

Lesson 29: Deuteronomy 12-26 King Priest Prophet

Introduction

Deuteronomy brings us to the end of the journey to establish covenant kingdom between God and his chosen people. Genesis was our Kingdom Prologue setting the theological foundation and introducing us to the Abrahamic covenant of promise. Exodus gave us kingdom establishment as God cut covenant with his rescued people. Numbers told us of kingdom rebellion and held us up in the wilderness waiting for a second generation to take up the challenge. Deuteronomy has now given us kingdom renewal. This is the challenge to the second generation. These five books are the covenant of Moses. This is Torah. This is the Pentateuch.

In our last book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy. Moses transitions leadership over to Joshua and challenges the second generation to embrace covenant with the Lord. He tells them to listen, love and live. Covenant obedience from a heart of love is the way to experience an abundant life.

Deuteronomy is chiastically structured. The very center of that structure, chapters 12-26, is specific law code. This is what it is going to mean to live with God and live for God. If you want life, this is how you must order society, this is how you must order your lives, this is the commitment you must make with God.

The mission to be salt and light is not spiritual abstraction. It is quite practical. Salt and light do not come from the Tower of Babel, with man making a name for himself, reaching himself up to God. Humankind does not define God. Humankind does not define what is good and just. God defines himself. And God gives humankind a moral vision of life. We have considered how the ten commandments provide a moral paradigm. The law code gives specific commands, indicating how the moral paradigm works out in the religious, civil, and moral life of a nation.

We are not going to address the specifics of the law code in Deuteronomy. We took time to consider the legal code of the Pentateuch in our lessons on Leviticus. In this lesson, as we conclude our series, I am going to point you to three aspects of the Deuteronomical legal code that stand out to me. They are order, tension, and leadership.

Order

The law code of Deuteronomy provides order for Israelite society. Let's consider the overall structure of this legal code. The section begins in 12:1 with a familiar proclamation about the commandments Moses is teaching in Deuteronomy. This is 12:1,

¹ These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe in the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess as long as you live on the earth.

These commandments, these are at the heart of covenant. If you desire to obey God from your heart and soul, then you are asking, "How shall we live?" That is the right response to grace. This law code is giving you specific direction on exactly how to live in covenant relationship. So, we are starting the law code section with the declaration that if you listen and love you will live. We end the law code with a charge to embrace that reality. Here are the final verses of the legal code. This is Deuteronomy 26:16-19,

¹⁶ This day the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul. ¹⁷ You have today declared the Lord to be your God, and that you would walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments and His ordinances, and listen to His voice. ¹⁸ The Lord has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments; ¹⁹ and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor; and that you shall be a consecrated people to the Lord your God, as He has spoken.

In between these two calls to covenant obedience, we have specific commands covering an array of topics. In the Word Biblical Commentary on Deuteronomy, Duane Christensen recognizes a 5-part chiastic structuring of this code. We had a five-part chiasm of the whole of Deuteronomy. And now we have a five-part chiasm of just the law code section. Both the beginning of the law code 12:1-14:21 and the end 26:1-19 contain laws about public worship at the central sanctuary and in local towns. The beginning of the inner frame 14:22-16:17 contains sacred laws. These laws deal with sabbath commands and pilgrimage festivals. The end of the inner frame 21:10-25:19 contains secular laws. These laws deal with horizontal relationships among God's people. And then we have the center, we have the x, this is 16:18-21:9, and it contains laws dealing with leadership in Israel.

