

Deuteronomy 18 - Priests & Levites; Occult Practices; The Prophets

II. Second sermon: What Israel must do for God (Deut 4:41—26:19)

(3) Exposition of the Decalogue (Deut 12:1—25:19)

(E) Laws arising from the fifth Commandment (Deut 16:18—18:22)

(c) Priests and Levites (18:1-8)

(d) Prophets (18:9-22)

(i) Pagan practices to avoid (18:9-14)

(ii) Prophet like Moses to be raised up (18:15-19)

(iii) Test of a genuine prophet (18:20-22)

Deuteronomy 18

(c) Priests and Levites (18:1-8)

The tribe of Levi was divided into three families (Gershonites, Kohathites, and Merarites). Each division originally had different responsibilities regarding the tabernacle (Num 3-4). The Kohathites were further divided into those who were descendants of Aaron and those who were not (Josh 21:4-5). Only the descendants of Aaron were permitted to serve as priests (Num 3:10). They are generally referred to as "the priests" or "the sons of Aaron" (Num 10:8). The rest of the tribe, those not serving as priests, were designated as Levites. Thus priests were a minority in the tribe of Levi. The Levites served as ministers to the priests (Num 18:1-7; 1 Chr 23:28-32), and in general as teachers of the Law in Israel (Deut 33:10a; 2 Chr 17:8-9). The priests officiated at the tabernacle and also had other duties. They served as judges (Deut 17:8-9), guardians of the scroll of the Law (17:18; 31:9), teachers of regulations concerning skin diseases (24:8), and assistants to Moses in the covenant renewal ceremony (27:9).

1 "The Levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall not have a portion or inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the LORD'S offerings by fire and His property.

1 "The Levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the LORD offerings by fire and His portion.

1 "The Levitical priests—the whole tribe of Levi—will not have a portion or an inheritance within Israel. Instead, they will eat the burnt offerings of the LORD, because that is their inheritance.

1 The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and his inheritance.

2 They shall not have an inheritance among their countrymen; the LORD is their inheritance, as He promised them.

2 They shall have no inheritance among their countrymen; the LORD is their inheritance, as He promised them.

2 But they will not have an inheritance among their relatives, because the LORD alone is their inheritance—as he promised them."

2 Therefore shall they have no inheritance among their brethren: the LORD is their inheritance, as he hath said unto them.

- Unlike the other 11 tribes, none of the Levites including the priests was given an allotment of land to settle and cultivate

— However, 48 cities were set aside for the Levites (Num 35:1-8; Josh 21:1-42)

- The priests (and the Levites who assisted them at the central sanctuary) were to be sustained by the people's offerings made to the Lord

— The Levites who did not assist at the central sanctuary were to be sustained by gifts from the people (Deut 14:28-29; 16:10-11)

3 "Now this shall be the priests' portion from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, either an ox or a sheep: they shall give the priest the shoulder, the two cheeks, and the stomach.

3 "Now this shall be the priests' due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, either an ox or a sheep, of which they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach.

3 "A portion of what the people offer in sacrifice, whether cattle or sheep, is to be due the priests. They must set aside the shoulder, jowls, and stomach for the priest.

3 And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from them that offer a sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep; and they shall give unto the priest the shoulder, and the two cheeks, and the maw.

4 You shall give him the first fruits of your grain, your new wine, and your oil, and the first fleece of your sheep.

4 You shall give him the first fruits of your grain, your new wine, and your oil, and the first shearing of your sheep.

4 Give them the first gatherings of your grain, wine, and oil, as well as wool from the shearing of your flock.

4 The firstfruit also of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him.

- The people were responsible for supporting the priests who officiated at the central sanctuary

— The priests were to receive parts of bulls and sheep that were sacrificed, the firstfruits of grain, new wine, and oil, and the first wool

— This was because God had chosen Aaron and his descendants out of all the tribes to stand and minister in the Lord's name, that is, on His behalf

5 For the LORD your God has chosen him and his sons from all your tribes, to stand to serve in the name of the LORD always.

5 For the LORD your God has chosen him and his sons from all your tribes, to stand and serve in the name of the LORD forever.

5 For the LORD your God has chosen them and their descendants from among your tribes to stand and serve in the name of the LORD all their lives."

5 For the LORD thy God hath chosen him out of all thy tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the LORD, him and his sons for ever.

