



THE WHOLE STORY

SUNDAY, APRIL 22, 2018

INTRODUCTION:

How do we know if one speaks for God or if God is being used to promote a social or political agenda? This question is as old as the ages, and this text from Deuteronomy goes hand-in-hand with the Gospel lesson from Mark. These questions are asked over and over again about Jesus. Is he the real deal? Is he really speaking for God, or is he just another itinerant prophet?

THIS WEEK'S MAIN FOCUS:

“The 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”— Deuteronomy 18:15

The literary setting for Deuteronomy is at the end of Moses' life as the wandering Israelites prepare to enter the Promised Land. Moses is the only leader they have ever known, and his impending death puts the community in jeopardy. Deuteronomy represents Moses' last words to Israel, both present and future. The style is one of a sermon. In other words, it is not simply information, but it encourages and cajoles, calling the people to belief and a life lived according to God's instruction. It is the equivalent of Moses' ancient life instruction book to the people of Israel.

To fully grasp the meaning of this passage in a modern context, some explanation is necessary. What is the modern equivalent of ancient prophets? First, most people are unfamiliar with exactly what a prophet was in the ancient near eastern context. In biblical times, prophets were not rare. Indeed, 2 Kings tells that the king of Israel had 400 prophets at his disposal (1 Kings 22:6)! The problem was not finding a prophet; it was finding a prophet that was truly speaking for God.

Prophets performed a wide range of functions, including some that are condemned in Deuteronomy 18:10-11. Prophets of the Lord are the mouthpieces for God, and their proclamations are made without the common acts of divination or speaking to dead spirits. Prophets of ancient times should probably be thought of as preachers, for they interpret the word of God to the people. Ancient Prophets, however, were distinct from priests who were

responsible for leading the people in worship. The only function of an ancient prophet was to declare the word of God to the people. They did not run meetings or organize the congregation.

This passage begins with the reason why prophets are needed. It reaches back to the giving of the law in Exodus 19 and 20. When the people heard God speak they were so frightened, they begged Moses to speak with God and be their mediator. Prophets, then, are selected by God ("I raise up" verses 15, 18; "I will put my words" verse 18; "I command" verse 18) for the sake of the people. Prophets answer to God, not to the people, so they are free to speak the truth. Prophets also come "from among their own people" (verse 18). These speakers of truth are home grown. They know the ways and the hearts of the people they speak to and connect with them. They who speak for God must also be paid attention to, for to ignore their calls is the same as ignoring God (verse 19).

The hanging question is the same today as it was in ancient days: how do we know which of the many preachers/prophets who speak are truly speaking for God? The answer in the text is clear. If what the prophet says comes true, then the prophet is speaking for God. It seems like a good answer, but it does not answer all our questions. Prophets talk of eternal things and life after death. Some of what they say is simply unknowable in this life. The test in Deuteronomy certainly helps us with some prophets who claim to speak for God, but not all. What is clear is that if a prophet/preacher leads folks astray, it is the prophet and not the people who are at fault. Unfortunately, unscrupulous prophets tend to prey on those who are the weakest and most vulnerable.

This text also speaks to Jesus' life and ministry. His truths were not easy to hear, and eventually it was his truth telling that would result in death on a cross. Some would not believe him because he did not have the right pedigree and did not hang out with the right people. Others did not believe him because they had already formed their own ideas of what the Messiah was to be, and Jesus' message of grace and forgiveness was nothing like they envisioned. Still others were clear that this was Joseph's son who could not possibly be proclaiming God's will. Yet all the things in the Deuteronomy text can be shown in Jesus' life, preaching, and death.

BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS: DEUTERONOMY 18:15-22

- 1) If you were giving your last words regarding faith in Christ and what you consider important to share with someone?
- 2) How do Moses and Jesus compare? List some of the ways that you see the life of Moses and the life of Jesus comparing?
- 3) The law is like a train track which can point you in the right direction, but it has no ability to move you don't the track. What does it mean to you when Jesus says he came to fulfill and is the fulfillment of the law?
- 4) The law is effective in showing us how sinful we are and how terrible our sin is. Moses says I have come to point you to someone who can solve your issue? How is Jesus the answer to this passage that is before us?