Chiastic structure of Deuteronomy 12-26 (Section X The Covenant Stipulations)

A Public worship at the central sanctuary and in local towns	12:1–14:21
B Sacred laws—sabbatical moratoria and pilgrimage festivals	14:22–16:17
X Laws on leadership and authority in ancient Israel	16:18–21:9
B' Secular laws—on horizontal relationships with others	21:10–25:19
A' Public worship at the central sanctuary and in local towns	26:1–19

The laws provide order and stability for society; order for worship, for economics, for leadership, for the courts, for moral relationship with one another. The how of the commands is not always immediately apparent. How does living this way provide a more orderly or stable society. This ordering of life requires trust in God that he has a plan and that his plan for Israel is good. This is the promise of life we addressed in our last lesson, "See I have set before you life and prosperity, and death and adversity...so choose life! (Deuteronomy 30:15 and 19b)." That promise of life most fundamentally speaks to our relationship with God. He is our life. We experience life by being in relationship with him. That is eternal. That is fundamental. At the same time, God has created us to live in physical bodies in physical places in relationship with other physical people. The life we experience in covenant with God includes meeting the needs and desires that we have in this physical world in which we live. The ordering of society commanded by God leads to life in the form of security and wealth and relationship. Consider this in 15:4-6,

⁴ "However, there will be no poor among you, since the Lord will surely bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, ⁵ if only you listen obediently to the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today. ⁶ For the Lord your God will bless you as He has promised you, and you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; and you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you.

Tension between idealistic and pragmatic

Along with order, there is also an inherent tension in the law between the high vision of life that God calls his people to pursue and a practical vision that takes into account the weakness of people. Moses just declared a high vision that there will be no poor among the Israelites if only they will obey the voice of the Lord. That is the ideal to be pursued. But the very next verses add a pragmatic view, 15:7-8,

⁷ If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; ⁸ but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need *in* whatever he lacks.

The idealist loves the first statement, "There will be no poor. If you just do what you are supposed to do there will be no poor." The pragmatic likes verse 7. "If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, then this is what you are supposed to do." It is an acknowledging that there are going to be poor among you. Moses' promise of material wealth in verse 4, "There will be no poor among you," aligns with the promises of blessing and life in the theological exhortation sections. For example, Deuteronomy 30:9-10,

⁹ Then the Lord your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the Lord will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers; ¹⁰ if you obey the Lord your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul.

There is promise of prosperity, of wealth. That promise is connected with the wealth of an orderly society. Covenant prosperity does come in part directly as an act of the Lord, blessing his servants for obedience. His servants obey, he sends rain. The obedience did not cause the rain. The obedience was blessed by God. Prosperity is also an effect of an ordered, moral, disciplined, loving life. There is a lot of cause and effect going on in covenant obedience. Obey and you will live because obedience leads you to the kind of behavior that produces success or abundance, goodness in life.

We do need to put the language of wealth and prosperity into context. What is wealth for a farmer or prosperity for a sheep herder? The promised blessings in Deuteronomy are almost all agricultural. The farmer is praying for a good harvest and the sheep herder for healthy flocks. To be prosperous is to have wealth, to have extra, to have more than what is needed for basic sustenance; to have extra to give to family and friends and people in need; to enjoy the feast days with fat calves and milk and honey; to fill up stores in case of a bad harvest.

Wealth and abundance in this context is certainly not a private jet or millions of dollars in a savings account or a mansion or expensive cars or jewelry. The words wealth and riches depend a great deal on your perspective. To have meat and milk and warm shelter, a close family with a loving marriage, a community that gathers on sabbath, celebrating weddings and feast days, free from plague or marauders, living under the rule of law, working your own land, worshiping God freely, this is what people through most of human history would call abundant wealth. This is prosperity.

And this will be the experience of the faithful, most of the time. But there will still be poor. There will still be suffering. Every faithful believer who does not die by accident or warfare will die by sickness. We all get sick and die. Sickness is a fact of life in our fallen world. Faith in Christ does not eradicate cancer. And there is this tension in the law code. We see that God desires our wealth. He desires our health. Prosperity for the community is the promised result of covenant obedience. It is the promised result for individuals. Still the poor will be with you and good people will suffer. And the tension here is ongoing, and that is why we are going to get the book of Job later in the Old Testament.

