

A Prophet Like Moses

18 I will raise them up a prophet from among their brothers, like unto you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

19 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto My words which he shall speak in My Name, I will require it of him.

(Deut. 18:18-19 HRV)

The Prophet is the Messiah

The Thirteenth Century Rabbinic commentator Ralbag (Rabbi Levi ben Gershon) writes concerning this passage:

A prophet from the midst of you.- In fact the Messiah is such a Prophet as it is stated in the Midrash [Tanhuma] on the verse “Behold my Servant shall prosper” [Is. 52:13]... Moses by the miracles which he wrought brought a single nation to worship Elohim, but the Messiah will draw all peoples to the worship of Elohim. (Ralbag on Duet. 18:18)

The Midrash Tanhuma (cited above) says:

It is written, Behold, my servant shall deal wisely, He shall be exalted, and extolled, and be very high (Isaiah 52:13). It means, He shall be more exalted than Abraham of whom it is written, ‘I lift up my hand’ (Genesis 14:22). He shall be more extolled than Moses of whom it is said, ‘As a nursing father beareth the nursing child’ (Numbers 11:12). ‘And shall be very high’—that is, Messiah shall be higher than the ministering angels. (Midrash Tanhuma Is. 52:13)

Maimonides, in a letter to a Yemenite community, denounces a man claiming to be the Messiah saying:

The Messiah will be a very great Prophet, greater than all the Prophets with the exception of Moses our teacher...His status will be higher than that of the Prophets and more honorable, Moses alone excepted. The Creator, blessed be He, will single him out with features wherewith He had not singled out Moses; for it is said with references to him, “And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither decide after the hearing of his ears.” (Isaiah 11:3)

The Dead Sea Scroll document 4Q175 also speaks of a Messianic Figure (clearly the Messiah) and applies Deut. 18:18-19 indicating that the Prophet “like Moses” was understood clearly as referring to the Messiah as far back as the Hasmoean period.

Parallel: Moshe and the Messiah

Another exposition of the text, ‘ My beloved is like a gazelle ‘: Israel, explained R. Isaac, said to the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘ Sovereign of the Universe! Thou hast told us that Thou wilt come to us first.’ ‘ My beloved is like a gazelle ‘; as the gazelle appears and then disappears, so the first redeemer appeared and then disappeared. R. Berekiah in the name of R. Levi said: Like the first redeemer so will the final redeemer be. The first redeemer was Moses, who appeared to them and then disappeared. For how long did he disappear from their sight? R. Tanhuma said: Three months; accordingly it is written, And they met Moses and Aaron, etc. (ib. V, 20).² The final redeemer will also appear to them and then disappear. (Midrash Rabbah Bamidbar 11:2)

Two Redemptions

13 And Moshe said unto the people, Fear you not. Stand still, and *see the salvation of YHWH, which He will work for you today!* For whereas you have seen the Egyptians today, you shall see them again, no more, forever.

14 YHWH will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.
(Ex. 14:13-14 HRV)

19 And the angel of Elohim, who went before the camp of Yisra'el, removed, and went behind them. And the pillar of cloud removed from before them, and stood behind them.

20 And it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Yisra'el. And there was the cloud and the darkness here, yet gave it light by night there: and the one came not near the other all the night.

21 And Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea. And YHWH caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all the night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

22 And the children of Yisra'el went into the midst of the sea upon the dry earth, and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

23 And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea; all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

24 And it came to pass in the morning watch, that YHWH looked forth upon the host of the Egyptians, through the pillar of fire and of cloud, and discomfited the host of the Egyptians.

25 And He took off their chariot wheels, and made them to drive heavily, so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Yisra'el, for YHWH fights for them against the Egyptians.

26 And YHWH said unto Moshe: Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians; upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.

27 And Moshe stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its strength when the morning appeared. And the Egyptians fled against it, and YHWH overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

28 And the waters returned and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, even all the host of Pharaoh that went in after them into the sea: there remained not so much as one of them.

29 But the children of Yisra'el walked upon dry land, in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

(Ex. 14:19-29 HRV)

Philo on the Crossing of the Red Sea

(2.265) Again, when you see, amid the wars and disasters of life, the merciful hand of God and his favourable power held over you and standing in defence of you, be silent yourself; for that champion stands in no need of any assistance. And there are proofs of this fact recorded in the sacred writings; such, for instance, as the verse, “The Lord will fight for us, and ye shall be Silent.” (Ex 14:14.)

