



Deuteronomy - Chapter Eighteen

III Deuteronomy 12:1-26:19 - Moses' Second Speech: Specific Covenant Stipulations (continues)

III.i Deuteronomy 16:18-18:22 - Leaders (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Eighteen

The first part of this chapter deals with the rights of the Levitical priests who shall have no land inheritance but may have allocated portions of the Lord's offerings to sustain them as they minister before the Lord.

The people are warned that they must never participate in magic nor should they make human sacrifices as both are abhorrent to God.

The chapter concludes with a promise that God will provide the Messiah, a prophet whom everyone must heed. In addition, there is a warning against those who either prophesy in the name of false Gods or who will claim to be speaking the words of God but are not.

III.i.v Deuteronomy 18:1-8 - Privileges of Priests and Levites

The tribe of Levi are to serve as priests before God, either in the towns or at the central location chosen by God. Because they receive no land inheritance they are permitted to share in the offerings made to God.

¹ The levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no allotment or inheritance within Israel. They may eat the sacrifices that are the Lord's portion ² but they shall have no inheritance among the other members of the community; the Lord is their inheritance, as he promised them.

Deuteronomy 18:1-2

The Levitical priests are the adult males within the tribe of Levi as a whole. They should not be confused with those who are solely priests who are the Levites descended directly from Moses' brother Aaron.

Shall have no allotment or inheritance within Israel. The Levites were the paid ministers for the nation of Israel; they were not to have allotted portions of land for their own possession. However, they would receive grazing land for their animals around the towns where they would live.

They may eat the sacrifices that are the Lord's portion. Instead, the Levites were to be supported by the gifts and offerings of God's people. The Levites were permitted to receive at least a portion of most animals sacrificed to the Lord, and thus were provided with meat for food: *<<Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar?>>* (1 Corinthians 9:13).

The Lord is their inheritance. This indicates the privilege of serving the Lord in the central sanctuary or out in the community, with the implied blessing of perpetual nearness to the Lord's presence.

³ This shall be the priests' due from the people, from those offering a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder, the two jowls, and the stomach. ⁴ The first fruits of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him.

Deuteronomy 18:3-4

This shall be the priests' due from the people. Parts of the sacrifices and first fruits are for the upkeep of the Levites. From a typical sacrifice, the priests received the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach. The rest of the animal would either be burnt before the Lord, or returned to the one bringing the sacrifice so they could enjoy his own fellowship meal with the Lord. This is confirmed in Leviticus 7:28-34 and Numbers 18:9-24, although the portions listed there for the priests are slightly different.

⁵ For the Lord your God has chosen Levi out of all your tribes, to stand and minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons for all time.

Deuteronomy 18:5

The Levites are chosen by the Lord, just like the central sanctuary (Deuteronomy 12:5), the king (Deuteronomy 17:15), and Israel itself (Deuteronomy 7:6).

⁶ If a Levite leaves any of your towns, from wherever he has been residing in Israel, and comes to the place that the Lord will choose (and he may come whenever he wishes), ⁷ then he may minister in the name of the Lord his God, like all his fellow-Levites who stand to minister there before the Lord. ⁸ They shall have equal portions to eat, even though they have income from the sale of family possessions.

Deuteronomy 18:6-8

He may come whenever he wishes. Levites who minister in the country have the right to come from time to time to minister in the central sanctuary. However, David organised the descendants of Aaron into twenty four divisions and allotted them to take turns to serve in sanctuary; refer to 1 Chronicles 24:1-19. This is confirmed in the story of John the Baptist: <<*In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years. Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense*>> (Luke 1:5-9).

From the sale of family possessions. Apart from their share of offerings, Levites may also make money from their personal property.

III.i.vi Deuteronomy 18:9-14 - Child-Sacrifice, Divination, and Magic Prohibited

The Israelites are forbidden to engage in human sacrifice or magic, as such practices are abhorrent to God.

⁹ When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you must not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations.

¹⁰ No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practises divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, ¹¹ or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. ¹² For whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord; it is because of such abhorrent practices that the Lord your God is driving them out before you.

Deuteronomy 18:9-12

You must not learn. God knows that many people have a natural curiosity regarding the occult, and that curiosity often leads them to gain knowledge God commands them to leave alone: <<*And now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, “The land that you are entering to possess is a land unclean with the pollutions of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations. They have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness”*>> (Ezra 9:10-11).

The abhorrent practices of those nations. As well as the sacrificial rites of burning or mutilating children and adults, the nations built shrines that the Israelites were instructed to destroy: <<*But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire*>> (Deuteronomy 7:5). Their worship ceremonies to their many gods often involved illicit sexual practices that God also hates.

