



Type: Journal Article

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Source: *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*,
Volume 41 (2020), pp. 265-280

Published by: The Interpreter Foundation

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INTERPRETER



A JOURNAL OF LATTER-DAY SAINT
FAITH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Volume 41 · 2020 · Pages 265 - 280

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Offprint Series

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ISSN 2372-1227 (print)
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

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**“A PROPHET LIKE MOSES”
(DEUTERONOMY 18:15–18)
IN THE BOOK OF MORMON,
THE BIBLE, AND THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS**

David R. Seely

Abstract: *David Seely provides a wide-ranging survey of interpretations of the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15–18 concerning “a prophet like unto Moses.” He examines relevant passages in the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and the Dead Sea Scrolls and shows how the prophecy has been fulfilled by Jesus Christ and others, continuing with Joseph Smith’s role in the Restoration and onward to the present day.*

[Editor’s Note: Part of our book chapter reprint series, this article is reprinted here as a service to the LDS community. Original pagination and page numbers have necessarily changed, otherwise the reprint has the same content as the original.

See David R. Seely, “A Prophet Like Moses” (Deuteronomy 18:15–18) in the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *“To Seek the Law of the Lord”: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 359–74. Further information at [https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/to-seek-the-law-of-the-lord-essays-in-honor-of-john-w-welch-2/.](https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/to-seek-the-law-of-the-lord-essays-in-honor-of-john-w-welch-2/)]

There is a passage in Deuteronomy 18:15–18 that speaks of a future prophet like Moses. Biblical scholars argue whether this prophecy was meant to refer to the continuation of the institution in general fulfilled by a variety of future prophets or to a specific, future individual

prophet. Early Christians interpreted this passage in Deuteronomy as being fulfilled by Christ (Acts 3:20–23). Likewise, the Book of Mormon also alludes to the prophecy twice, identifying the future prophet as Christ. The first time it is Nephi declaring “that this prophet of whom Moses spake was the Holy One of Israel” (1 Ne. 22:21). The second time it is Jesus during his visit to the Americas attesting “Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me” (3 Ne. 20:23). This paper surveys the variety of interpretations of the pronouncement in Deuteronomy 18 beginning with the Hebrew Bible and ending with the Christian interpretation in Acts, with a focus on the rich traditions preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls in order to consider how the Book of Mormon and New Testament identification of the prophet as Christ fit into these traditions. In particular, the survey is looking for any interpretations that point to a single individual future prophet, and if other interpretations before the New Testament identify this prophet with the Messiah.

“A Prophet Like Moses” in the Bible

Chapters 16–18 in Deuteronomy describe four institutions in Israel: judges (16:18–17:13), the king (17:14–20), Levitical priests (18:1–8), and the prophet (18:18–22). Especially for the Deuteronomistic History, these definitions continue as important landmarks for these respective institutions.

The term “prophet” (Hebrew: *nabi*) only occurs eight times in three passages in Deuteronomy: in chapter 13 where false prophets are condemned; in chapter 18 where the characteristics of the true prophet are described; and in chapter 34:10–12, the only passage that explicitly refers to Moses as a prophet (*nabi*) in Deuteronomy or the Torah—besides the two passages in chapter 18 that imply Moses was a prophet. The text in 34:10–12 reads: “Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom the LORD singled out face to face, for the various signs and portents that the Lord sent him to display in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and his whole country, and for all the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed before all Israel.”¹ The title of Moses as prophet is relatively rare in the Hebrew Bible and is only alluded to here and elsewhere in Hosea 12:14. However, throughout Deuteronomy and the rest of the Bible, Moses is

¹ Translations of the Hebrew Bible are from the New Jewish Publication Society (*NJPS*) and translations of the Apocrypha and the New Testament are from the New Revised Standard Version (*NRSV*) unless noted otherwise.

called by titles referencing prophets: “the servant of the Lord” (Deut. 34:5; Num. 12:7–8; Josh. 1:1) and “the man of God” (Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:6; Ps. 90:1). Moses is considered functioning as a prophet—although not explicitly called as such.