(2.266) And if you see the genuine offspring and the firstborn of Egypt destroyed, namely desire, and pleasures, and pain, and fear, and iniquity, and mirth, and intemperance, and all the other qualities which are similar and akin to these, then marvel and be silent, dreading the terrible power of God;

(Philo; Dreams Book 2; 40; 265-266)

So Philo sees an allegory here where the “Egyptians” represent “desire, and pleasures, and pain, and fear, and iniquity, and mirth, and intemperance, and all the other qualities which are similar and akin to these.” In other words Philo sees the Egyptians as representing the sin-nature which the Rabbis call the Yetzer Ra, the Evil inclination.

The Messiah Defeats the Yetzer Ra

The first redeemer (Moses) delivered us from the Egyptians, but the second redeemer (the Messiah) would deliver us from the Evil Inclination.

Rabbi Nachman wrote one of the most authoritative Torah commentaries in Rabbinic Judaism. He says on this topic:

And YHWH your Elohim will circumcise your heart (Deut. 30:6) It is this which the Rabbis have said, “If someone comes to purify himself, they assist him” [from on High]. The verse assures you that you will return to Him with all your heart and He will help you.

This following subject is very apparent from Scripture: Since the time of Creation, man has had the power to do as he pleased, to be righteous or wicked. This [grant of free will] applies likewise to the entire Torah period, so that people can gain merit upon choosing the good and punishment for preferring evil. But in the days of the Messiah, the choice of their [genuine] good will be natural; the heart will not desire the improper and it will have no craving whatever for it. This is the “circumcision” mentioned here, for lust and desire are the “foreskin” of the heart, and circumcision of the heart means that it will not covet or desire evil.

Man will return at that time to what he was before the sin of Adam, when by his nature he did what should properly be done, and there were no conflicting desires in his will, as I have explained in Seder Bereshit.

It is this which Scripture states in [the Book of] Jeremiah 31:30], Behold, the days come, says YHWH, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers ..etc. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Eternal, I will put my Law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it.

This is a reference to the annulment of the evil instinct and to the natural performance by the heart of its proper function. Therefore Jeremiah said further, and I will be their Elohim, and they shall be My People; and they shall teach no

more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying: ‘Know YHWH; ‘for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them

Now, it is known that the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth and it is necessary to instruct them, but at that time it will not be necessary to instruct them [to avoid evil] for their evil instinct will then be completely abolished. And so it is declared by Ezekiel, A new heart will I also give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will cause you to walk in My statutes . (Ezekiel 36:26)

The new heart alludes to man’s nature, and the [new] spirit to the desire and will. It is this which our Rabbis have said : “And the years draw nigh, when you shall say: I have no pleasure in them; these are the days of the Messiah, as they will offer opportunity neither for merit nor for guilt,” for in the days of the Messiah there will be no [evil] desire in man but he will naturally perform the proper deeds and therefore there will be neither merit nor guilt in them, for merit and guilt are dependent upon desire.
(Nachman on Deut. 29:6)

Torah Requires us to Accept Messiah

Deut. 18:19 the Torah says of those who do not give heed to this Messiah “I [Elohim] will require it of him.” What does this mean?

The Targum Onkelos to this phrase is even stronger saying “My Word shall take vengeance upon him” and similarly the Greek Septuagint translator rendered the phrase “I shall take vengeance upon him.”. The Mishnah explains the phrase “I will require it of him” to mean “death at the hands of heaven”:

“HIS DEATH IS AT THE HANDS OF HEAVEN. FOR IT IS WRITTEN, [AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT WHOSOEVER WILL NOT HEARKEN UNTO MY WORDS WHICH THE PROPHET SHALL SPEAK IN MY NAME.] I WILL REQUIRE IT OF HIM (DEUT. 18:19).”
(m.San. 11:5)

And as it is again said in the Talmud:

But he who suppresses his prophecy, or disregards the words of a prophet, or a prophet who transgresses his own words is slain by Heaven, for it is written, All it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken: now this may be understood [as implying] to proclaim’ and ‘hearkening himself’ unto my words; and the verse concludes, I will require it of him (Deut. 18:19), i.e., [he shall be slain] by Heaven.
(b.San. 89a)