

How To Recognize God's Voice

Deuteronomy 18:9-19

David Sunday November 8, 2020

Please turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 18. I want to challenge you this morning to consider, "Who are you listening to?" There is probably no

question more weighty in determining the quality, fruitfulness and faithfulness of your Christian life, from the day of your baptism until the day you finally end your journey here on earth. So to whom are you listening? Who do you let speak into your life? Whose voice is influencing you? Whose counsel is shaping your thoughts, guiding your decisions, as well as informing your vision and values?

When I was a toddler, I learned this simple song: "Oh, be careful little ears what you hear..." That's what Deuteronomy 18 is here to help us do. It's helping us pay attention to whom we are listening. I heard Ryan Fullerton talk about how this world has so many voices we need to tune out, but there's one voice we always need to tune in. I thought, "That's very helpful in terms of an outline for this passage." There are just two points, but they're very important. There are many voices we need to reject and there is only one voice we need to revere. Let's listen carefully to God's voice as He speaks to us in His Word from Deuteronomy 18.

1. There are many voices we need to reject (verses 9-14).

Let's look at verse nine: "*When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not imitate the detestable customs of those nations.*" God's people are standing on the edge of the Promised Land, they're about to go in and take possession of it. Moses, their leader, is not going to be going with them. So he's warning them here that they're going to be confronted by a plethora of spiritual practices that rise up like a revolting stench are abominable to God.

What would drive these nations to practice these abominable things? Chris Wright reminds us in his commentary that these people 3,000 years ago are actually not that different from us. They have the same desires we have. All humans want to know the unknown. We



want to get some preview of the future. We want to get guidance for our decisions. We want to exercise control over others. We want to harm others when they're a threat to us and we want to ward off the harm we fear our adversaries might bring to us. If we're alienated from the one true and living God, all these desires that are in our hearts are going to drive us to practice some detestable things.

Verse ten describes some of these detestable practices. It starts with this: *"No one among you is to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire..."* We readily agree—that is abominable. In order to secure a better future for themselves, these people would sometimes sacrifice their little ones. Can you think of anything like that in our nation today, where in order to secure a better future for themselves, people might sacrifice their children in a variety of ways.

Look again at verses ten and 11. No one is to *"...practice divination, tell fortunes, interpret omens..."* They would sometimes open up an animal and look at its entrails to decide if this was a sign about something in the future. We sometimes have an idea that if a black cat crosses our path, it's an omen of something. God says, "My people are not to practice this." No one is to *"...practice sorcery, cast spells, consult a medium or a spiritist, or inquire of the dead."*

What I want you to notice is that God doesn't call these occultic practices silly. He doesn't say they're fake. No, God calls His people not to take part in these things because they are empowered by the diabolical influence of Satan himself. They're detestable. They're abominable. God doesn't want His people dabbling in these dark arts. He's warning them to curb their curiosities and detest these evil influences as much as God detests them.

In fact, to protect His people from these corrupting influences, look at what God is about to do in verse 12: *"Everyone who does these acts is detestable to the Lord, and the Lord your God is driving out the nations before you because of these detestable acts."* He's saying, "I'm doing this so you, My people, won't be corrupted by them." Then in verses 13 and 14, God commands His people to tune out and reject the voices of all who practice such evil:

You must be blameless before the LORD your God. Though these nations you are about to drive out listen to fortune-tellers and diviners, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do this.

In other words, "The Lord your God commands you to tune out these voices and reject every attempt they have to capture your attention." What you and I have to recognize is that we are not immune to these same temptations that lead people to turn to the occult. We all want to know the unknown. We all would like to predict the future. We all want to be able to guarantee

our own security. And sometimes we want to control others who threaten us or who stand in the way of achieving our goals. What all these detestable practices have in common is that they are manipulative. These are all human ways to manipulate spiritual forces to try to fulfill our own agendas. But God doesn't guide His people like that. God's will is not something we can manipulate or control. We're not trapped in a maze that God is waiting for us to find our way out of. God is much more gracious than you can imagine. He is a God Who takes the initiative to reveal Himself and His ways to His people. He is a God Who makes Himself known.