Here we are interested in the passage in Deuteronomy 18:15–18 that talks about the Lord raising up a prophet “like Moses.” In the two relevant passages, verses 15 and 18, the Lord speaking to Moses says:

15. The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people, like myself; him you shall heed.

18. I will raise up a prophet for them from among their own people, like yourself: I will put My words in his mouth and he will speak to them all that I command him.

Because the noun “prophet” (*nabi*) is in the singular, at first glance it may seem that these passages are explicitly referring to a single future individual “like Moses.” However, read in context it seems more likely that “prophet” is meant in a collective sense, referring to the future succession of prophets, just as the singular “king” in 17:14–20 refers to the institution of kingship and a succession of kings, and “the Levite” in 18:6 refers to the institution and succession of Levites. Thus, this passage seems to describe the continuation of the institution of prophecy—that prophets would be raised up to receive and deliver the words of the Lord as did Moses—rather than a single individual. Elsewhere in the Bible, many are called by the title of “prophet” and a passage such as Hosea 12:11–14 refers to a succession of prophets following Moses.

The standard scholarly interpretation of this passage is expressed by S.R. Driver:

The “prophet” contemplated is not a single individual, belonging to a distant future, but *Moses’ representative for the time being*, whose office it would be to supply Israel, whenever in its history occasion should arrive, with needful guidance and advice: in other words, that the reference is not to an individual prophet, but to a *prophetic order*.²

While there is no evidence in the Old Testament that the prophecy of a prophet like Moses specifically referred to a specific future messiah, some scholars argue that this passage is fulfilled by a specific prophet

² S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 229.

like Joshua—the successor to Moses.³ Other scholars have noted that portrayal of Moses in Deuteronomy introduced a succession of prophets and influenced the portrayal of the prophets throughout the Deuteronomistic History (2 Kings 17:13). The figure of Samuel shows characteristics of a prophet like Moses,⁴ and Römer notes, “Elijah is also constructed in comparison and contrast to Moses.”⁵ Thus, throughout the Deuteronomistic History the prophecy of a future prophet like Moses is fulfilled in a series of Moses-like prophets. Jeremiah also understood himself to be a prophet like Moses. The account of his call in Jeremiah 1 shows parallels with the call of Moses in Exodus 3. Jeremiah recorded, “The LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: Herewith I put My words into your mouth” (Jer. 1:9). This echoes Deuteronomy 18:18: “I will put My words in his mouth.”⁶

Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of Deuteronomy 18:15–18

Later interpreters, however, including Jews (1 Macc. 4:46; Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 1:64–65), Christians (John 1:21, 45; 6:14; 7:40; Acts 3:22; 7:37) and Muslims (who identify this prophet as Muhammad in the *Quran* 7:157) interpreted the singular reference to a prophet as a specific individual. In particular, some of these interpretations read this passage as referring to an eschatological figure who would come in the end-time preceding the messiah or messiahs.

In order to give some perspective to the passages related to the issue of “a prophet like Moses” let us look at a few representative examples of Jewish and Christian interpretations. In 1 Maccabees there are two passages that allude to a future prophet in language resembling Deuteronomy 18. 1 Maccabees 4:45–46 reads: “So they tore down

3 Hans M. Barstad, “The Understanding of the Prophets in Deuteronomy,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 8, no. 2 (1994): 243.

4 Mark Leuchter, “Samuel: A Prophet Like Moses or a Priest Like Moses,” in *Israelite Prophecy and the Deuteronomistic History: Portrait, Reality, and the Formation of a History*, Mignon R. Jacobs and Raymond F. Person Jr, eds. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 147–68.

5 Thomas C. Römer, “Moses, Israel’s First Prophet, and the Formation of the Deuteronomistic and Prophetic Libraries,” in *Israelite Prophecy and the Deuteronomistic History*, 129–46, in particular 141.

