

Requirements for Priests and Discerning a Prophet

Deuteronomy 18

Deuteronomy 18:1-8 - *“The priests, the Levites—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 portion. ² Therefore they shall have no inheritance among their brethren; the Lord is their inheritance, as He said to them.*

³ “And this shall be the priest’s due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, whether it is bull or sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach. ⁴ The first fruits of your grain and your new wine and your oil, and the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him. ⁵ For the Lord your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons forever.

⁶ “So if a Levite comes from any of your gates, from where he dwells among all Israel, and comes with all the desire of his mind to the place which the Lord chooses, ⁷ then he may serve in the name of the Lord his God as all his brethren the Levites do, who stand there before the Lord. ⁸ They shall have equal portions to eat, besides what comes from the sale of his inheritance.”

Background Notes

The Mosaic Law was given to the people of Israel when they were encamped at Mt. Sinai, soon after they came out of Egypt. Now, forty years later, a whole new generation of Israelis was encamped on the plains of Moab, ready to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. Before this new generation entered the Land, Moses reviewed the laws that God had given them.

In Deuteronomy 18, four areas of requirements were reviewed. These four areas are our doctrinal points for this Talk.

Doctrinal Points

1. Israel was to establish the Levites.

The tribe of Levi was the priestly tribe in Israel, but only those men descended from the family line of Aaron were priests. So not all Levites were priests - but all Levites were to be involved in serving the Lord.

The Levites were not assigned any tribal territory in the Land of Israel, as were the other tribes. However, they received 48 cities that were scattered throughout the Land. Besides receiving the tithes the people brought to the Lord, the Levites were entitled to certain portions of the sacrificial offerings, and some of the “first fruits” given by the people (v3-4).

Some Levites were not appointed to serve at the Tabernacle (and later the Temple), but any Levite could volunteer to come up to serve at Jerusalem. *“So if a Levite comes from any of your gates, from where he dwells among all Israel, and comes with all the desire of his mind to the place which the Lord chooses, then he may serve in the name of the Lord his God as all his brethren the Levites do, who stand there before the Lord”* (v6-7).

The Levites shared equally as they served the Lord, but they could keep for themselves any profit they made from the sale of their personal or family possessions (v8). So under the Law, Israel was to establish the Levites in the Land.

2. Israel was to eliminate occult practices.

Deuteronomy 18:9-14 - *“When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations.¹⁰ There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,¹¹ or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.¹² For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you.¹³ You shall be blameless before the Lord your God.¹⁴ For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you.”*

In these verses we see one reason why God directed that the Israelis were to make a clean sweep when they entered the Land. All the occult practices listed in these verses were practiced by the foreign nations and the Canaanites, and God wanted to remove the Canaanite inhabitants and their practices from the Land.

The term “pass through the fire” (v10) does not mean some kind of walking or running through a fire, or walking on coals. No - it means child sacrifice by fire! The term “calls up the dead” (v11) does not mean that it was actually possible to contact people who had died. The mediums would contact the demonic familiar spirits that had associated themselves with the deceased person while that person was still living. These so-called “familiar spirits” were able to mimic those who had died. The same is true today. No medium or “spiritist” or “channeler” is actually able to contact the spirits of people who have died. However, they are able to contact demonic spirits who know about and can mimic the one who has died. The account of King Saul and the witch (medium) of Endor (1 Samuel 28) was a unique situation in which God allowed the real spirit of the Samuel to come back from the dead to pronounce judgment against King Saul. That’s why the witch herself was so surprised - she had never experienced anything like that before. All occult practices were not to be tolerated in Israel. Under the Law, Israel was to eliminate occult practices.

3. Israel was to expect the Messiah.

Deuteronomy 18:15-19 - *“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, ¹⁶ according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’*

¹⁷ “And the Lord said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. ¹⁹ And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.”

Who is “the prophet like Moses” (v15)? In a general sense, the “prophet like Moses” was the office of the prophet that would become the means of speaking to the people when they entered the Land. But ultimately, this prophecy was specifically fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter quoted this prophecy in reference to the Lord Jesus in Acts 3:19-23 - *“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’”*

Do you remember that the Jews asked John the Baptist whether he was “the prophet” (John 1:21). They were referring to this Deuteronomy 18 prophecy. So at the time of Christ there was an expectancy of the coming prophet. But the people did not understand the prophecy correctly, and they rejected the Lord in whom the prophecy was fulfilled. Israel was to expect the Messiah - but they failed to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah when He appeared.

4. Israel was to execute false prophets.

Deuteronomy 18:20-22 - *“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ ²¹ And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’— ²² when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”*

What was the test of a true prophet in Israel? Was it “A” - if the prophet was right some of the time? Or was it “B” - if the prophet was right most of the time? Or was it “C” - if the prophet was right all the time? The right answer is “C.” **The words of a true prophet had to be right 100% of the time.** A person who claimed to speak for the Lord but wasn't right 100% of the time, that was evidence that he was not speaking the true Word of the Lord, and was a false prophet (v20).

False prophets in Israel were to be executed (v20). They were to be silenced - permanently. *“When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him”*(v22). This stiff penalty would certainly be a protective barrier. If this law were carried out properly it would certainly limit false teaching from penetrating Israel! Although we don't execute false prophets in the Church today, this Scripture teaches us how very important it is that believers not tolerate false teaching. False teaching must be silenced, and false teachers must be excommunicated. Israel was to execute false prophets.

Practical Application

Keep your distance from occult practices!

A paraphrase of Deuteronomy 18:12 is, “God is disgusted with anyone involved in occult practices.” All of the occult practices mentioned in verses 10-11 are still around today. These practices are real, and they are evil. They are connected with the evil demonic world.

So - ***keep your distance from occult practices!*** Don't play around with magic cards or Ouija boards - not even naively. Don't get involved in role-playing fantasy games with their evil characters. Don't use crystals or other objects in any way, as a means of determining or controlling reality - not even if it appears harmless. Don't consult tarot cards or any form of fortune telling - not even if everyone else is doing it. Don't read horoscopes and zodiac predictions - not even just for fun. ***All of these things are gateways into the world of the occult.***

Keep yourself and your family protected. Keep your distance from occult practices!