

A Prophet Superior to Moses

Hebrews 3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, 2 who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also *was faithful* in all His house. 3 For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. 4 For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things *is* God. 5 And Moses indeed *was faithful* in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken *afterward*, 6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. (Heb. 3:1-6)

In this last week, my wife and I had our cellphone numbers fraudulently ported to another network. We hurried to have them returned, but criminals who do that are usually after some kind of identity theft, where they use your name and number to access bank accounts, internet accounts, or solicit money. Identity theft is where people impersonate someone else and claim to speak on their behalf or act on their behalf. Advanced computer software is now even able to capture your face and voice, and create movies of you saying and doing what you never did. As the technology advances, it becomes harder and harder to know if someone is truly speaking.

But that's really the problem when people claim to speak for God. They say, here is a message from God. What I am saying I got from God, and this is God's will. You should listen and follow it. But some prophets are relaying a message faithfully. Some prophets are practising identity-theft, speaking in God's name.

Which prophets should you trust? The writer of Hebrews wants his readers to see how Jesus is the ultimate prophet, ultimate king, and ultimate priest, so that we would look nowhere else. And after having compared Jesus to the kingly beings called angels in chapters 1 and 2, the writer now moves to compare Jesus to the greatest prophet of all, Moses, and his successor, Joshua.

Now once again, if you are to feel the weight of the comparison, you need to understand the greatness of the one being compared. Just as the writer expected you to see very kingly beings when he compared Jesus to angels, so he expects you to see someone very significant when comparing Jesus to Moses.

I. A Prophet Spoke the Very Words of God

The biblical prophet was not someone who expounded the words of God, already given. That would be the office of teacher. The prophet did not simply explain or expand upon existing revelation. The prophet was the mouthpiece of fresh, hitherto unrevealed truth from God.

I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. (Deut. 18:18)

We even see this idea when God tells Moses that he will make Moses like God to Pharaoh and Aaron would be his prophet (Ex 7:1). Moses would tell Aaron exactly what to say.

The biblical prophet was one of the sources by which God made His will known during the time that Scriptural revelation was being progressively given. Not all prophecies ended up in Scripture; not all Scripture came from a direct prophecy. But as the Word was being given, God sent prophets to communicate His exact words. Sometimes they received it in a dream or vision, and then communicated it subsequently, sometimes they were controlled by the Spirit in an ecstatic fashion, and

spoke instantly and immediately the words coming to them.

But this was the mark of the true prophet: 100% accuracy in doctrine and in fulfillment. Whatever a prophet said would accord exactly with what had already been revealed, but since it was new, it would come to pass exactly as the prophet said it would. That was the test: God's Word through a prophet would be perfect in doctrine, and perfect in fulfillment.

19 And it shall be *that* whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require *it* of him.

20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21 "And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'--22 "when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (Deut. 18:19-22)

Now just like there are people today whose unbiblical idea of angels have undermined the kingly comparison with angels, so there are people today whose unbiblical idea of prophets undermines this comparison with Moses. They teach that the biblical office of apostle and prophet was unique, but the New Testament gift of prophecy is different. The gift of prophecy can be mistaken, it can be fallible, the New Testament prophet can get it partially wrong.

One, he says the New Testament prophet Agabus made a prophecy about Paul that was mistaken. Two, he says that since the churches were commanded to discern the prophecies and test the prophecies, this shows that the New Testament gift of prophecy can be fallible.

On the first count, this is simply wrong. Agabus prophesied that Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.' (Acts 21:11). Well, in fact, that's exactly what happened. The Jews fell upon Paul during his preaching, and most certainly had bound him. When the Romans arrived on the scene, the Jews indeed were forced to deliver Paul over to the Gentiles, who bound Paul with their own chains. Agabus was not wrong, in a straight reading of the text. In fact, none of the New Testament prophets we read about ever got anything wrong: Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, Judas, Silas, Paul himself, and the daughters of Philip.