6 William L. Holladay, “The Background of Jeremiah’s Self Understanding: Moses, Samuel and Psalm 22,” *Journal of Biblical Literature (JBL)* 83, no. 2 (1964): 153–64 and “Jeremiah and Moses: Further Observations,” *JBL* 85, no. 1 (1966): 17–27. See also Römer, “Moses, Israel’s First Prophet,” 136–40 and Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: Prophet Like Moses* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015).

the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them.” And 1 Maccabees 14:41: “The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise.” While these passages are somewhat vague they appear to refer to the coming of a future individual prophet although they do not necessarily refer to this prophet being like Moses.

Elsewhere, a passage in Philo does allude to the prophet like Moses talked about in Deuteronomy 18:15–18. After describing the nature of humans to seek after the future through divination and omens, as condemned in Deuteronomy 18:14, Philo says: “A prophet possessed by God will suddenly appear and give prophetic oracles” (*De specialibus legibus* 1:64–65).⁷ This is one of the clearest passages that demonstrates the Jewish interpretation of a single future prophet.

Later, Christians apparently interpreted the passage in Deuteronomy 18 as the promise of a single messianic prophet at end time that they would identify with Jesus (John 1:21, 24, 45; 6:14; 7:40–41; Acts 3:22; 7:37). A passage from the Gospel of John demonstrates that in the first century there was the idea of a future prophet and a Messiah as is also attested in the Qumran texts. The passage reads: “When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, ‘This is really the prophet.’ Others said, ‘This is the Messiah’” (John 7:40–41). And a passage in Acts 7:37 reads: “This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up a prophet for you from your own people as he raised me up.’”

Consequently, much of the scholarship on the “prophet like Moses” has been generated by New Testament studies and much of this scholarship deals with the eschatological prophet in conjunction with the future messiah or messiahs.⁸

“A Prophet Like Moses” in the Dead Sea Scrolls

At least two texts from Qumran, both of which are considered sectarian texts, directly cite or allude to Deuteronomy 18 in regards to prophets, and both appear to interpret verses 18–20 as a reference to an eschatological prophet like Moses (1QS 9:9–11 and 4QTestimonia

⁷ *Philo VII*, trans. F. H. Colson, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), 137.

⁸ See for example Dale Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) and John Lierman, *The New Testament Moses: Christian Perceptions of Moses and Israel in the Setting of Jewish Religion* (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen Germany, 2004).

[4Q175], lines 5–8). In addition there are many other passages that may or may not be related to the coming of a prophet “like Moses.” Here we will look at these passages to address four questions: 1) What are the views of the Dead Sea Scrolls about the future prophet “like Moses.” 2) What is the role that this prophet is to have? 3) Who are the possible candidates to fulfill this role? And, 4) How do the interpretations of this prophet in the Dead Sea Scrolls fit in with the history of the interpretation of this prophecy in Judaism and Christianity?

There is a great wealth of literature on this topic with many different interpretations of the data.⁹ To facilitate our discussion we will focus our attention on the most important related texts.

The passage that is most often identified with the expectation of an eschatological prophet like Moses is found at the conclusion of the rules in the *Rule of the Community* (1QS) from Cave 1. The passage reads:

They shall deviate from none of the teachings of the Law, whereby they would walk in their willful heart completely. They shall govern themselves using the original precepts by which the men of the *Yahad* began to be instructed, doing so until there come the Prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel. (1QS IX, 9–11)¹⁰

This passage presents the idea of a future prophet and two messiahs—all three seem to be eschatological figures—and all three may be considered messianic figures—that is anointed ones.¹¹ Let us take a moment to analyze exactly what the Rule of the Community says about the role of these three eschatological figures. The passage in 9:9–11 occurs in the text after the rules of the Community (*Yahad*) are given, and it says that the Community is to be governed by these rules until

⁹ See John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995); Alex P. Jassen, *Mediating the Divine: Prophecy and Revelation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Michael A. Knibb, “Apocalypticism and Messianism” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, John J. Collins and Timothy H. Lim, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 403–32; and most recently see Jeffrey Stackert, *A Prophet Like Moses: Prophecy, Law, and Israelite Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Translation from *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader, Volume 1*, 2nd ed., Donald W. Parry and Emanuel Tov, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 27.