Leadership

Moving on to the third aspect of this law code that stands out to me, the ordered society, both ideal and pragmatic, requires leadership. That is the third aspect. The five-part chiasmic structure of the law code has public worship on the outer frames, sacred and secular laws on the inner frame and right there in the center laws of leadership. This central section can also be organized chiasmically. This 16:18-21:9. The outer frame 16:18-17:13 and 19:1-21:9 address laws concerning the courts which mention judges and priests. The language is the same in the beginning and the end. The first half of the inner frame addresses laws concerning the king. That is 17:14-20. The second half of the inner frame addresses laws concerning prophets, that's 18:9-22. And the center addresses laws concerning the Levitical priests, that in 18:1-8.

Chiastic structure of Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9 (Section X Laws on Leadership and Authority)

A Laws on judges and officials and right worship in the land	16:18–17:13
B Law of the king	17:14–20
X Law of the Levitical priests	18:1–8
B' Law of the prophets	18:9–22
A' Laws concerning the courts—administration of justice	19:1–21:9

So, we have law of the courts, law of the king, law of the priest, law of the prophet, and then back to law of the courts. It is right there in the center, king, priest, and prophet. That's the center of the law code of Deuteronomy. The section on prophets is interesting to me. It contains a warning and a promise. And I want to focus on that section because I feel like it is the most relevant to us in our new covenant context. So, let's focus in on the law of the prophets. This is 18:9-22. I am going to read the whole passage.

⁹ When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. ¹⁰ There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, ¹¹ or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. ¹² For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you. ¹³ "You shall be blameless before the Lord your God.

¹⁴ For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you *to do so*. ¹⁵ The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.

¹⁶ 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.'

¹⁷ The Lord said to me, 'They have spoken well. ¹⁸ '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. ¹⁹ '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. ²⁰ '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.'

²¹ You may say in your heart, 'How will 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 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.

I understand if you are getting a little tired of chiasm by now. I've heard it suggested that one reason for such a highly structured style in Deuteronomy is for the sake of memorization. It made it easier to get it into the mind by having so much order. There is repetition here in this passage about prophets that once again suggests a chiastic structure. You may have caught some of the repetition as I read. A phrase that stands out is "God will raise up a prophet like me." That phrase is first in verse 15 and then it is repeated in verse 17. So, the outer frame of this chiasm addresses false prophets, first at the beginning with a warning in 18:9-13 and then at the end with a test for identifying false prophets in 18:21-22. The inner frame includes this repeated promise that Yahweh will raise up a prophet in Israel and also includes a repeated warning against false prophets. These two sections are 18:14-15 and 18:17-20. The center is just one verse 18:16 which reminds Israel of their request at Horeb for God not to speak to them directly but through Moses as mediator.

Chiastic structure of Deuteronomy 18:9-22 (Section B' Laws of the prophets)

A No prophets who seek messages from other gods	18:9–13
B YHWH will raise up a prophet in Israel	18:14–15
X The people requested prophetic mediation at Horeb	18:16
B' YHWH will raise up a prophet in Israel	18:17–20
A' The true prophet is the one whose word comes to pass	18:21–22

Let's consider first the warning against false prophets and then the promise of a prophet like Moses.

Warning against false prophets

The first verses of our present passage 18:9-13 do not use the term prophet, so to call this a warning against false prophets is using the term prophet in a very broad cultural sense. Prophets are those who discern the minds of the gods and speak for the gods in a multitude of ways. This warning specifically names witchcraft, spiritism, divination, and contacting the dead. We would think that Christians would recognize and reject such activities with no hesitation. But there is a long history of spiritual practices foreign to the Bible making their way into Christian practice. I recently heard a quote from a Christian leader endorsing spiritual practices with this phrase, "God is bigger than his book." Well, if that means there is much more to God than he has revealed to us in the Bible, I heartily agree. God is bigger than his book. He has not given us everything. But if that means we need someone to give us new words of revelation to take us into spiritual practices and experiences not described for us in Scripture, then get uncomfortable really quickly. We do not come to the gospel of Christ and then move on to a separate stage of enlightenment that is not included or described in Bible. We come to the gospel of Christ and continue to go deeper into the gospel of Christ through the study and application of God's word. That is our main spiritual discipline. We are not looking for practices outside of the Bible.