That brings us to the second argument: that since people were commanded to test the prophecies, since the prophets were commanded to judge the prophecies of other prophets, and since there was the gift of discerning of spirits, surely that then shows that the NT gift of prophecy could contain human error. Well, remember, Old Testament Israel was commanded to test the prophets-- we've just seen that. Does that mean Moses or Israel's prophets could present fallible prophecy? Not at all. The test in the Old was the same as the test in the New: discern if this is a true prophet or a false prophet. How would they know? If it was 100% in accord with already-revealed doctrine, and if it came to pass exactly as the prophet had said. See, some in Corinth were getting up and saying "Jesus is Accursed". Paul says, now that is obviously not in accord with what has already been revealed, which makes not just the prophecy false, but the person giving it. Scrutiny was required not because true prophecy could be erroneous, but because false prophets are always an ever-present danger.

As long as Scripture was in the process of being written and delivered, God sent direct messages to His people through the prophets. But precisely because prophets carried the authority of "thus says the Lord" they required special scrutiny, special discernment.

Of course, those who believe that the New Testament gift of prophecy can be erroneous and fallible are

missing a very important point. If the New Testament gift of prophecy was different to the Old Testament form of prophecy, would we not expect one of the apostles to write that down and make that clear? After all, the early church is Jewish, and all they have is the Old Testament, which tells you what to do with someone who makes a prophecy that doesn't come true. If New Testament prophecy allows for mistakes, you'd think something would be said to protect the lives of all those who were going to get it wrong! The fact that it doesn't simply makes the point: we have no reason to regard Old Testament and New Testament prophecy as different.

Several dangers come of the modern prophecy movement. First, if there is supposedly fallible prophecy floating around, it is very hard to identify false prophets in the way that is given in Deuteronomy. They are not held to that standard, so they get a free pass. They can attribute to God something that never comes to pass, and then back out and say, well, the mistake was mine, not God's. This demeans and cheapens the true gift of infallible prophecy as it operated in the Old and New Testaments.

Second, people begin looking for messages from God outside the Bible. Again, many in the modern prophecy movement will say that the canon is closed and Scripture is sufficient, but practically, believers begin looking for fresh, direct messages from God outside of the Bible. If someone has a choice between Bible study, and receiving an immediate rhema from God, which will most people take? 35 "Thus every one of you shall say to his neighbor, and every one to his brother, 'What has the LORD answered?' and, 'What has the LORD spoken?' 36 "And the oracle of the LORD you shall mention no more. For every man's word will be his oracle, for you have perverted the words of the living God, the LORD of hosts, our God. (Jer. 23:35-36)

Third, the modern prophecy movement can manipulate other people and binds their consciences. When a person today claims to have a prophecy, he or she is using biblical language that means God has spoken to me directly, as he did Moses. He has put His words in mouth. To say, no, I am not a prophet, but I have a gift of prophecy is what we call a distinction without a difference. When you say, *God told me, God spoke to me, God gave me a Word, God said I must tell you*, you are using language that suggests an immediacy of communication which belonged to Moses and the prophets. With that kind of claim comes a certain kind of authority. If you are God's mouthpiece, we should all drop what we are doing and listen, possibly even record what you say. Don't play cry-wolf with the word *prophecy*, calling for everyone to give you the attention worthy of a prophet, but then dismissing it lightly if it contradicts Scripture or does not come true.

Fourth, I think the modern prophecy movement can undermine the centrality of Christ and His new covenant. The message of Hebrews 1:1-2, is that we are now in the last days, where God has spoken through His Son. You see, the very point of Hebrews 1:1-2 is to say that prophets were the partial vehicle used to communicate in times past. But once the Son comes, you stop using the partial methods, because the Final Speech of God has arrived. So the Son comes, speaks, and delegates the full communication of the New Covenant to twelve men, who write, and oversee the writing of the New Testament. During the fifty or so years that that is happening, God also raises up New Testament prophets, equal in authority to Old Testament prophets. This is why Ephesians 2:20 tells us the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. You don't lay a foundation repeatedly, you build upon it. So once the New Testament is written, the building that happens on top of it is the work of evangelists and pastor-teachers. Evangelists plant new churches, pastor-teachers teach the revealed Word in those churches.