¹¹ The passage about the prophet and the two messiahs is not found in the other copies of the *Rule of the Community* found at Qumran, which raises the issue of the dating of the manuscripts and the development or deletion of the idea of the coming of a prophet and two messiahs.

the coming of the three eschatological figures who will then apparently overturn the old rules and institute new ones. The reference to the “Prophet” (*nabi*) appears to be an allusion to Deuteronomy 18:15. While it is not clear if the three figures together, or one or another of them, will fulfill this role in the Rule of the Community, it seems apparent in Testimonia (4Q175), which was written in the same hand as 1QS, that this legal role is the role of the future prophet “like Moses” referred to in Deuteronomy.

The sectarian texts from Qumran place great emphasis on eschatology. Several texts, such as the War Scroll (1QM) and the Pesharim, deal almost exclusively with the end of time. The prevailing view in the sectarian texts is that during the end time two messiahs will appear to lead the congregation.¹² From these passages it is possible to learn much about these messianic figures. On the other hand the prophet mentioned in the Rule of the Community IX, 9–11 who will serve as a forerunner to these messiahs is only specifically mentioned in the scrolls here and in Testimonia. From this we can deduce that there was less interest in the eschatological prophet than in the eschatological messiahs, and it is thus more difficult to understand the perceived role of this prophet and who he might be. From a close reading of the text we can summarize what we do know. First, it seems clear that the intention is of a single prophet; second, that this prophet is an eschatological prophet; and third, that his function in the Rule of the Community seems to be as lawgiver to replace the current set of rules with new ones; and fourth, both texts agree that the prophet will come before, perhaps as a forerunner, to the two messianic figures: the Messiah of Aaron and the Messiah of Israel. So who are these figures and what is the relationship between them? And, is the prophetic figure himself a messianic or “quasi-messianic” figure as some scholars have argued?

The role of the “prophet like Moses” is also specifically mentioned in Testimonia accompanied by the reference in Deuteronomy. Because it appears to be written in the same scribal hand as 1QS, Testimonia is considered to be from the same time period with a similar point of view. Testimonia is a short text composed of four units of citations of scripture, the first three providing a scriptural proof-text for each of

12 The Damascus Document (CD) talks of the coming of the messiah(s) with a singular noun: “And this is the exact interpretation of the rules by which [they shall be ruled until there arise the messiah] of Aaron and of Israel. And their iniquity will be atoned...” (CD XIV, 18–19). The singular noun “messiah” has led some to believe that CD anticipated a single priestly messiah. See the discussion in Michael A. Knibb, “Apocalypticism and Messianism,” 421–22.

the three anticipated eschatological figures: the prophet, the king, and the priest or Levite—the same three offices described in Deuteronomy 16–18 and referred to in the Rule of the Community 9:11. The Prophet is described in the terms of Deuteronomy 5:28–29 and 18:18–19—a prophet “like Moses.”¹³ The King is described in terms of Balaam’s prophecy in Numbers 24:17: “A star rises from Jacob, A scepter arises from Israel.”¹⁴ And the Priest is described in terms of Deuteronomy 33:8–11 “And of Levi he said: Let your Thummim and Urim Be with Your faithful one.” The fourth citation is a reference to Joshua and the foundation of Jericho.

The passage in Testimonia that describes the prophet quotes the passage in Deuteronomy 18:18–19 and reads:

I will raise up a prophet for them from among their own kindred like you and I will put my words in his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I command him. If there is someone who does not heed my words which the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. (4Q175, 5–8)¹⁵

Here the biblical idea that the Lord would simply call a succession of future prophets to replace Moses after he died appears to be changed. Testimonia shifts the calling of a prophet like unto Moses as a reference to a succession of prophets into a single eschatological figure and defines one of his tasks to be a mediator of law. If read in conjunction with the passage in the Rule of the Community an argument could be made that the prophet who is to precede the two messiahs is the one to be the lawgiver for the new laws.

