

God's Representatives
Deuteronomy 18
Series: Loving God in Every Way

Introduction: Take your Bible and turn with me to Deuteronomy 18, Deuteronomy chapter 18.

Down in the depths of the human psyche is a longing to connect with the supernatural. We inherently know that there is something more going on than what we can see or hear or experience through natural means. All mankind seems to understand that there is something bigger than us and greater than us. And we are fascinated with the idea of connecting with this supernatural being or force. Not only do we as humans want to connect with the supernatural, but we also want to control and manipulate the supernatural. We want to tap into the power of the supernatural and harness it for our own ends. Or we want to know what the supernatural knows. There seems to be a general assumption by mankind that there is a spiritual and deeper reality. And mankind seems to think that there is a way for the material world to connect to the immaterial world, and in some way control or benefit from the powers of the immaterial world.

And so, man has set out in every generation to connect himself to the power and mystery of the supernatural. Magic, sorcery, cults, witch doctors, horoscopes, fortune tellers, palm readers, tarot cards, religious experiences, false teachers, fake faith healers, prosperity gospel preachers, religious sacrifices, even the search for aliens – are all evidence of mankind's basic longing to connect with and harness the power of the supernatural.

We come to a text this morning in which the people of God are told how they are to connect with God, and how they are not to connect with God. To bridge this gap between the Creator and the creature, the holy and the unholy, the omniscient and the ignorant, the omnipotent and the weak, the omnipresent and the limited – God provided a way. Mankind cannot reach up to God and bring him to us. So, God condescended to us and provided a way for us to know Him and to be made right with him.

In Deuteronomy 18, Moses gives the people three commands for how they are to connect with God when they get into the Promised Land. This section in Deuteronomy, you'll remember, is all about the 4 main offices of leadership that are to govern God's people in God's land. In chapter 17 he taught them about the responsibilities of the judge and the king. Now in chapter 18 he will teach them about the responsibilities of the priest and the prophet. The chapter starts out with the priests and ends with the prophet, and in the middle, there is this section about abominable worship practices that they must absolutely avoid. And all of this is to instruct them in how they will rightly connect with the Lord in the Promised Land. They are not to seek him like the nations they are going in to dispossess do. Rather, if they are to rightly connect to God then they are to receive God's representatives, because remember, he must bridge this gap between Him and humanity, we cannot. And these two offices of leadership – priests and prophet – are the

two closest to God who would represent God to His people and represent the people to God. So, let's read chapter 18 and study these three commands the Lord gives to his people here.

Moses' concern for God's people in the book of Deuteronomy is that they learn to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and strength. He knows that the comfort and ease of the Promised Land will tempt them to forget God's Word and leave God's way, and therefore cease to love God as they should. So, he reminds them here that they are to provide for the priests, refuse the reprobates, and listen to the Lord. Those are the three commands of this text which are to guide the nation. The first command is found in the first 8 verses.

- I. Provide for the Priests – vs. 1-8
 - a. Moses is concerned that they heed God's good design for them. The tribe of Levi was to be cared for by the rest of the tribes. God has already spoken to them about this arrangement, but it is reiterated here. The 11 tribes will all be given a chunk of the Promised Land as their inheritance. But the tribe of Levi would not receive a land inheritance. Therefore, they would need the other tribes to supply their physical needs. And this was necessary because the Lord was the priest's inheritance.
 - b. Because the Lord is their inheritance – vs. 2
 - i. Just for the record, there is a distinction between the Levites and the official priests who would serve at the Altar and behind the curtain in the Tabernacle and Temple. The priests are a subset of the tribe of Levi. The whole tribe is conscripted by God to serve him in the ministry of the Temple, but the descendants of Aaron were those specifically designated for the work of the priests within the Tabernacle, and later the Temple. They were all serving the Lord, and they were all given the Lord as their inheritance. Which means that He is their portion in the land. His food will be their food. What is brought by the rest of the Israelites in the offerings that we learned about in chapter 16 is given to the Levites. The Lord is their inheritance. The food would be offered to the Lord in holy worship and then given to the Levites for them to eat and enjoy. The Lord was to be their inheritance.
 - c. Because they stand before the Lord – vs. 5
 - i. And this provision for the Levitical priests is also to be done because they stand before the Lord. That is the language of verse 5. The impetus for this arrangement is God and not man. God chose the tribe of Levi for this purpose. They were to stand before Him and serve in his name. The idea of standing before the Lord is a technical designation of service to the Lord. It is used in 1 Kings 17 by Elijah the prophet when he says that he stands before the Lord as he gives the decree about the coming drought. It is used by Gabriel in Luke 1 to describe how he stands in the presence of God and was sent to speak this news to Zechariah about his son that was to be born to him.
 - ii. In other words, standing before the Lord here means more than just a physical posture. This is the status of a humble servant. They are standing