God may be bigger than his book. But we are not at liberty to define truth about God or truth about spiritual experience outside of Scripture. This was the point of our passage from the previous lesson, Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe the words of this law." The things not yet revealed are not for us. God is bigger than his book, but he has given us his book. This is enough for you. The things revealed are given to us for our meditation and our reflection and our study and our obedience. This idea continues in Deuteronomy 30:11-14,

¹¹ For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?'

¹⁴ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.

Israel is not to continually search out new spiritual experience apart from the words of Scripture. God did not hide the truth across the sea or up in a mountain in the heavens or somewhere difficult to get to. God gave his word for Israel through Moses. Covenant obedience takes discipline and hard work and it requires growth. You get better as you grow. Eve took the easy way and Adam followed right with her. Where are you going to get your wisdom from? By stretching the boundaries God has set, by listening to the voices that say he is holding back on you? Or through the more difficult road of going back to God and his word to ask clarification, to think and reflect, to walk with God until you get it and obeying even if you don't.

The words I just quoted from Deuteronomy may sound familiar to you, but maybe from a different context. Paul takes Deuteronomy 30:11-14 and restates it for the new covenant revelation of Jesus Christ. This is Romans 10:6-8,

⁶ But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down), ⁷ or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." ⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching,

Just as Moses said, "It is not out of reach. You do not have to go and get it. I have given it to you." So, also, Paul says, you do not have to say, "How are we going to go up into heaven to find out this message." Or, "How can we go down into hell and let them speak to us, so that we can really know what it is like." Christ has been there. Christ came from heaven. Christ died and rose again. So, if you are seeking for truth outside of Christ and his word and the word of his apostles, then you are

devaluing what you have. Hasn't Christ come from heaven and hasn't Christ risen from the dead. And hasn't he given us his word. Why are we searching for a new word from Christ or some new spiritual experience rather than walking with the Christ of Scripture, studying all that he has taught us, and fixing our eyes on him according to the revelation of his word.

And there is some tension here. We are to listen for the subjective voice of the Holy Spirit guiding us. God does guide us. So, I am not discounting that. At times God speaks through others powerful, miraculous words of encouragement and direction. So, God is speaking in us, and he is speaking to us through other people. Maturity comes as we both learn to listen to God and as we learn to test what we hear by the word of Scripture.

I become very worried when I see or hear about Christians employing practices that I just don't see in the Bible. It looks like new age. It looks like Hinduism quite frankly. It does not look related to spiritual habits of Scripture. I worry when I hear Christians talking about seeking out angelic beings or talking about angels being all around us and how important that is to them. I do not see that in the practice of Scripture. Or Christians trying to meditate in such a way that they conjure up a picture of Jesus, and Jesus is speaking to them. And I am thinking, "Why in the world do you think your image of Jesus is actually Jesus." I don't see that anywhere in Scripture. Or moving from one emotional high to another emotional high, just looking for that kind of experience.

I think we need to be asking ourselves these questions, "How devoted am I to learning the word I have been given? Am I testing my spiritual experience according to the words of Scripture? In my eagerness to experience God emotionally, am I also seeking to know God with my mind through his word? Am I seeking multiple experiences apart from the gospel of Christ or am I seeking to walk in the gospel of Christ, to walk with him in the truth revealed? Am I seeking an easy path to wisdom, like the plucking of a fruit from a tree? Do I just want an experience that will make me wise or am I seeking wisdom over time through the hard work of obedience and ongoing study?"

We have to test ourselves, and we have to test our leaders, especially leaders who claim to speak the very words of God. Christians mean different things sometimes when they use the word prophet. Sometimes the word prophet is used to mean one who applies the word of God to the people of God. That is almost like the gift of preaching as the gift of prophecy. At other times the word prophet applies to someone who believes they have heard something from God for another person, like a word of wisdom or encouragement. At other times, and this is the usage we have to be very careful about, the title prophet is being used to claim authoritative utterance. These were the prophets of Scripture. When they spoke, they said, "Thus saith the Lord." And we now believe that every word they spoke came from God. His word is inspired. The prophets did not speak on their own but were carried along by the Holy Spirit. They spoke it from the Lord. And they meant it.