The two messiahs—“anointed (ones) of Aaron and of Israel”—are mentioned elsewhere together in the Dead Sea Scrolls (CD 12:23; 14:19; 19:10–11; 20:1; 1QS 9:11) and scholars have argued that these two anointed ones—messiahs—are based on other similar models in

13 A scriptural discussion also combining Deut. 5:28–29 and 18:18 is found in 4QReworked Pentateuch (4Q158), but it does not discuss the future prophet. See the discussion in James C. Vanderkam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 39–43.

14 In the Damascus Document (7, MS A) the scepter in the oracle of Balaam is interpreted as the “Prince of the Congregation”—the Davidic messiah, and the star, instead of being interpreted as the priest by analogy to the messiahs of Aaron and Israel, is interpreted as “the Interpreter of the Law.” See John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 63–64, 102.

15 Translation from James H. Charlesworth ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations, Volume 6B: Pesharim, Other Commentaries, and Related Documents* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 313.

scripture that include a spiritual and a political leader. Such pairs include Moses and Aaron, Aaron and Israel, Solomon and Zadok, the two “sons of oil” Jeshua and Zerubbabel, and later Bar Kochba and the High Priest Eleazar.¹⁶

Related to the prophet like Moses figure, a passage found in the Damascus Document identifies an important individual who will come as an eschatological teacher. This passage reads: “Until the rise of one who will teach righteousness (*yoreh hatsedek*) in the end of days” (CD VI, 10–11).¹⁷ It is possible that this is a reference to the eschatological prophet. The image in Testimonia of the Lord putting words in the mouth of the prophet that he will speak in the Lord’s name can easily be interpreted as one who “teaches righteousness.” In addition a passage in Hosea 10:12 alludes to a future prophet, “until he comes and teaches righteousness” which may be the language from which CD 6:11 is drawn.¹⁸

Identification of the Prophet

Elsewhere in the Qumran texts the king and the priest are called by other titles. For example the king is called the “Prince of the Congregation” (CD 7:20; 4Q285.5.5; 6:2–10; 1QM 5, 1; 4QpIsa^a 2:14), and the priest is called the “interpreter of the Law” (CD 7:18; 4QFlor 1.i.11). Reflecting the emphasis in the Dead Sea Scrolls on the messianic figures over the future prophet much has been written about the significance and identification of the two messianic figures.¹⁹ Let us look at some texts from Qumran that describe the prophet, and the possible candidates of this figure, to develop a list of similar epithets and characteristics of the future prophet like Moses to see if a possible identification of who this prophet was thought to be is possible. We will first examine two candidates that have been proposed for the “prophet like Moses” at Qumran: the Teacher of Righteousness and Elijah.

16 Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia: Doubleday, 1995), 322.

17 Translation from James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, 23.

18 Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 113–14.

19 Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*; Michael A. Knibb, “Eschatology and Messianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls.” In *Essays on the Book of Enoch and Other Early Jewish Texts and Traditions*. SVTP 22 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 307–26. James C. VanderKam, “Messianism and Apocalypticism” in J. J. Collins, B. McGinn, and S. J. Stein, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*. 3 vols. (New York: Continuum, 1998), vol. 1, 193–228.

From the beginning many scholars advanced the idea that the Teacher of Righteousness could be identified as a prophet, and specifically as the prophet “like Moses.”²⁰ The main objection to this idea is that the Teacher of Righteousness is never specifically called a “prophet” (*nabi*) in any of the texts. In fact he is specifically identified as a priest in *Pesher Habakkuk* (1QpHab 2:8–9) and the *Pesher Psalms* (4QpPsa 1–10.iii.15). Nevertheless, there is much evidence in the Qumran texts that suggest he may anciently have been considered a prophet and his ministry reflects many of the attributes of Moses: teacher, giver of the law, and interpreter of the law. In particular some believe that the Teacher of Righteousness was the author of the Temple Scroll, a work that may have been intended to serve as the law for the eschatological period as alluded to in the Rule of the Community.²¹ A study by George Brooke titled “Was the Teacher of Righteousness Considered to Be a Prophet?” provides a comprehensive survey of the evidence for whether the Teacher was considered a prophet at all and if so whether he was considered to be the prophet “like Moses.”²²