6 "Now if a Levite comes from any of your towns throughout Israel where he resides, and he comes whenever he desires to the place which the LORD chooses,

6 "Now if a Levite comes from any of your towns throughout Israel where he resides, and comes whenever he desires to the place which the LORD chooses,

6 "Any descendant of Levi who wishes to do so may come from any city or part of Israel where he resides to the place that the LORD will choose.

6 And if a Levite come from any of thy gates out of all Israel, where he sojourned, and come with all the desire of his mind unto the place which the LORD shall choose;

- The New Testament broadened the priesthood to include all Christians (1 Peter 2:9)

— The reason for this is that Jesus Christ by virtue of His ministry, death, and resurrection superseded the Aaronic priesthood of the Old (Mosaic) Covenant and became the High Priest of the New Covenant (Heb 2:17-18; 4:14-5:10; 6:19-7:28)

— Every Christian has come into the family of Jesus (Heb 2:10-13) and therefore into Jesus' priestly line

7 then he shall serve in the name of the LORD his God, like all his fellow Levites who stand there before the LORD.

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7 There he may serve in the name of the LORD his God. Like his fellow descendants of Levi who stand there in the LORD's presence,

7 Then he shall minister in the name of the LORD his God, as all his brethren the Levites do, which stand there before the LORD.

8 They shall eat equal portions, except for *what they receive* from the sale of their fathers' estates.

8 They shall eat equal portions, except *what they receive* from the sale of their fathers' estates.

8 he may eat the same share as they do regardless of what he receives from his ancestral estate."

8 They shall have like portions to eat, beside that which cometh of the sale of his patrimony.

- If a Levite wanted to go to the central sanctuary to minister there in the Lord's name (on His behalf), he was permitted to do so and to receive equal support along with the other Levites

— This does not imply that this Levite would minister as a priest as some have suggested

— The Levites were to assist the priests (1 Chr 23:28-32)

- Even though a Levite had received money from the prior sale of his family possessions (Cf. Lev 25:32-34) before moving to Jerusalem, he was to receive support for his work at the sanctuary

— Paul restated this principle for the New Testament church (1 Cor 9:14; 1 Tim 5:17-18)

(d) Prophets (18:9-22)

(i) Pagan practices to avoid (18:9-14)

9 "When you enter the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations.

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.

9 "When you enter the land that the LORD your God is about to give you, don't learn the detestable practices of those nations there.

9 When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations.

- Dark Practices: In these verses all the forbidden practices—called detestable ways (Cf. v12) of the nations in the land—dealt with either foretelling the future or magic

— By the use of magic one attempted to manipulate or force the "gods" into certain courses of action

— Child sacrifice was mentioned here because it was used either as a means of foretelling or as magic to manipulate certain events

— The practices mentioned in v9-14 have led many into satanic bondage

— Such detestable practices were one reason the Lord used Israel to destroy the Canaanites. Therefore it was understandably detestable for an Israelite to become involved in those things.

Dangers of the Occult

The future was “determined” by one’s moral behavior, not by magical manipulation. Using magic to manipulate one’s circumstances was in essence a futile attempt to flee from the Lord’s ethical laws which promoted life and blessing. The use of magic and divination was a denial of the sovereignty of the Lord. Reliance on these practices indicated a corresponding failure to trust the Lord with one’s life. All these practices are forbidden because they divorce life from morality.

10 There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, a soothsayer, one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,

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,

10 There must never be found among you anyone who sacrifices his son or daughter in fire, practices divination, interprets omens, practices sorcery,

10 There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch,

11 or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who consults the dead.

11 or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.

11 casts spells, or who is a medium, an occultist, or a necromancer.

11 Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

- Divination (v10,14), from the verb *qasam*, “to divide,” means to give false prophecy or seek to determine the will of the gods by examining and interpreting omens

— *Qasam* is also used in Josh 13:22; 1 Sam 6:2; 28:8; 2 Kings 17:17; Is 3:2; 44:25; Jer 27:9; 29:8; Ezek 13:6,9,23; 21:21,23,29; 22:28; Micah 3:6-7,11; Zech 10:2

- Sorcery (*'anan*, Deut 18:10,14; Cf. Lev 19:26; 2 Kings 21:6; Is 2:6; Micah 5:12, “cast spells”) is the attempt to control people or circumstances through power given by evil spirits (demons)

- To interpret omens is to tell the future based on “signs” such as the movements of birds, fire, or rain

- Witchcraft (*kasapl*) involves practicing magic by incantations

— One who casts spells is literally “one who ties knots” (*hòablar*), thus one who binds other people by magical mutterings

- A spiritualist is one who supposedly communicates with the dead but who actually communicates with demons
- One who consults the dead may mean the spiritist's attempt to contact the dead to gain advice, information on the future, or help in manipulation

12 For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God is going to drive them out before you.

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.

