

# The Prophet like Moses in Jewish Expectation

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The purpose of this article is to provide a brief survey and summary of the various references within extra-biblical sources to the Deuteronomy 18 “prophet” like Moses.

## 1 Maccabees

These passages explicitly show that Jews were waiting for a prophet to arise again after centuries of silence.

*“They stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them.”* (1 Macc 4:46)

*“So there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them.”* (1 Macc 9:27)

*“And it was agreed that Simon should be their leader and high priest until a trustworthy prophet should arise.”* (1 Macc 14:41)

The Jews were expecting an eschatological prophet, not just any prophet, but *the* Prophet who would bring divine guidance again. This expectation was rooted in Deuteronomy 18.

## Dead Sea Scrolls

The Qumran community (Essenes) anticipated multiple messianic figures — notably a *prophet*, a *priestly Messiah*, and a *royal Messiah*.

Community Rule (1QS 9.11)

*“They shall govern themselves according to the first rules by which the men of the community began to be instructed until there shall come the Prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.”*

Here, the Prophet is distinct from the two Messiahs:

- “Messiah of Aaron” = a priestly figure
- “Messiah of Israel” = a royal (Davidic) figure

- “The Prophet” = likely the Deuteronomy 18 figure

This triadic expectation is remarkably close to what we see reflected in John 1:19–21, where people ask John the Baptist: “Are you the Christ? ... Are you Elijah? ... Are you the Prophet?”—treating all as separate eschatological identities.

Damascus Document (CD 12.23–13.1)

*“... until the coming of the Messiah of Aaron and Israel.”*

Again, two distinct messianic offices — priestly and royal — with the Prophet often understood as a *forerunner or interpreter*.

4QTestimonia (4Q175)

This Qumran scroll *explicitly* combines Deut 18:18–19, Numbers 24:15–17 (Balaam’s Star prophecy), and Deut 33:8–11 (Levitical blessing) — the very passages that underlie early messianic categories:

- The Prophet like Moses (Deut 18)
- The Star from Jacob (Num 24 — royal Messiah)
- The Levite/Priestly blessing (Deut 33)

This document shows that the Qumran community linked all three — prophet, king, and priest — as end-time expectations.

## The Targums (Aramaic Interpretive Paraphrases of Scripture)

Targum Jonathan on Deuteronomy 18:15

*“A prophet from among you, from your brethren, like unto me, shall the Lord your God raise up for you; with the Holy Spirit, a prophet in whose mouth He will put His word, the Holy Spirit shall speak through him.”*

This shows that the Prophet like Moses was seen as an eschatological figure who would speak by the Holy Spirit — an expectation clearly alive in Jesus’ day.

Targum Jonathan on Isaiah 52:13

*“Behold, My servant the Messiah shall prosper...”*

This targum explicitly interprets the *Servant as the Messiah*, demonstrating how prophetic

and messianic lines of interpretation were sometimes merged — even if not always clearly unified in expectation.

## Josephus and Pseudepigrapha

Josephus, *Antiquities* 3.317; 18.85–87

Josephus describes Moses as the archetypal prophet, and he reports several false prophets in the first century who led revolts, showing that people were expecting a prophetic deliverer:

*“These impostors and deceivers persuaded the multitude to follow them into the wilderness, promising them that they would show them signs and wonders performed by the providence of God.”* (Ant. 20.97–98)

This parallels the Gospel accounts where people ask John the Baptist if he is “the Prophet.”

Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (Testament of Levi 18:1–3)

*“Afterwards the Lord will raise up a new priest, to whom all the words of the Lord shall be revealed... and his star shall arise in heaven as of a king.”*

This combines priestly, prophetic, and royal imagery — again showing a multifaceted messianic hope.

## Early Rabbinic and Later Jewish Thought

While later rabbinic Judaism (after A.D. 70) began to collapse the messianic figures into one, early sources still show diversity.

- Rabbi Hillel (b. Sanhedrin 98b) refers to Messiah ben David as a royal redeemer.
- Midrashim later distinguish *Messiah ben Joseph* (suffering/dying figure) and *Messiah ben David* (conquering king).  
This two-Messiah theory may be an echo of the older dual or triadic expectations (prophet–priest–king).

## New Testament Reflection

John’s Gospel clearly mirrors this Second Temple diversity:

- *John 1:21*: “Are you the Prophet?” —possibly distinct from “the Christ.”

- *John 6:14*: After the feeding miracle, people say, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”
- *John 7:40–41*: Some said, “This is the Prophet”; others, “This is the Christ.”

The Gospel of John intentionally shows that Jesus fulfills all these roles—Prophet, Priest, and King—even as the crowd misunderstands the unity of those offices.

## Conclusion

By Jesus’ day, the Jewish people were *not united* in a single, coherent messianic expectation.

- Some awaited “the Prophet”—a Spirit-empowered lawgiver like Moses.
- Others awaited “the Christ”—a Davidic king and conqueror.
- The Qumran community awaited both, along with a priestly figure.

John’s Gospel masterfully captures this confusion—not to mock it, but to reveal that all these streams of expectation converge in one Person:

the Prophet, Priest, and King—Jesus the Messiah.