One of the things I find most discouraging in life is when relationships go silent, when people you thought were your friends stop talking to you and there's no way to connect anymore. That's what our sin deserves. Our sin deserves God's silence. We deserve to have God say, "I'm done talking to you. That's it." It would have been perfectly just for God to leave us in this world of darkness with no light, no revelation and no means of finding our way to Him.

That's what these voices of fortune tellers, sorcerers, witches, mediums and spiritists are suggesting. They're all insinuating that God has abandoned us, that we live in a world where darkness reigns and that the only way to navigate your way through life in this world is to manipulate the powers of darkness to give you what you need.

But there is amazingly good news in this passage: God has not left us in the dark. God is not giving His people the silent treatment. God is on speaking terms with us and His Word is clear. His Word pierces the darkness and shines in the night guiding our feet into the paths of peace and the ways of righteousness. So reject all voices that suggest you need to manipulate your way into a brighter future for yourself. These evil voices are speaking under the influence of a thief who comes only to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10)—there is a better way. There's a way of life, abundance and blessing that is found in revering one voice above all others. That brings us to our second point this morning.

2. There is one voice we need to revere (verses 15-19)

Let's read verses 15 through 19:

¹⁵ "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ This is what you requested from the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, 'Let us not continue to hear the voice of the LORD our God or see this great fire any longer, so that we will not die!' ¹⁷ Then the LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I

command him. ¹⁹ I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name.

What a relief to read this, to leave the haunted realms of verses nine through 14 and enter into verse 15. It's like coming out of the toxic air of a polluted swamp into the refreshing breeze of a lakeside retreat. Here is life. Here is wisdom. Here is counsel and clear guidance for our pilgrimage through this bewildering world.

Verse 15: *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers..."* One who is like you, one who will speak God's word to you in a way you can understand. Right away, we're presented with a stark contrast between the detestable practices of the surrounding nations and the grace of the true and living God. Those who serve false gods have to practice all kinds of incantations and rituals in order to try to manipulate those gods into giving them what they want. But our God takes the initiative to come to us and speak to us in a way we can understand. He raises up a prophet, which means someone who is called and appointed by God to be His spokesman to a people who need guidance. A prophet is not like a fortune teller. A prophet in the Bible is not someone who peers into a crystal ball, trying to see what's in the future.

Whenever God's prophets do speak of the future, they speak under the inspiration of God Himself; their words come true. We see this in verses 20-22. A true prophet's messages are fulfilled, and a false prophet's messages don't come true. Prophets not only have a word about the future; they also bring the Word of God for today, for the present moment. They are God's mouthpiece, calling us away from the false paths of sin into true trust in the Lord, Who promises a hope and a future for His people if they will believe in Him and trust in Him (Jeremiah 29:11).

The first thing to notice about God's prophet is that he is someone who is called and raised up by God to faithfully speak God's Word to God's people. We see this very clearly in verse 18, where God says, *"...I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him."*

The second thing to notice is that Moses stresses that the Lord is going to raise up a prophet like Moses himself. But Moses was one of a kind among the prophets of Israel. He performed wonders. He received God's law from God Himself and instructed the people in the law of God. And Moses became a mediator between God and God's people which see in verses 16 and 17.

Moses remembers the day when he was up on Mt. Sinai, although he calls it "Horeb" here in Deuteronomy. He was receiving the Ten Commandments from God and was in

conversation with God. Awesome things were happening on that mountain. Down below, the people heard thunder, saw lightning and smelled smoke. A voice that made them tremble said, “No one may touch this mountain. Even if an animal touches this mountain, it must surely die.”

When the people heard that voice, they were terrified and said, “*Let us not continue to hear the voice of the Lord our God or see this great fire any longer, so that we will not die!*” They asked God for a mediator, someone who would stand between them and God, deliver God’s word to them and deliver them to God. God said, “That’s a good thing you’re asking for.” Look at verses 17-18: “*Then the Lord said to me, ‘They have spoken well. I will raise up for them a prophet like you...’*” God promised to provide them with a mediator. We see what makes Moses so special as a prophet in Numbers 12:6-8:

Listen to what I say: If there is a prophet among you from the Lord, I make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my household. I speak with him directly, openly, and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. So why were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

Moses was unique because God spoke directly to him and he saw the form of the Lord. He had open access into God’s presence and spoke face to face with God. There’s another passage at the end of Deuteronomy that summarizes what made Moses so unique. Look at what God says in Deuteronomy 34:10-12:

No prophet has arisen again in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unparalleled for all the signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do against the land of Egypt—to Pharaoh, to all his officials, and to all his land—and for all the mighty acts of power and terrifying deeds that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

There was no prophet like Moses who had this kind of direct access to God and communication with God. No one knew God as well as Moses did and the Lord knew him face to face. But Moses was about to die. He knew it, so now he was giving his last sermon to God’s people. Here they were, looking at this man who’s been their pastor, who’s been their shepherd, this man who has interceded and prayed for them, who stood up to Pharaoh for them and who helped deliver them from Egypt. He’s performed wonders. He’s brought water out from a rock in a wilderness. He’s delivered God’s law to them and led them through the desert for 40 years. He’s instructed them in God’s covenant. They loved Moses and they needed him.

But God is about to bury Moses in a valley in the land of Moab. God's mouthpiece is about to die. Moses knows his end is drawing near, so he's assuring the people of God, "God is not going to leave you without revelation from Him. God's not going to leave you without hearing from Him." God is going to raise up prophets—a noble army of prophets like Deborah, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah and many others—who will continue to speak God's word to them.

What I want you to notice here in Deuteronomy 18 is that the focus is not on the prophets (plural), but on a Prophet (singular) whom God will raise up. Someone Who is like Moses. Someone Who faithfully speaks God's Word. Someone who will come from among His own brothers and sisters. Someone Who will be a Mediator between God and His people. Someone Whose voice is going to speak with absolute authority. Look at verse 19: "*I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name.*"

Who is this Prophet from God? Throughout the Old Testament the prophets kept pointing forward to One Who was going to come and Who would surpass them all. When John the Baptist arrived on the scene in John 1:21, they asked him, "Are you the Prophet?" He said, "No, but He's coming." A few chapters later, after Jesus fed the 5,000, we read this in John 6:14: "*When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, 'This truly is the Prophet who is to come into the world.'*" They recognized, "This is Who Deuteronomy 18 was promising—Jesus."

I love how Charles Spurgeon sums up our passage so beautifully: "The Lord knew that a person would always be unable to hear his maker's voice and he determined not only to speak by Moses but to speak by his prophets. Then at last he would put all the words he had to say into one mouth, furnishing a full, complete and unchangeable revelation of himself to the human race." All these spokesmen were a gift of God's grace; otherwise we'd be lost in the dark. That mouth is the mouth of Jesus. What a gift!

In Acts 3, Peter is preaching, urging everyone who hears him to repent, turn away from their sins and turn back to God. He says to them in verse 19, "*Turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out, that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.*" It is so refreshing to turn away from the polluted streams of sin to the Lord. Peter tells them to turn so that the seasons of refreshing may come, "*and that he may send Jesus, who has been appointed for you as the Messiah.*"

Peter wants the people to recognize that Jesus is coming again and that their eternal joy—or their eternal misery—hinges on how they respond to the words of Jesus. In order to underscore how important it is that they listen to these words, Peter—in the strongest way

possible—urges them to respond to Jesus by quoting from our passage this morning. Look at how Peter ends his sermon in verses 22-24:

Moses said: The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers. You must listen to everything he tells you. And everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be completely cut off from the people. In addition, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, have also foretold these days.

In other words, Peter is saying, “He’s here! The Prophet has come and it’s urgent that you revere the words of Jesus and not reject His Word.” Jesus is not just a prophet, He’s not even just the Prophet—Jesus is Himself God’s true, final and living Word. Look at what Hebrews 1:1-2 say:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him.

Jesus is God’s full, final and complete revelation. He has nothing more to add to what He has already said to us in Jesus. Jesus is not just a prophet like Moses. Jesus is vastly superior to Moses in every way. Look at Hebrews 3:2-6:

For Jesus is considered worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder has more honor than the house. Now every house is built by someone, but the one who built everything is God. Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s household, as a testimony to what would be said in the future. But Christ was faithful as a Son over his household. And we are that household if we hold on to our confidence and the hope in which we boast

What this means for us in 2020 is abundantly clear. Moses made it so clear back in verse 15 of our passage this morning. Look at that one more time. “*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.*” You must listen to Jesus. Revere His voice. Never tune it out.