12 Whoever practices these things is detestable to the LORD, and the LORD your God will expel them before you because of these things.

12 For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee.

13 You are to be blameless before the LORD your God.

13 You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.

13 You must be completely faithful to the LORD your God,

13 Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God.

14 For these nations, which you are going to dispossess, listen to soothsayers and diviners, but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you *to do* so.

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.

14 because those nations that you are about to dispossess listen to those who practice witchcraft and divination. But the LORD does not allow you to act this way."

14 For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered thee so to do.

(ii) Prophet like Moses to be raised up (18:15-19)

15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen; to him you shall listen.

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.

15 "The LORD your God will raise up a prophet like me for you from among your relatives. You must listen to him,

15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;

16 *This is* in accordance with everything that you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Do not let me hear the voice of the LORD my God again, and do not let me see this great fire anymore, or I will die!'

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.'

16 because this is what you asked from the LORD your God at Horeb when you were assembled together: 'Don't let us hear the voice of the LORD our God again, or even see this great fire—otherwise, we will die.'

16 According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not.

17 And the LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well.

17 The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well.

17 "Then the LORD told me: 'What they have suggested is good.

17 And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.

The Prophets

In contrast with the dark magic of Canaanite diviners, witches, and spiritists, Israelites were to listen to the Lord's prophet. The Israelites could be sure that a "line of prophets" would follow in succession after Moses because of their original request at Horeb (Sinai) that God speak to them through Moses as a mediator (Cf. 5:23-27). Each prophet God would raise up would be an Israelite, and because the true prophet would only speak the words of the Lord, the people were obligated to obey (listen to) those words.

The ultimate Prophet like Moses (18:15,18) is Jesus Christ—the One who spoke God's words and who provides deliverance for His people. Not even Joshua could be compared to Moses, for since Moses "no prophet has risen in Israel like" him (34:10) with such power before men and intimacy with God. However distinguished a future prophet's role might be in Israel, none would be like Moses until the Mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ, came. Moses set the standard for every future prophet. Each prophet was to do his best to live up to the example of Moses until the One came who would introduce the New Covenant. During the first century AD the official leaders of Judaism were still looking for the fulfillment of Moses' prediction (Cf. John 1:21). Peter said their search should have stopped with the Lord Jesus (Acts 3:22-23). Other early and clear predictions of the Messiah may be found in Gen 49:10-12; Num 24:17-19.)

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

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.

18 I will raise up a prophet like you from among their relatives, and I will place my words in his mouth so that he may expound everything that I have commanded to them.

18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

- This is the biblical definition of a prophet...it's not a preacher behind a pulpit, but rather someone who receives direct revelation from God

— This is not just an OT definition of a prophet, but also is found in the NT (2 Peter 1:20-21)

19 And it shall come about that whoever does not listen to My words which he speaks in My name, I Myself will require *it* of 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.

19 But if someone will not listen to those words that the prophet speaks in my name, I will hold him accountable.

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.

(iii) Test of a genuine prophet (18:20-22)

20 But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name, *a word* which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'

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.'

20 Even then, if the prophet speaks presumptuously in my name, which I didn't authorize him to speak, or if he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet must die.'

20 But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

21 And if you say in your heart, 'How will we recognize the word which the LORD has not spoken?'

21 You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'

21 Now you may ask yourselves, 'How will we be able to discern that the LORD has not spoken?'

21 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken?

- Since the people were to obey God's prophet without question (v19), to prophesy falsely was in effect to usurp the place of God

— For this the false prophet was to be put to death

- Two tests could be used to determine whether a prophet was speaking God's words:

(1) The prophet's message had to be in accordance with God and His Word

- If he spoke in the name of (on behalf of) other gods then he contradicted the objectively revealed Word of God and was therefore a false prophet (Cf. 13:1-5)

(2) His prophecy must come true

- If neither of these conditions was met, then no matter how powerful the would-be prophet seemed to be, the people were not to be afraid of him or of any reprisals he might predict against them

22 When the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, and the thing does not happen or come *true*, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you are not to be afraid of him.

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.

22 Whenever a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD and the oracle does not come about or the word is not fulfilled, then the LORD has not spoken it. The prophet will have spoken presumptuously, so you need not fear him."

22 When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

- Because of this passage, long range prophecies often had a short range partial fulfillment to serve as a confirmation of the eventual total fulfillment.