As evidence that the Teacher of Righteousness was portrayed with the qualities and functions attributed to biblical prophets we can identify passages in the Damascus Document and in the Pesharim. The passage found in the Damascus Document that identifies the eschatological teacher has also been interpreted as a reference to the Teacher of Righteousness. This passage reads: “Until the rise of one who will teach righteousness (*yoreh hatsedek*) in the end of days” (CD 6:10–11). From this description some have identified this eschatological teacher with the prophet “like Moses” and in particular with the Teacher of Righteousness. The Hebrew words for “teach” and “righteousness” *yoreh hatsedek* here are the same words used in the title Teacher of Righteousness *Moreh Hatsedek* and describes a figure who will, like Moses, and the Teacher of Righteousness before him, continue to teach righteousness. Of course the office of eschatological teacher may also be one assumed by the Teacher of Righteousness as a priest.

20 Michael O. Wise, “The Temple Scroll and the Teacher of Righteousness,” in *Mogilany 1989: Papers on the Dead Seas Scrolls*, Vol. 2, Z. J. Kapera, ed. (Kraków: Enigma, 1991), 142.

21 Michael O. Wise, *A Critical Study of the Temple Scroll from Qumran Cave 11* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of Chicago, 1990), 184.

22 George J. Brooke, “Was the Teacher of Righteousness Considered to be a Prophet?” in *Prophecy after the Prophets? The Contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Understanding of Biblical and Extra-Biblical Prophecy*, K. De Troyer, A. Lange, L. L. Schulte, eds. (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 77–97.

Two examples from the Peshar Habakkuk (1QpHab) are similarly interpreted as references to the Teacher of Righteousness as the eschatological prophet, or teacher in that he is described as one who receives mysteries from God and as one who serves as a mediator—both characteristics of Moses. In Peshar Habakkuk 7:4 the Teacher of Righteousness is described: “Interpreted this concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries (*raz*) of the words of His servants the Prophets.”²³ And in 8:1–3: “Interpreted, this concerns all those who observe the Law in the House of Judah, whom God will deliver from the House of Judgement because of their suffering and because of their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness.”²⁴

In regards to the question as to whether the Teacher of Righteousness was to be considered a prophet at all, if we were to assume there is autobiographical material about the Teacher of Righteousness in the Hodayot, there are many examples of the author portraying himself with prophetic attributes. As noted by Brooke: “This was not done explicitly by him claiming the title ‘prophet,’ but in terms of how he projected himself indirectly as a new Moses, as a new Jeremiah, as imitating the prophetic servant of the Isaianic servant songs, and even in his very act of writing hymnic poetry that could be understood prophetically.”²⁵

Even if the Teacher of Righteous was considered by the Community to be a prophet, it is strange that the term is never used about him. In terms of the identification of the Teacher of Righteousness as the eschatological prophet “like Moses,” or even in his priestly office as the eschatological teacher, a further problem is that the texts were written and transmitted within the time period, either directly before, during, or after his lifetime and there is no indication that he was the forerunner of the two eschatological messiahs. It seems that if indeed the Teacher of Righteousness were to be identified with this eschatological figure there would have been some identification of this in connection with the two messiahs in the texts.²⁶ In addition, all of the text talk of him as a historical figure in the past and separately mention the eschatological prophet and/or teacher in the future. In order to solve this problem some scholars have postulated the idea that the Teacher of Righteousness would rise

23 Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 4th ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 343.