But if we still have prophets, it is almost as if the distinction of Hebrews 1:1-2 is not present. He didn't

speaking in time past through the prophets and in these last days through His Son. He is still speaking here and there, a little here and little there through the prophets. This undermines the finality of the Son's position as ultimate prophet. It casts doubt on whether Jesus is the Final Word. It undermines the sufficiency of the Word. It casts doubt on whether the New Covenant represents the agreement between God and His people. It casts doubt on whether we are in the last days.

Someone says, "no, no, I don't mean it that way. I mean that I felt an impression in my soul. I felt a strong prompting by God. I felt led". Fine, I have had those too. Sometimes those prompts turn out to come at very significant moments, and sometimes they don't. Sometimes that phone call was in the nick of time, and sometimes it wasn't. All that goes to show that when it comes to inner impressions, prompts, reminders, leading, it may be sourced in God, it may be sourced in us, we don't know. But even if it is sourced in God, it still isn't a prophecy, a direct word. Why? Because it can be wrong, and it is not the very words of God through my mind and mouth. You want to tell someone you felt an impression, a sense, an urge to call him or her, or to send them a verse? Fine, but own it. *I felt I should call you. I have a strong impression to pray for you right now. I don't know why, but I feel I should send you this verse. I had a vivid dream last night and I felt I should pray for you.* Emphasis I. Why? Because it is emanating from you. You and I both have no special ability to tell one impression apart from another, so we need not claim that we know its source or that it is God. It's a serious thing to ascribe something to God, however benevolent and kind the gesture might be.

Now it's important to say all that so as to feel the weight of this comparison between Moses and Jesus.

Moses was not dealing with impressions, possibly misconstrued whims.

6 Then He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. 7 Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. 8 I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant Moses?" (Num. 12:6-8)

It seems that Moses entered the Tabernacle, and apparently Moses had the right to enter the Holy of Holies, because in Exodus 25:22, the Lord said He would speak to Moses from above the mercy seat. Moses would have gone into the outer court, past the bronze altar, past the laver to wash in, and then into another enclosure, the Holy place. This place was dark, except for the light from the seven candles in the golden candlestick to his left. To the parallel right would have been the table of shewbread, and directly in front of him would have been the altar of incense, burning the sweet smell right in front of the Veil of the Most Holy Place.

As Moses passed through there, there would have been no natural light, only the Ark, with the Mercy seat on it. In that darkness, one would appear to Moses. He took the form of a man, with a brightness and a glory that left Moses' face shining even after he left. Moses listened to Him speak, and spoke to Him. Moses was not communing with his own thoughts, but hearing the very voice of God.

II. A Prophet Was Confirmed By Signs

Deuteronomy 13:1 "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 "and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'-- which you have not known--' and let us serve them,' 3 "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deut. 13:1-3)

Great claims required great authentication. To claim that you had heard from God and had his exact words often required some accompanying signs.

Great signs accompanied great prophetic claims. In fact, while there are scattered miracles in the Bible, there are really three major outpourings of miracles, and each has to do with prophets. The first is all the miracles associated with Moses and Joshua. The second is when Israel began worshipping Baal, and God sent Elijah and Elisha the prophets to call them back. The third is Jesus and the apostles. In fact, the writer of Hebrews was undoubtedly a companion of the apostles, but not one himself, as we see in 2:3-4.

3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? (Heb. 2:3-4)

Again, one of the reasons we believe that signs, wonders and miracles were present in the early church was because this was when the apostles and prophets were laying the foundation of the church. Great authentication was needed for the apostles and the prophets.

Can God do miracles today? Of course. But God is not a cheap conjurer, or a provider of religious amusements. Signs and wonders are almost always there to confirm the authenticity of the one claiming divine revelation. If that is still going on today, we'd expect miracles to confirm those prophets. If it is not, then we would not expect to see miracles and signs, certainly not in abundance.

Now again, so much of the modern-day obsession with signs and wonders undermines the power of this comparison. Exactly how many signs accompanied Moses? I counted twenty-eight miracles performed by and through the hand of Moses.

When Moses first complained that the people would not believe that he was a prophet, God gave him the sign of his rod turning into a snake. When Pharaoh did not believe Moses, God sent the signs of the ten plagues. When a rebellion against Moses broke out, God sent a sign of ground splitting apart and swallowing those men alive. When Israel complained, God sent snakes, and gave Moses the miracle of healing through a bronze snake.