in the presence of the Lord to be at his beck and call. They are to have no other concerns or commitments to their time. They are the Lord's servants to serve the people all the time as they minister in His name.

- iii. So, for the tribe of Levi this is an all-in commitment to the Lord for which they have been drafted. We are not going to get into the weeds on this, but they did live throughout the land in cities which were assigned to them in the tribal allotments of the other tribes. And they were spread out throughout the land where they were to be teachers of the Law to the people and aids to the judges as they governed the people under the Mosaic Law. So, in those towns they would have some means to supply for their own needs with the meager fields and pasture lands around them. But that was not to consume their time. They were to be servants of the Lord – standing before Him. And for them to do this they must be provided for by the rest of the nation. So, Moses commands them here – provide for the priests.
- iv. Before we move to the next command – consider how this position of priest as presented here in Deuteronomy 18 points forward to Jesus Christ. There are so many other texts about the priests and their role in sacrificing before the Lord. The High Priest especially is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ who would come and offer himself as the atoning sacrifice once for all for the forgiveness of sins. But just stick with me to the truths about the priest in our text and think about how they point ahead to Christ.
 - I. As our Great High Priest Jesus was
 - a. Appointed by God
 - i. Jesus was appointed by God to be priest according Hebrews 5:5 which says - So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.” So, just like the Levitical priests, Jesus was appointed to this role of service as our great High Priest.
 - b. Provided for by others:
 - i. In Luke 8 we read of how Jesus was provided for by the many women who followed him. Out of their abundant means they gave and provided for his needs. Just like the Levitical priests in our text, Jesus was dependent on the provision of others to meet his daily needs.
 - c. Without Physical Inheritance
 - i. In Luke 9:58 Jesus tells the man interested in following him that he himself has nowhere to lay his head – meaning he has no earthly possessions or

home. He had no physical inheritance, in other words – just like the Levitical priests.

d. Fed with God's Food

- i. Do you remember that incident in John 4 when Jesus talks with the Samaritan woman at the well while the disciples are in town getting food? They return and urge him to eat and he tells them that he has food to eat that they do not know about. And then he says in John 4:34 that “his food is to do the will of him who sent me.” Just like the Levitical priests, Jesus was fed with God's food. It looked much different for him, but the principle was laid in Deuteronomy 18 and fulfilled in John 4. He ate God's food.

2. So, beloved, see in the face of Jesus Christ the radiance of the glory of God. From beginning to end in Scripture we are directed to the man Jesus Christ, who is the one mediator between God and man. The priests are shadows pointing us forward to anticipate His grand glory.

II. Refuse the Reprobates – vs. 9-14

- a. The second command in our text in Deuteronomy 18 is that God's people are to refuse the reprobates. So, while they are meeting the needs of God's priests who are ministering to them and for them – they are to be watching out for the dangerous deceit of false worship which so easily creeps in. The section in verses 9-14 is bracketed by something they have and something they must not have. So, in verse 9 they are going to enter into the land the Lord is giving to them. And in verse 14 they are not to take up these abominable practices – the Lord has not allowed them to do that. The clear statement of this middle section is that God hates these practices of divination and spiritual manipulation. He hates them so much that it is these abominations that are the impetus for his judgment over the nations whom the Israelites are going in to dispossess. They are not to be like them. They must love the Lord their God by refusing to listen to the world around them and by listening to the Lord their God. They must not follow the popular trends in spiritual practice. They must not cave to popular pressure in the latest techniques devised by men to draw close to God. They must not take pagan and godless forms of worship and employ them in their pursuit of the one true God.
- b. Just so they are sure they know what he is specifically talking about, Moses gives them an extensive list of the current fads in pagan worship. This is one of the most extensive lists in the Scriptures, by the way, of all of these dark practices. All of them have the common thread of man seeking to connect with the supernatural for the purpose of blessing, direction, and power. So, let's walk through the list:

- i. In verse 10 we are confronted with the most heinous of them which is the sacrificing of a son or daughter in the fire as an appeasement offering to a god. It is most often associated in the Old Testament with the god Molech. As best as can be figured out, this was a sacrifice by which the offeror was keeping a vow to the god or seeking to secure some blessing for fertility of the womb or of the flock or of the crop.
 - ii. The next one is “divinations” which is the overall word for seeking to gain insight from the gods through these techniques. Those who tell fortunes or interpret omens are the people who are using tools to interpret the times and prophesy the future. Sorcerers are those who can cause things to appear – they create apparitions which harness the power of the supernatural. The charmer is the practice of witchcraft for the sake of casting spells and bringing curses to bind an opponent. The last three all deal with the realm of the dead in which these practitioners have access to the spirits of the dead which they consult for guidance. This is what Saul pursued with the help of the witch at Endor.
 - iii. So, you can see just by their descriptions how completely wicked they are. And we have all of them, or similar things happening in our own world today. We have fortune tellers and witches, necromancers and spell-casters. We have those who read the omens and those who sacrifice their children to the god of immorality behind the walls of Planned Parenthood. And it is all evil in God’s sight. And yet, the dangers are so very real for the people of God to become desensitized to them and to think that there really must not be too much wrong with them. In our culture these types of things are showing up in our media more and more. The movies and TV shows of this generation are pushing the envelope of how much black magic and sorcery and necromancy and other wicked elements they can include.
 - iv. But our Christian culture is all too quick to adopt these pagan methods into the practice of the church all for the purpose of pursuing a closer connection with God, or to receiving special direction from God about a decision that needs to be made. The prayer labyrinth or the eastern meditation techniques for personal prayer or the adoption of Christian yoga as the practice of emptying the mind so that it can be filled by God, or the use of Christian Tarot cards, are just a few examples of this infiltration. But it is all vile attempts at getting closer to God or getting direction from God in ways which He detests. Why does he hate them so much? Well, primarily He hates those who practice such things because they refuse the authority of His Word and the sufficiency of His Word.
- c. God hates them because:
- i. They refuse the authority of His Word
 1. At the core of all these practices man is placed over God as the authority. God becomes the servant of the manipulative efforts of the so-called worshiper. If the people of God were to adopt these

practices, then they would be seeking after God to make him their errand boy. They would be reversing the reality of it all and putting God at the beck and call of His people. In that way, they are rejecting His authority revealed in His Word and their word is becoming more in charge than His.

2. But not only that, these practices are a flat rejection of His Word. He is here declaring that they are to have nothing to do with these things. So, when they get into the land and get into these things - then they are denying the authority of God over them by disregarding his clear command.
- ii. They reject the sufficiency of His Word
 1. But they are also rejecting the sufficiency of His Word through these practices. By their pursuit of these pagan practices they are showing a dissatisfaction with what God has already said to them. They are saying that His Word is not enough – they need more, and they will seek it through these despicable methods. So, when Saul seeks the spirit of Samuel through the witch of Endor, he is inherently saying that what God has told him already is not enough. He needs more information from the supernatural world in order to go forward.
 2. Or it might be an attempt to get more direction than what God has provided. Or an attempt to harness more power than what God has currently given. It all amounts to a rejection of what God has already said as though that were not enough, and a hankering after something else from the spirit world.
- d. Moses says here that God’s people have no business dabbling with any of that. They are not to open the door even just a little. They are to be completely blameless. They are to have a no tolerance policy. They are to not even have these things named among them. Their children and children’s children shouldn’t even have to know what they are because this generation is to wipe it out of the land and never let it return. They are to refuse to follow the reprobates.

III. Listen to the Lord – vs. 15-22

- a. And the third command is found in verses 15-22, and that is that they are to listen to the Lord. In contrast to listening to the fortune tellers and diviners in the land, they must listen to the Lord who will speak to them through a prophet like Moses. And this provision of the Lord would also be aped by Satan and false prophets would arise among them as well. So, they must not listen to the diviners and they must not listen to the false prophets. Rather, they must value God’s way of condescending to them and blessing them with his prescribed ways for them to draw near to Him – through the ministry of the priests and through the words of the prophet.
- b. Through the True Prophet, not the False
 - i. The bulk of this command is taken up with the contrast between the true and false prophet. Moses is equipping the people so that they can know

who to listen to when he is gone. So, he gives them the criteria here to decipher between the true and the false.