I like to make a distinction between big "P" prophecy and little "p" prophecy. Little "p" prophecy would be using the term of prophecy in the first two ways of applying the word of God to the people of God, the gift of preaching or having a word of wisdom or encouragement from God for someone. Little "p" prophecy assumes a tentativeness in the preaching or in the giving a word for somebody else. It is not a claim to authority. It is, "I think God has given me this message for you." And we grow in our ability to use our spiritual gifts and in our ability to hear from the Lord. So, sober judgement, humility, requires us to recognize our susceptibility to error. And that leads to a tentativeness. "I think this is what God is saying." And when I am preaching, I am willing to be corrected. I understand that I may make some mistake. And I don't need to be stoned if I do make a mistake. Big "P" prophecy is not tentative. It is a confident assertion that God has spoken. It is standing up in front of people and saying, "God has said this. You are now obliged to act on it. This is the word of God."

Moses gives us this test for big "P" prophecy in 18:20-22,

²⁰ '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.' ²¹ You may say in your heart, 'How will 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 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.

So, when a guy has a word from the Lord that this sister in the church is going to marry him. And he goes up and says, "I have a prophecy that you are going to be my wife." Well, he better hope she does not marry somebody else, because we need to take him out and stone him if she does. If he is claiming that level of authority. If he is claiming to be a prophet speaking the word of God and if other Christian leaders are claiming direction based on the clear direction of the Lord, and there is no tentativeness there, there is no, "I sense God speaking," or, "I think this is what God is saying for us. I believe it. Let's do it." But that is kind of tentative. If it is a clear authoritative utterance, then if it is not true, that is evil. It is a claim to authority that the person does not have the right to claim.

But what if the word of the prophet does come true? Does that prove the prophet speaks for God? Well, not necessarily. Moses gave this warning, this is earlier in the legal code, this is 13:1-5,

¹ If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, ² and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom 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 find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. ⁴ You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. ⁵ But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.

It is possible for false prophets to work miracles. It says that God allows this to happen because God is testing us. He has given us his word. Are we committed to his word, even in the face of miracles. And Moses does not explain how. How do these miracles happen? Sometimes it is through deception. It is not a miracle at all. But it could also be through demonic power. We can think of the magicians who initially opposed Moses in Exodus. We are not told whether they were being deceptive or whether they really had some kind of power. We are just told they duplicated his miracles until God took the plagues up to a level that they could not replicate. We can also think of Jesus' words at the end of the sermon on the mount to some workers of miracles. This is Matthew 7:22-23,

²² Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

So, they are taking the name of the Lord God in vain. They do not really know Christ. But they see him as a name of power that they can use. And they are using it. And things are happening. But they are not truly with Christ. They practice lawlessness.

So, while unrealized prophecy shows us that we are dealing with a false prophet, the miracle of realized prophecy does not prove we are dealing with a true prophet. It could be deception, or it could be demonic power. We test the prophet by the fruit of his character (That is also Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:15-19.) and by comparing his teaching to the teaching of Scripture. Is he or she taking us back to Scripture, teaching us to apply, or to recognize, to apply the truth of God's Word to our lives, or is he or she taking us beyond Scripture in a different direction to something new? Some kind of experience that is not in Scripture.

Promise of a prophet like Moses

That's the warning. Moses also gave a promise. "The Lord will raise up for you a prophet like me." What does that mean, a prophet like me? The first and most obvious candidate in the context is Joshua,

especially when we consider the first few chapters of Joshua which describe him calling the people to covenant obedience like Moses, sending spies into the land like Moses, and dividing the Jordan river with his staff for all the people to cross over like Moses. So, this looks like a prophet like Moses.