Do you remember when Jesus appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, talking to Peter, James and John? Then Moses and Elijah suddenly appeared with Him? What an experience that must have been to be with these great prophets! Suddenly a voice came from

heaven and what does it say? *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him”* (Matthew 3:17). Do you hear God saying this over and over to us?

It’s like when you’re talking to your kids and they’re just not tuned in. They’re not getting it. So you say, “Listen to me. Don’t miss this. This is vital.” When the disciples heard this, they fell face down in terror—and so should we. We should tremble at the voice of Jesus because His voice is the living Word of God.

Jesus is the Prophet, but He is infinitely more than that. He speaks with the authority of almighty God because Jesus is God. He is the one Mediator between God and man, because He is fully man. So the words of Jesus promise salvation and eternal life to all who believe, but conversely there will be judgment and condemnation for all who tune out and reject Jesus’ words, for His voice is the living Word of God.

When He speaks, for those who listen to His voice, the dead receive new life. He can raise the dead spiritually and physically through His voice. Salvation comes through hearing and believing Jesus’ words (Romans 10:17). John Calvin put it like this: “Outside Christ there is nothing worth knowing and all who by faith perceive what He is like have grasped the whole immensity of heavenly benefits.”

“Outside Christ there is nothing worth knowing...” There are many voices in this world that you need to reject because they’re not worth knowing. But there is one voice above all others you need to revere, for in that voice you will grasp all that heaven has to offer. All God wants to give you He gives in Jesus Christ and through His Word. Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me”* (John 10:27).

So how do you recognize God’s voice today? How do you know it’s God Who is speaking? The best way to recognize God’s voice is to realize that God’s voice sounds just like Jesus. The voice of Jesus is the voice of God. Listen. Listen to Him. Revere His voice always.

We’re going to take into our hands the bread and the cup. This bread and this cup are for those who have heard the voice of Jesus saying, “Come unto Me and rest.” You’ve responded to His voice. You’ve laid your sins and burdens on Jesus; you’ve found in Him sweet relief, because His Word is true. He gives rest to your soul and releases you from the burden of sin. This bread and this cup are for everyone who has heard the voice of Jesus say, “Is anyone thirsty? Let him come to Me and drink. As he comes to Me and drinks, out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.”

Have you come to Jesus for the satisfaction of your thirst? Have you found in Him the life He came to give? Is His Spirit now living in you and making you a source of living water to a world that's parched?

This bread and this cup—they are not for those who tune out Jesus' words. They are not for those who listen to Jesus and then walk away unrepentant and unchanged. If you are not listening to the voice of Jesus, don't just eat this bread and drink this cup to go through some ritual. It won't help you. In fact, it will harm you if you take this bread and drink this cup without listening to, responding to and believing in the word Jesus speaks to you.

There are many who have no ears to hear Jesus' voice. There are many who do not know His love within. There are many who have no taste for heaven's joys. Even in His day, there were many who walked away from Him after hearing His words. But to His disciples, Jesus said, "You don't want to go away too, do you? You don't want to leave with the rest of them, do you?"

And we answer with Simon Peter, "Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We wouldn't want to be anywhere else because You speak to us the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that You are the Holy One of God." If that's your confession, if that's what you have come to believe and know about Jesus, if His words to you are "beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life," if you want to hear them again and again, then He welcomes you and He calls you to Himself in this bread and in this cup. Would you join me in prayer?

We thank You, Lord Jesus, that Your words make these symbols more than just a ritual. Your words teach us to see You in this bread and in this cup. Your words beckon us to feed on You as the Bread of Life and to drink Your blood as the only source of our cleansing and renewal. We are weary of our striving, Lord, and we come to You for rest. We are hungry for real meaning and true life. We come to You as the Bread of Life. You love us and have set us free from our sins by Your blood. You make us a Kingdom, priests to our God and Father. To You be glory and dominion forever and ever.

As we eat this bread and drink this cup, we pray, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus," for we long for the wedding feast. We pray this in Your name. Amen.

Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it. He gave it to His disciples and said, "Take and eat. This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." Let's partake with joy and thanksgiving. Thank You, Jesus.

Then He took a cup and after giving thanks, He gave it to them and said, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of their sins.”

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