in God's will, but how do we know? Of course, God knows what we should do. He has a plan for our lives. But this is often where we make a very serious mistake. Our idea about how we try to discern God's will is often more pagan than it is Christian. Here's what I mean by that.

We tend to treat God a little bit like a Magic 8 Ball. Do you remember that novelty toy from the 1980s? It was a big hit when I was a kid. You would take that Magic 8 Ball in your hands, you would ask a simple yes or no question, and then you would shake the 8 ball, flip it upside down, and then the answer would be revealed for you in a little window. And the answers to your questions could be positive ("Yes, it is certain"),

negative (“Don’t count on it”), or neutral (Try again later”). Now, who of us would like to admit that yes, at times we treat God like a Magic 8 Ball? That’s how we approach God in prayer. We’re looking for the sign: What am I supposed to do? But you see, that’s more pagan than it is Christian, because God would rather us not be looking for signs but instead cultivating a heart of wisdom.

Bruce Waltke is a biblical scholar who once wrote a book called “Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?” In it, Waltke makes a thought-provoking statement. He says that God in the New Testament never tells us to try to divine God’s will in advance. Rather, the New Testament tells us to do God’s will. In other words, we’re not supposed to learn how to read the tea leaves to try to predict the future and figure out what we’re supposed to do. Rather we’re supposed to know God so well that we know instinctively what would honor him and what would please him, and that’s how we know how we’re supposed to live our lives and what decisions we’re supposed to make. We’re not supposed to try to read the signs; we’re supposed to cultivate a heart of wisdom that acts within God’s will because we know him so well.

So how do we do that? Well, the primary way in which we get to know God, draw close to him, make his heart our own is by reading the Scriptures — day in and day out, taking the Word of God into our heart and life. That’s how we know who he really is. That’s how we know his Truth. Because the Bible records for us the full and final revelation of God that culminates in the person and the work of Jesus.

Now this can be a little bit confusing, because even as you read through the Bible, it’s clear that in times past God sometimes did speak through signs, through an audible voice, through dreams or visions. And of course, God can do anything. If God wants to, he can continue to communicate in those ways. But rarely does he do that now. Do you know why? Because he doesn’t have to.

In the past, God spoke in bits and pieces in many ways and in various times through the prophets. But now, in these last days, he’s spoken to us through his Son. See, now that we have the words of God contained for us in the Scriptures, now that Jesus has been revealed, God doesn’t have to communicate in those other ways, because now he’s got direct access to us through the Scriptures. And so our job is to listen to the Word and draw near to God to understand his character so that his character becomes our own; to know his heart so that his heart becomes our own; to know his thoughts so that his thoughts become our own; and to know his ways so that his ways become our own.

See, we have to take his Word into our heart and life until we become the kind of people who know instinctively what God wants because we have become like him. And the point therefore, is that you don’t have to guess. You don’t have to guess who God is or what God wants from you. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. If you want to know what God thinks of you, listen to Jesus. And if you want to know what God wants you to do with your life, follow Jesus. As the promised prophet, Jesus not only brings God’s Word; he is God’s Word. He’s the Word made flesh.

What difference does he make?

So what difference does all this make? I would suggest that Jesus offers us not only revelation but mediation. Let me show you. There's this interesting place right here in this passage where Moses says, "God will raise up for you a prophet like me." In what sense is Jesus a prophet like Moses? Well, what does Moses go on to say? In verse 16, a prophet like me "just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.'"

See, after the Exodus, after God leads his people out of Egypt, he brings them to Mount Horeb, which is the same thing as Mount Sinai, and that's where he enters into a covenant relationship with him. Now, Mount Sinai is the very same mountain where God speaks to Moses in a burning bush. But now at Mount Sinai, it's the whole mountain that is engulfed in flames, not just a tiny little bush. And this is the same mountain where, centuries later, God will bring the prophet Elijah, and there he whispers to Elijah in a still small voice. But after the Exodus, it's the whole assembly, it's all the people of Israel, they're all gathered there on the mountain, and they hear the thunderous voice of God that shakes the earth and causes rocks to split.

I was thinking about this this week. Wouldn't that have been amazing? I mean, can you imagine? What would it have been like to hear the voice of God, the audible voice of God, at Mount Sinai? Now, you and I, we might be fascinated by that. We might be intrigued by that. But the people who were there? They weren't intrigued; they were terrified. Because they respond to Moses by saying, never again! Don't ever, ever, ever force us to do that again! We never want to hear the voice of the Lord with our own ears, and we never want to see that great fire, because we know that it will consume us.

So they asked Moses to be their mediator. "You can go. We're not going. You can go up on top of the mountain, you can hear God's voice, and then just tell us what he had to say. But never again are we going to put ourselves in that position." They didn't ever want to be in that position, because they knew that God's glory and his greatness were too much. They knew that that great fire would consume them. As a result of that, they knew that they were lucky. They knew that they were lucky to be able to stand in the very presence of God and make it out alive. And so they tell Moses, you do it. You have to intervene. And so Moses becomes the mediator. He stands in the gap. He mediates the relationship between God and his people.