- ii. *The True Prophet is raised up by God.* In verse 15 the promise is that this is God's doing in response to the people's desire to have a mediator between them and God. They need a man to represent God to them and bring God's Word to them. God gave them Moses, but now Moses will not enter the land with them. So, God will raise up another in his place.
- iii. *The False Prophet raises himself up* – in verse 20. This false prophet speaks presumptuously of his own accord. Meaning, he says he represents God, or even another god, but in reality, he is representing himself. The words he says are from himself, not from God.
- iv. *The True Prophet speaks for God (16-18)* – connected to the prophet's source is the prophet's message. The true prophet speaks for God. God will put his words into the prophet's mouth in verse 18 and he will speak faithfully what God says.
- v. *The False Prophet doesn't speak for God (20)* – this presumptuous false prophet simply does not have the words of God in his mouth. He speaks it in the name of God, but the words he speaks are not words that God has commanded him to speak.
- vi. *The True Prophet speaks all that God commands (18b)* – his message is the total message that God gives. He doesn't hold anything back. He is faithful to bring to God's people all that God has commanded him to speak.
- vii. *The False Prophet speaks a word in God's name (20a)* – the false prophet doesn't even have a message from the Lord, but what he does claim to speak for God it is a word only. Meaning that this is a partial message so as to trick and deceive. It is partially true or partially honoring to the Lord, but overall it is an abomination of deceit.
- viii. *The True Prophet's message holds people accountable (19)* – because the true prophet represents God and speaks for God, God will hold the hearers accountable for what they have heard. This is not child's play where words can be many and consequences few. No, these words will not fall on the ground. God means what he says and says what he means. And the hearers will be held accountable for all of it.
- ix. *The False Prophet will be held accountable for his words (20c)* – this false prophet shall die because he has spoken presumptuously for the Lord. He has presumed that he can play with God's Word. He has presumed that he can manipulate God to his own advantage. He has presumed that he can be over God in authority and use God's name and God's honor to make a name for himself. God will require that of him – he will die.
- x. *The True Prophet is proven true (21-22)* – the test for the true prophet will be whether or not his message comes true. If he is really speaking for God, then what he has said will indeed come true!

- xi. *The False Prophet is proven false (21-22)* – his message will fall to the ground. He will prophesy bold and great predictions of peace and success – because that is what people want to hear – and it will fall flat. His words will prove his character. Out of the abundance of his corrupt heart he will speak corrupt words which will prove false in the end.
- c. With this contrast between the true and the false then, Moses expects the people to be discerning. He expects them to understand the promise of God to raise up a true prophet. And he expects them to listen to his message and obey it, just like they would if it was Moses. And he tells them that these false prophets are going to come with messages contrary to the Lord's clear Word. So many will rise up and presume to speak for God. And when they do, they will speak happy messages of human success and accomplishment.
- d. Do you remember the false prophets in 2 Chronicles 18? They were telling Ahab that they had consulted with the Lord and that the Lord was guaranteeing Ahab's success in battle. Or how about the prophets in Jeremiah's day? He says in 14:13-14:
 - i. Then I said: "Ah, Lord GOD, behold, the prophets say to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.' " And the LORD said to me: "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds.
- e. This was completely counter to the message of judgment that was coming from Jeremiah's own mouth. And it was counter because who wants to hear a message of judgment from the Lord. It is much more soothing to the conscience to be told that God is happy with you and will bring you success and peace. But it is Jeremiah's prophecy which was in line with God's former revelation. And that is how true prophets always work. They don't bring radically new messages, but they unfold another layer of the message already spoken by God. So, Jeremiah was simply speaking for God about the coming curses upon God's people which had been prophesied way back in the book of Deuteronomy, some 900 years before. He was unfolding another layer of God's truth and of God's timing. A true prophet is true to the Heavenly king, not the earthly one. And therefore, he is to be feared.
- f. At the end of this section it closes with two characters – the disobedient listener and the presumptuous prophet. The disobedient listener refuses what God has said, and the presumptuous prophet proclaims what God has not said. And they create a poisonous duo. They feed into one another. The disobedient listener needs the false message of the presumptuous prophet. And the presumptuous prophet needs the ear of the disobedient listener. The first is susceptible to the deceit of the second, and the deceit of the second is dependent upon the hard-heartedness of the first. And this is why God's people throughout history have been so susceptible to false teaching and to false prophets proclaiming to represent God – because they are not hearing and heeding the Word from God

which is already proven true. Those who listen and obey are those who are protected from what is false.