Who makes a son or daughter pass through fire. This refers to the debased worship of the Canaanite god Molech, to whom children were sacrificed by burning. A thorough list is given of people and practices seeking divine help, guidance, or revelation apart from the Lord. No such practices are to be tolerated, e.g. Leviticus 19:26, 1 Samuel Chapter 28, 2 Kings 17:17, Isaiah 2:6, Isaiah 21:6, and Micah 5:12. All are abominations to the Lord and should therefore be the same to his people. Even child sacrifice was, for some pagan religions, an act of seeking divine guidance or help: <<*When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through, opposite the king of Edom; but they could not. Then he took his firstborn son who was to succeed him, and offered him as a burnt-offering on the wall. And great wrath came upon Israel, so they withdrew from him and returned to their own land*>> (2 Kings 3:26-27). Deliberately juxtaposed with this section are instructions about God’s prophets (vv.15-19), the avenue for true revelation.

Or who practises divination. The word divination or witchcraft here seems to be a broad word, describing a variety of occultic activities. Basically, anything that makes contact with the demonic or dark spiritual world. There is a modern revival of witchcraft, or Wicca, and many people claim that ‘white’ witchcraft, as opposed to ‘black’ witchcraft, is a use of spiritual powers for good, as well as being a more feminist, ecology-friendly understanding of god and spirituality. But whether a witch claims to be ‘white’ or ‘black,’ they are still using occultic powers. Much also can be said for those who allow their children to engage in the so-called ‘harmless fun’ of Halloween.

Or is a soothsayer. This has reference to astrological-type divination, predicting the future or seeking guidance through the stars, planets, clouds, or weather. Even though astrology is unscientific, it is based on the supposition that the sun circles the earth, and the positions of the planets and stars have shifted, and are never consistently uniform; therefore, the houses of the Zodiac have shifted, despite all that, millions of people still believe in astrology! There are 10,000 full time and 200,000 part time astrologers in the USA alone! Three out of four western newspapers carry a horoscope column. So where does the real ‘power’ of astrology come from? From what most astrologers call ‘intuition’, but is really psychic knowledge and ability. Astrology is idolatry, and stems from the demonic. It leads people away from trusting in God, and encourages them to put trust in what God created. And is not that Satan’s goal: to replace confidence in God with a dependence on anything else? Therefore, the Bible clearly forbids Christians to participate in astrology, which includes the reading of horoscopes, studying signs, and computing a natal chart. It is an occult art, meaning that it involves ‘knowledge of hidden things’, seeking spiritual knowledge apart from God’s revelation. It is a foundational art, which means it is the building block for all occultists. It is studied by witches and magicians alike. Every Christian should renounce any involvement they have ever had with astrology!

An augur is someone who interprets omens. The word comes from the root ‘to hiss’ or ‘to whisper’ and refers to psychics and fortune-tellers who use ‘aids’ other than naturally created things to gain knowledge, tell the future, and cast spells. Today, these people are the tarot card readers, crystal ball seers, tea-leaf readers, palm readers, Ouija board users, and the like. A Christian has no business participating or approving of any of these practices, because either they are money-grabbing frauds at best, or worse, they gain their knowledge from satanic, demonic, spiritual sources.

A sorcerer. This has reference to those who use drugs or potions to cast spells, gain spiritual knowledge, or enter into altered states of consciousness. Modern drug abuse easily falls into this category, and the use of drugs has a definite occult connection that the drug taker may not want, but is exposed to nonetheless.

One who casts spells. This is literally, ‘a charmer of charms’ and refers to those who cast spells or charms for good or evil upon others with spiritual powers apart from God. It is a glorious thing to bless another in the name of the Lord; or even to pray to God against the evil of another person. But it is always and forever wrong to use demonic, dark, pagan, or occultic powers to cast spells or charms, or even to express an interest in such practices.

Or who consults ghosts or spirits. The idea is of someone who ‘stands between’ the physical world and the psychic world; they channel knowledge from the psychic world into the physical world. A Christian has no business participating or approving of any of these practices, because either they are again money-grabbing

frauds at best, or worse, they gain their knowledge from satanic, demonic, spiritual sources.

Who seeks oracles from the dead. This refers to the practice of necromancy, which is the conjuring up or the contacting of the dead.

It is because of such abhorrent practices that the Lord your God is driving them out before you. The destruction of the Canaanites is not an attack on an innocent people. It is God's judgement against abominable sin: *<<And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete>>* (Genesis 15:16). God's judgement was upon the Canaanites because of these occultic practices, and if Israel took up the same occultic practices, they could expect the judgement of God also. God did not take these occultic actions lightly then, nor does he today. It is consorting with the power of darkness, and always to be rejected by Christians: *<<And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil>>* (John 3:19).