Even so, the very last verses of Deuteronomy make this point, “Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face (Deuteronomy 34:10).” There was something very special about Moses’ relationship with God. And his ability to communicate. At the time of Jesus, Jews expected three end times figures to show up. That’s why the priests who came out from Jerusalem to ask John the Baptist about himself, first asked, “Are you the Messiah?” He said, “No.” Then, “Are you Elijah?” He said, “No.” Finally, “Are you the prophet?” (And this is in John 1:19-23.) That prophet is the prophet here in Deuteronomy 18. That is the prophet that they were asking about, because the Jews did not believe it had happened, yet. They are still waiting for God to raise up a prophet among them like Moses.

So, if it is not Joshua, then to go further, we need to ask, “What does it mean, what does it really mean, to be a prophet like Moses?” Moses was everything for Israel. As a law giver and leader into battle, he executed the role of a king. As a priest he consecrated Aaron and Aaron’s sons. As a prophet he spoke the word of God. So, Moses is unique in all three roles of leadership. But this prophecy is speaking specifically about the role of prophet. “A prophet like me.”

So, what kind of prophet was Moses? Well, at the beginning of our Pentateuch series, we made a distinction between prophets who mediate new covenant and prophets who apply existing covenant to the people. There are only six covenant mediator prophets in the Bible: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus. The other famous prophets, Elijah and Elisha and Nahum and Isaiah and Jeremiah, and so on, they all spoke the word of God to bring people into covenant obedience with God. They are covenant lawsuit prophets. But they didn’t bring new covenant.

The first covenant mediator prophet after Moses is David. But David is not really like Moses. Moses mediated covenant with all of God’s people. David had a very limited covenant. It was a covenant specifically with his house. So, the next covenant mediator prophet to rise up like Moses is the one who establishes a new covenant with all of Israel, with the people of God. That next covenant mediator prophet is Jesus.

The prophecy that God will rise up another covenant mediator prophet connects with the prophecy we looked at in our previous lesson in chapter 30 that after being exiled from the land, God would bring Israel back to the land and circumcise their hearts to love the Lord with heart and soul (30:6). So, both of these prophecies in Deuteronomy are pointing us ahead to the new covenant, foreshadowed by Moses, fulfilled in Jesus.

Before we get to that new covenant of Jesus, God has planned the period of Old Covenant. And during that period, we come to clearly see that God’s people cannot live consistently for him with a law handed down. God’s people desperately need a transformation of heart. They need a law that is working from the inside out. The Old Covenant period also shows that there is blessing with king, priest, and prophet in the ordering of society. But there are huge limitations to even the best of the human kings and priests and prophets. And we don’t even often get the best. We need a new kind of king, a God-man who will reign with unending justice and who will lay down his life to take our place. We need a new kind of high priest in the order of Melchizedek, one who stands sinless by the throne of God as he intercedes for God’s people, for us. And we need a new kind of covenant mediator prophet, one who not only speaks the name of God, but one who is the name of God, who can say, “If you have seen me, you have seen my Father in heaven.”

This central section of Deuteronomy, as we end our series on the Pentateuch, by looking at this central section of Deuteronomy, we are being pointed ahead in the years to come to the one true king, the one true priest, the one true prophet. It is one man. He has already come. And he is going to come again. He is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

1. Skim over the law code in Deuteronomy, chapters 12 through 26. Take note of the first and last verses. What are a few things that stand out to you in the law code as interesting or important or strange?
2. What do you think of the suggested chiastic ordering of the law code? Does that seem like a possible structure or not so much?
3. Read 15:4-8. How do you understand Moses comments about the poor? It is fair to say this is a tension between the ideal and the pragmatic reality that humans will not live up to the ideal?
4. How do you see the ordering of society and the ordering of individual lives, bringing about blessing and wealth in relationships and possessions?
5. What do you think about the suggest chiastic structure of 16:18-21:9? Does it seem accurate to you to say that the center of the law code is the law of king, priest, and prophet?
6. When you read the sections 18:9-22 and 13:1-5, what stands out to you about the nature of prophecy?
7. What are three things you would like to remember from your study of the Pentateuch?
8. What is one section of the Pentateuch you would especially like to study in more detail?