Conclusion: But there is one point about this coming true prophet that we haven't covered yet. In verse 15, Moses says that this prophet will be like him. Notice that this is a singular prophet, which makes you wonder about the identity of this coming prophet. Certainly, after Moses there were many prophets who truly spoke for God along the way. But there is something unique here in this promise. What does it mean that this prophet would be like Moses?

- In Numbers 12, we read of how Miriam and Aaron raise a challenge against the leadership of Moses and basically say – why does he get to call all the shots – we can speak for God too you know! But God calls for a powwow in the Tent of Meeting with the three of them, and among other things says this:
 - Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. ⁷Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. ⁸With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”
 - So, Moses is a one of a kind prophet. He sees the form of God and God speaks to him directly and he is faithful in every way.
- And just think of how this had played out for Moses with the people. Moses came down to Egypt in obedience to the calling of God. And he spoke a message of deliverance from slavery by the powerful hand of God. No one believed him until the plagues started happening. And then he told them that there was one final plague coming of great judgment, but they could be protected from that if they would sacrifice a lamb without spot or blemish and put its blood on their doors. And after the death angel swept through the land and passed over the Israelites who were covered by the blood of the lamb, then Moses led the people out of slavery and bondage. And he led represented God to them at Mt. Horeb and he cut a covenant between God and them in which they became God's people and God became their God. They were now God's kingdom on Earth. And through Moses God spoke the Law that would govern them as His kingdom on earth.
- No other prophet had this privilege, and in fact, the book of Deuteronomy ends with that sentiment. Flip over with me to the end of the book of Deuteronomy – chapter 34. The book closes its message with this cliffhanger statement in verses 10-12.
- In light of the promise of 18:15, this cliffhanger statement leaves you wondering – who will this prophet be? When will God raise up another like Moses? That was on the Israelites' minds in the First Century. When John the Baptist appeared on the scene after 400 years of silence from the prophets of God – they asked him – are you the Prophet? Not, are you a prophet – they knew he was a prophet. What they wanted to know was – are you the prophet who will come like Moses? John says he is not, but that this prophet is coming after him. As Jesus shows up on the scene and begins to speak authoritatively as no one else ever has – the people quickly pick up on the fact that this man must be the

Prophet who will be as unique as Moses was. In fact, Jesus will say in John 5:46 that Moses wrote of him, so if you believe in Moses' writing then you should believe in Jesus.

- And Jesus came in the uniqueness of Moses, but he was so much greater. He was raised up by the Lord God. And he only spoke that which His Father gave Him to speak. He declared the whole message of God to the people of God. And it was in line with previous prophecies, not something completely new and off the wall. And it was a message of coming judgment, sacrifice, salvation, and a new covenant for his people. He prophesied of judgment that would come upon every human soul. And he told them that he was the lamb who was spotless and without blemish. He would shed his blood for the remission of sins. He would offer himself as the Great High Priest so that our atonement could be secured before the all-righteous God. And by the offering of his own body he cut a new covenant with his blood. He created a new kingdom which was not ultimately of this world. He represented the Heavenly Kingdom, and by his death he made our entrance into that Kingdom possible. And by His resurrection from the dead and by his ascension into Heaven he has proven that His word is true. His prophecies about himself have come true just as He said. He is the prophet prophesied by Moses. He has come once to secure our salvation, and he is coming again to bring universal judgment and the fullness of His Kingdom to Earth. Are you ready? Have you heard His Words? Have you believed Him and been saved by Him?
- I hope you have noticed that all of the offices of leadership promised in Deuteronomy 17-18 are finally fulfilled in Christ Jesus our Lord. He is the all-righteous Judge who will one day judge the living and the dead. He is the King of kings who rules over all and who will one day return to visibly rule and reign in this world. He is the great High Priest who represents God to us and us to God and who has offered the atoning sacrifice of His own flesh to secure the forgiveness of our sins. And he is the True and great Prophet whose words must be heard and obeyed!