¹³ You must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God. ¹⁴ Although these nations that you are about to dispossess do give heed to soothsayers and diviners, as for you, the Lord your God does not permit you to do so.

Deuteronomy 18:13-14

You must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God. More than being a general call to a holy walk, this is a solemn warning to keep from any involvement with these detestable practices of the occult. The Lord your God has not appointed such for Christians, who are to be blameless in regard to such things, even as the Ephesian Christians, who destroyed all things that marked the occult in their lives: *<<A number of those who practised magic collected their books and burned them publicly; when the value of these books was calculated, it was found to come to fifty thousand silver coins. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed>>* (Acts 19:19-20). This is why it is dangerous for people to seek or approve of the occult, even if they do not really believe it, even if they just kind of think it is 'cool.'

III.i.vii Deuteronomy 18:15-22 - A New Prophet Like Moses

God informs the people through Moses that he will send his Messiah as a man from their own people whom they must heed and follow. There follows a warning against heeding prophets who claim to speak on behalf of other gods or who, indeed, prophesy falsely in the name of God.

¹⁵ The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. ¹⁶ This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: 'If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.' ¹⁷ Then the Lord replied to me: 'They are right in what they have said. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. ¹⁹ Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable.

Deuteronomy 18:15-19

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people. God promises first a line of prophets who will speak to Israel on his behalf, for example: <<*But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, "I am only a boy"; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.'* Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, 'Now I have put my words in your mouth'>> (Jeremiah 1:7-9), pertaining to Jeremiah's ministry. Ultimately, the Prophet would be the Messiah.

Moses speaks of himself as a prophet, the instrument of communicating God's Word to Israel. Like Moses, this prophet would be from the midst of Israel. This not only meant that he would be an Israelite, but that he would be a 'man of the people', he would be one of them.

People looked for this prophet in Jesus' day: <<*When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world'*>> (John 6:14), and: <<*When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, 'This is really the prophet'*>> (John 7:40), and some thought that John the Baptist might be this prophet: <<*This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No'*>> (John 1:19-21). **However, the NT plainly reveals that Jesus is this prophet:** <<*Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets. Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a*

prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out from the people.” And all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, also predicted these days. You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, “And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways’>> (Acts 3:19-26), and: <<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”>> (Acts 7:37).

Nations listen to magicians, etc. (v.14); Israel is to listen to God’s prophet rather than pagan means of revelation and guidance. Like Moses, this prophet would command the attention of the nation. This means both that Israel should listen to this prophet, and that they would listen to this prophet.

This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb. Like Moses, this prophet would be a mediator, representing God to the people, and representing the people before God.

If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die. The Mount Sinai experience was not one of sweet fellowship with God. The message of Mount Sinai was not ‘come unto me,’ but ‘stay away, for I am holy and you are not.’ This is exactly the message of the writer to the Hebrews in Hebrews 12:18-24: Christians, under the New Covenant, have not come to Mount Sinai and the message ‘stay away’; they have come to Mount Zion, where God’s message is ‘come unto me.’

A prophet like you. Now God speaks of Moses as a prophet and promises a future prophet like him for Israel. In the First Century AD, Jews expected a final prophet, whom NT writers identified as Jesus.

I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet. Like Moses, this prophet would speak God’s Word.

I myself will hold accountable. Like Moses, this prophet’s message would only be rejected at a great penalty.

²⁰ But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak — that prophet shall die.’ ²¹ You may say to yourself, ‘How can we recognise a word that the Lord has not spoken?’ ²² If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it.

Deuteronomy 18:20-22

False prophets, whether speaking in God's name or the name of other gods, are to be put to death. One test of false prophecy is, if a prophet's words do not take place or prove true, then they are not the Lord's words. However, the fact that a prophet's words do come to pass does not automatically mean that person is God's prophet; refer to Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and the comments made there.

Scripture confirms that there have always been and will always be false prophets: <<*An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule as the prophets direct; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?*>> (Jeremiah 5:30-31), <<*Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen oracles for you that are false and misleading*>> (Lamentations 2:14), <<*Its prophets have smeared whitewash on their behalf, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord God', when the Lord has not spoken*>> (Ezekiel 22:28), <<*False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect*>> (Mark 13:22), and: <<*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world*>> (1 John 4:1).

That prophet shall die. Simply stated, the penalty for false prophets was death. Presumptuous speaking in the name of the Lord, disobedient speaking in the name of the Lord, and speaking in the name of false gods were simply never to be tolerated in Israel: <<*But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even deny the Master who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves*>> (2 Peter 2:1).

Do not be frightened by it. People have nothing to fear from false prophecies providing they do not heed what is being said but are to be discerning of what is being said to them and are to seek affirmation that it is indeed from God. Paul writes: <<*Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil*>> (1 Thessalonians 5:20-22).