24 Ibid, 344.

25 Brooke, “Was the Teacher Considered a Prophet?” 84–85.

26 Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 102–04.

from the dead and reappear but these theories have not gained universal acceptance.²⁷

Brooke concludes that the question of whether the Teacher of Righteousness could be considered a prophet can be answered with a qualified “yes” or a qualified “no,” but it is very unlikely that he was the eschatological prophet like Moses. In the end Brooke says, “The Teacher of Righteousness remains a somewhat shadowy figure.”²⁸ Another scholar, James Bowley, similarly summarizes the evidence, “Though in some ways he can be compared to Moses, the authority of the Teacher is nowhere explicitly based on the claim that he was a *nabi*’. Rather, he is presented as the divinely inspired and ordained exegete of the prophetic word.”²⁹ The consensus among scholars is that while the Teacher of Righteousness had many of the characteristics of a prophet, and may even have been considered by the Community as a prophet, he should not to be equated with the prophet “like Moses.” Ironically, the fact that Moses is actually never explicitly called a prophet in Deuteronomy or in the Torah, the Teacher of Righteousness may be exactly a prophet “like Moses” in the sense that he, like Moses, functioned as a prophet, but was never actually called a prophet.

Another proposed identification of the prophet “like Moses” is the prophet Elijah. In the biblical passage at the end of Malachi the Lord exhorts Israel to “Be mindful of the Teaching of My servant Moses” and says, “Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the LORD,” (Mal. 3:22–23; [English 4:4–5]). A passage in Ben Sira (48:10) refers to Malachi when it talks of the future coming of Elijah to calm the wrath of God in order to restore Israel: “At the appointed time, it is written, you [Elijah] are destined to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and to restore the tribes of Jacob.”

Thus, Jewish and Christian interpreters have identified Moses and Elijah as important persons that figure into the future. Perhaps echoing Malachi, Qumran texts also expect the return of Elijah and a Moses-like prophet among the sectarian (1QS, 4Q175, 11Q13) and the non-sectarian

²⁷ Ibid..

²⁸ Brooke, “Was the Teacher Considered a Prophet?” 97.

²⁹ James E. Bowley, “Prophets and Prophecy at Qumran,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years, Vol. 2*, Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 354–78, in particular 371.

texts (4Q558, 4Q521).³⁰ And in 4Q558 Malachi 3:23 [4:5] is quoted directly referring to the return of Elijah.

So the most common specific identification of the eschatological prophet “like Moses” in all of these traditions is Elijah. This fits well with the fact that since Elijah did not die but was taken into heaven he would be able to return (2 Kings 2:11).

The New Testament tradition recognizes both Elijah and Moses, perhaps based on Malachi as well. In John 1:21 the people ask John the Baptist if he is either: “And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the prophet?’ He answered, ‘No.’” Later rabbinic traditions (*b. Sanh* 118a; *b. ’Eruv* 43b) also relate the future coming of Elijah as related in Malachi.

Summary and Conclusions

In regards to the history of the interpretation of the prophet like Moses we can summarize: the biblical passage in Deuteronomy refers to the institution of prophecy in Israel and a future succession of prophets in including perhaps specific prophets who are portrayed with characteristics of Moses. Influenced perhaps by Malachi 3 [English 4], interpreters in the inter-testamental period began to read this passage as referring to a single future prophet, and identified the specific future prophet as Elijah—an interpretation that continues in Christianity and rabbinic Judaism.

As illustrated by the passages in the Rule of the Community and Testimonia the expectation of the Community at Qumran had the expectation of the coming of a future eschatological prophet “like Moses” as prophesied by Deuteronomy 18. This prophet would receive and deliver the word of the Lord, would establish the new laws, and would precede the coming of the two messiahs. The allusion to a prophet “like Moses” in verses 15–18 evokes all of the characteristics known of Moses through the biblical text: leader, lawgiver, teacher, worker of miracles, and one who received revelation and spoke with the Lord “face to face.” The Damascus Document talks of an eschatological teacher who would teach “righteousness” before the end. It is not clear if this figure is to be equated with the prophet or not. In any case, whenever the texts of Qumran speak of the coming of a prophet “like Moses,” it was to

30 Alex P. Jassen, *Mediating the Divine: Prophecy and Revelation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 188. See also John C. Poirier, “The Endtime Return of Elijah and Moses at Qumran,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 10.2 (2003): 221–42.

be a figure who would be anointed, and would have power to bring the word of the Lord, to be a herald, and to precede the coming of the two messiahs. His power was not just that he would be a prophet, but that he would be a prophet “like Moses.”