But you see, Jesus is the true and better Moses, because he doesn't merely bring the ultimate revelation; he is the ultimate mediator. The people were right. God is a consuming fire. His holiness demands perfect obedience. Not one of us, not a single one of us could stand in the presence of God, hear his voice, and make it out alive. We need a mediator — someone who can absorb the fire so that we can draw near to his presence. And that is what Jesus does for us.

Now it's fascinating to me that at the very same time that God brings his people to Mount Sinai, he not only gives them the 10 Commandments — he not only gives them the law and tells them how to live their lives in response to his love and grace — but he provides them with the means to atonement, because he knows there's never going to

be a world in which they can actually do what he says. He knows that we're going to fail. He knows that we're going to mess up, and therefore we need our sin to be covered. We need our sin to be atoned for.

And so at the very same time that he gives the 10 Commandments, he also makes provision for the atonement. That's what the whole sacrificial system was about. He gives them at the very same time, and that's why Jesus is an even greater prophet than Moses, because this sacrificial system was always meant to be temporary. It was always meant to point beyond itself. Jesus is the true Passover Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus is the ultimate exodus who delivers us not from slavery in Egypt but from the true bondage to sin, evil, and death — things that we could do nothing about.

That's why the author of Hebrews talks about how Jesus is our great high priest who appeared at the end of the ages to put away sin once and for all. How? Not through the sacrifice of bulls and goats, but through the ultimate sacrifice of himself. And therefore he can establish a better covenant based on better promises. And therefore he offers a better hope. Jesus lived the perfect life that we should have lived in conformity to God's law, and then he died the perfect death that we deserve in our place, as our substitute, so that we might not only hear God's Word from Jesus, but so that we might draw near to God through his mediation.

Let me close finally with this: That as the promised prophet, Jesus not only brings revelation and mediation but also transformation. All three of the synoptic gospels — Matthew, Mark, and Luke — record one same event. There's a day in Jesus' life when he goes up on top of a mountain. He takes three of his disciples with him, Peter, James, and John, and his appearance is transfigured. His face changes, his clothes become dazzling white, and his disciples see Jesus speaking to two people.

Do you know who they were? The two people on top of that mountain speaking to Jesus? Moses on the one hand, and Elijah on the other. And what do they speak to him about? Luke 9 tells us that they speak to Jesus about his departure. But no, no, no. That's not right. The actual word in Greek is "exodus." They speak to Jesus about the exodus that he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. See, Jesus is going to pull off the greatest rescue mission in the history of the world.

And as Moses and Elijah are speaking to Jesus on top of that mountain, the whole mountain is overshadowed by a cloud, just like Mount Sinai. And a voice speaks from the cloud. What will the voice of God say now, in the presence of Jesus, with Moses and Elijah? Will God offer a new set of 10 Commandments through Jesus? Will the voice from the cloud say, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Admire him, respect him, love him." No, the voice from the cloud says, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him." Listen to him. He's the promised prophet, like Moses — the one to whom we must listen. And you see, that's the only way you can experience true life change.

Now, some of you do not yet know Jesus as your promised prophet. Others may, but you aren't listening to him. Either way, you'll never know God, you'll never become the person that you are destined to be until you begin to listen to him. Some others are resistant. You may call yourself a Christian, but you really know deep down in your heart of hearts that you've never actually submitted yourself to his Word. Part of the reason

why is because you're afraid. You're afraid that if you really were to listen to this voice outside of yourself, that Jesus might ask you to start doing something or to stop doing something that you don't want to because you feel like it's going to impinge on your freedom.

But what you have to realize is that Jesus created you. Jesus knows you. Jesus loves you, and he knows how life works best. Therefore the way to true joy, the way to true fulfillment, the way to true freedom is by listening to him. How does a bird soar through the air? How does a fish dive through the water? Not by going against the grain of their nature, but rather by living in line with their design. Likewise, to become fully, truly human is to live in accordance with God's design for us, which means that true freedom and true obedience are the same thing. The only way that you actually become your true self is by living in line with God's intentions for you.

So some of you are resistant to this truth, and some of you may be exhausted. Some of you may say, you know what? I've been trying to obey God, but I don't feel like I'm getting anywhere, and I'm not experiencing that joy. I'm not experiencing that freedom, that fulfillment. Well, it may be that somewhere deep down you still think that you have to earn God's love and acceptance through your obedience. But remember, when God gave the 10 Commandments, he also gave the provision for atonement, because he knew you wouldn't be able to do it.

Therefore, to obey the law requires obeying the gospel. You have to stop trying to be your own savior. To believe the gospel means that only Jesus can rescue and save you through what he's done for you — through his finished work on the cross. So you have to rest in him. Only then will duty turn into delight, and drudgery turn into grateful joy. As the promised prophet, Jesus reveals God's Truth, he reconciles us in God's presence, and he conforms us to God's will. Jesus is that prophet, greater than Moses. And Jesus is speaking. The only question is whether we are listening.

Let me pray for us.

Father, we thank you that you have promised a prophet greater than Moses, who would not only speak your Word but who would embody it. We thank you that in him we have the ultimate revelation, the ultimate mediation, and the ultimate transformation for our lives. Help us to take that truth deep into our heart so that we might be changed by it. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.