If there's any doubt that Moses is the prophet with signs and wonders par excellence, read the last verses of Deuteronomy.

10 But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face,¹¹ in all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, ¹² and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel. (Deut. 34:10-12)

Now with these two marks of the a prophet in mind, and with the greatness of Moses as a prophet, let's again read the comparison of Hebrews 3

Hebrews 3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, ² who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also *was faithful* in all His house. ³ For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things *is* God. ⁵ And Moses indeed *was faithful* in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken

afterward, 6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. (Heb. 3:1-6)

Look at the similarity before you look at the difference. Consider the Apostle, the sent-one, the prophetic mouthpiece of our faith, Messiah Jesus. He is like Moses in that He was faithful like Moses. Moses faithfully spoke all the words of God, and Moses faithfully performed all God him perform. So did Jesus.

But here comes the contrast. Once again, it is as if the writer is saying what he said about the angels: but to which of the prophets did he ever say, My Son? Moses was a faithful house-steward. He is a beloved part of the household. He might even be called one of the best of the stewards. But of Jesus it is said, He is the Son.

How did God speak to the Son?

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. (Jn. 1:1-2)

Let's think about the meaning of this idea. What do words do? Words carry meaning, they carry the idea. If Jesus is the Word, then what does that say about Him? He is the full expression, the full communication of the triune God. All that God is gets communicated to a viewer or listener who encounters Him.

Now think about the contrast. The prophet, according to Deuteronomy 18 was one that God put His words in his mouth. The prophet would speak what God commanded him. So the prophet becomes a medium to transmit a message that originates in God. The prophet does not create or write the message, he is a loudspeaker, a megaphone, a transmitter, a communication device. But the Son does not only communicate those words, He is the Word. He does not simply carry the message, He is the message. Moses was a prophet. But Jesus is the Prophet. He is the Message and the Messenger. He is the speaker and the Final speech. He is the preacher and God's ultimate Sermon.

What about signs and wonders? The signs that accompanied Jesus were so remarkable that people remarked in Matthew 9:33, "It was never so seen in Israel". The miracles of Jesus caused people to make immediate associations with the greatest prophets: "Who do the crowds say that I am?"

19 So they answered and said, "John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again." (Lk. 9:18-19)

The Gospels records 37 miracles of Jesus, but those are specifically selected by the Gospel writers for the purposes of their accounts. In some cases, the writers tell us that there would be an entire day of miracles, as whole towns or even regions brought all their sick or infirm, and five times Scripture says, as if in passing, "and He healed them all". He healed them all. Maybe hundreds, thousands, of varying complicated conditions. And not one went away partially healed, not healed. Miracle after miracle, as if the power is limitless, as if this Prophet is more than a prophet. The outpouring of miracles, healings, exorcisms, control of nature, and even resurrections simply dwarfs all the other prophets and their miracles put together.

In fact, the last verse of John summarises how the miraculous had just saturated the life of Jesus.

24 This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is

true. 25 And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen. (Jn. 21:24-25)

Moses did miracles on the authority of God. Jesus did them in His own authority, to the Father's glory, by the Spirit's power.

Going back to Moses is a regression. Going back to the prophets is a regression. Indeed, trying to revive having prophets is a regression. The greatest Prophet has come. God's final speech has come.

Where do I hear Him? He communicated His Word to His apostles who wrote down the new covenant under the control of the Spirit. He then sent His Holy Spirit to immerse believers into the body of Christ and indwell them.

Today, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to illuminate the written Word, so that you can know the living Word. If you hear God's Word with a seeking, obedient heart, the Spirit of God will work in you to teach you the glories of Jesus Christ. You don't need words of knowledge and prophetic claims, when there exists the glorious New Testament doctrine of illumination.

How do you avoid being duped by those practising identity-theft with God? Remember that God's Final Speech, His ultimate Word is Jesus. He is not a prophet, but the Prophet. So receive Him, and with His Spirit within you, seek Him out in the Word, where His Spirit will show you Him.