The New Testament followed by early Christian interpreters specifically identifies the prophet like Moses as the Messiah (Acts 3:17–26). So while the idea that the prophet like Moses was a specific future individual is attested in inter-testamental literature including the Dead Sea Scrolls, the identification of this prophet as the Messiah seems to be distinctive to Matthew and the New Testament. That this identification is also attested anciently in the Book of Mormon may be best explained by prophetic foresight.

While the Book of Mormon, like the New Testament, specifically identifies the future prophet like Moses as Christ, it also develops the idea that the institution of prophecy that continued in Israel included other future prophets like Moses. Similar to the Deuteronomistic History, the Book of Mormon records the continuation of the institution of prophecy in its history and in several cases specifically portrays prophets with characteristics of Moses. The prophets Lehi and Nephi, for example, like Moses spoke with the Lord, and delivered their family from destruction in Jerusalem and led them through the wilderness to the promised land. They became prophetic leaders and lawgivers to their people, and constantly reiterated the blessings and curses of the covenant, similar to those in Deuteronomy, associated with the promised land. The commandment repeated by prophets throughout the Book of Mormon: “And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper...And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (1 Ne. 2:20–21; cf. 1 Ne. 4:14) is reminiscent of the language and theology of Deuteronomy (cf. 28:15, 29 and 29:9). And Lehi, like Moses, blessed his posterity before his death (2 Ne. 1–4; Deut. 33).³¹ Likewise, Abinadi confronted King Noah with the same language Moses faced Pharaoh. King Noah’s response to

31 See Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephite Kingship Reconsidered,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 172–77 for a list of 21 points of comparison between Nephi and Moses; “Lehi as Moses,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 26–35; and “The Israelite Background of Moses Typology in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2005): 5–23. See also George S. Tate, “The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, Neal E. Lambert, ed. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1981), 246–62 and S. Kent Brown, “The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in *From Jerusalem to*

the prophet “Who is Abinadi?” (Mosiah 11:27) echoes Pharaoh’s “Who is the LORD?” (Exod. 5:2), and Abinadi threatened the people with a series of plagues reminiscent of those performed by Moses and Aaron on the Egyptians including pestilence, hail, the east wind, and insects (Mosiah 12:3–7; Exod. 7–10). Additionally, Abinadi, as a synopsis of the law of Moses, delivered the Ten Commandments to Noah’s priests.³²

Finally, Latter-day Saint tradition continues to describe their prophets as prophets “like Moses.” Joseph Smith was said to have received revelations “even as Moses” (D&C 28:2) and to lead his people like Moses (D&C 103:16). Brigham Young is referred to by the saints as the Mormon Moses or the American Moses who delivered them from bondage and led them into the wilderness to the Promised Land.³³ For Latter-day Saints the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18 that the Lord will raise up a prophet like Moses has been fulfilled in the past by Christ and others and continues to be fulfilled through the Restoration to the present day.

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Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 75–98.

32 David R. Seely, “Abinadi, Moses, Isaiah, and Christ: O How Beautiful upon the Mountains Are Their Feet,” in *The Book of Mormon: The Foundation of Our Faith: the 28th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 201–16.

33 Not only did the early saints refer to Brigham Young as Moses, but Brigham Young also referred to himself as Moses. Willard Richard’s Journal contains a quote by Brigham Young, “I feel all the time like Moses.” “Unlike the original Moses though Young would reach what Clayton termed, ‘the place which God for us prepared.’” (Willard Richard’s Journal 14 March 1847). Quoted from John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 148, 443 n. 8.

