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Deuteronomy 18:9-22 “Seek Christ, Not the Occult”

Intro. We all face problems and major decisions in life and wonder what we should do. We all wonder what the future holds. In such situations who do you turn to for answers? In our text of Scripture we will see who we should *not* turn to and we will see who we should turn to for answers.

As the people prepared to enter the Promised Land, they knew that Moses would not be coming with them. Joshua was ready to take over as their leader, but there was no indication that he would be a prophet like Moses. All Joshua could do was remind the people of the words of the law and the words of Moses. Nor did the office of priest have a prophetic role. So in the vacuum created by the death of Moses, God promised that he would raise up other prophets like Moses in the future. These prophets would call the people back to God, rebuke the words of false prophets, and help God’s people as they faced new situations.

We, too, need help and guidance as we face the difficulties of life. As we do so, I want us to look into our text of Scripture for guidance as to what we should do. First of all,

I. DON’T SEEK HELP AND GUIDANCE FROM THE OCCULT

After describing occult practices, Moses says in the last of v.14, “the LORD your God has not appointed such for you.” So just in time for Halloween week, and think it is fitting to share God’s Word on the subject. Note first:

A. Examples of the Occult to Avoid – In vv.10-11 Moses gives nine different examples of the occultic practices that we are to avoid as believers. This is probably the most inclusive list of the occult found in Scripture. The practices in this list are all intended to manipulate deities, supernatural forces, and the spirits of the deceased to act in the worshiper’s favor in some way, including the revealing of otherwise unknown information. This list is not exhaustive, but it gives us an idea of the kind of occultic practices we should avoid:

1. Child Sacrifice - Moses says in v.10, “There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire,....” In 2 Kings 17:17 & 21:6 this evil practice was also associated with witchcraft and soothsaying. Exactly how human sacrifice entered into the realm of divination is not at all clear. Perhaps it was a drastic attempt to manipulate the deity to gain help or to reveal what the worshiper wanted to know. Regardless, this places occultic practices in the same category as idolatry.

2. Witchcraft/Divination – This may be the most general term for the type of activity we see here.

3. A Soothsayer – The Hebrew word literally refers to “those who cause to appear.” They were diviners whose specialty lay in their ability to create apparitions (cf. Judg 9:36-37), including dead people. Lev. 19:26 directly states, “nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying [same word].” God’s people should obey that command.

4. Interpreting Omens – They divined through the use of certain revelatory objects or devices such as a cup (cf. Gen 44:5) or crystal ball or through the actions or words of others (1 Kings 20:32-33).

5. Sorcery – This word was used of the magicians of Egypt who did signs and miracles before Pharaoh (Ex. 7:11). It may correspond to what is known as black magic.

6. Conjuring Spells – The “spell caster” was literally, “the binder with a band.” He or she was thought capable of invoking powerful curses that would bring their intended targets under their control (cf. Isa 47:9). This is also referred to in Ps. 58:5, “Which will not heed the voice of charmers, Charming ever so skillfully.”

7. A Medium – This was one who sought to communicate with the dead and thereby gain secret information. 1 Chron. 10:13 said of King Saul that he died for his unfaithfulness “because he did not keep the word of the LORD, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance.” Indeed, the best known such practitioner in the Old Testament was the witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28:3, 8-9; cf. Isa 8:19).

8. A Spiritist – The Hebrew word is based on the word that meant “to know.” This is similar to a medium, for this word is associated with mediums about a dozen times in Scripture. It is someone who seeks to communicate with the so-called ghosts of the spirit world.

9. Calling Up the Dead – This is yet another general term for necromancy, similar in meaning to a medium or spiritist (cf. Isa 8:19; 11:10; 19:3). All three terms refer to those who seek special knowledge and information from the spirits of the dead.

In light of this Scripture, I believe Christians have no business seeking the help or guidance of anyone involved in such practices. What is more difficult to determine is whether Christians should participate in activities that simply portray such activities as make-believe.

B. Don't Seek Them Just Because Others Do - Moses says in v.9, “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.”

This is a basic principle that Christians need to follow today. Sometimes it seems like Christians and churches are more interested in following the world than following the teachings of Scripture.

C. Reasons You Should Avoid the Occult:

1. They Are an Abomination to God - Moses says in v.12, “For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD...” The word translated “abomination” is a strong word. It refers to something that is disgusting or detestable.¹ It is something that is so disliked that it causes an emotional reaction. For example, this word is found in Jer. 44:4, where God says, “Oh, do not do this abominable thing that I hate!” Why is it an abomination? It takes people away from the living and true God.

2. Occult Practices Invite God's Judgment - Moses says in the last of v.12, “because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you.” These nations in the land were judged and would be removed from the land because of this very thing. Since that is the case, why should Israel imitate the nations in the very deeds that led to their destruction?

Dabbling in the occult is not just a concern for the days of the Old Testament. The apostle Paul listed “witchcraft” as one of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:20. He warned in 1 Tim. 4:1 “that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.” I find it interesting that the most that is said about occultic activity is in the book of Revelation, which is a prophecy of the end times (see Rev. 9:20-21; 18:23; 21:8,

¹ Other examples of this word include 7:25-26; 12:31; 13:14; 14:3; 17:1, 4.

etc.). There is quite a bit of occultic activity today, all the way from Satan worship to astrology. There are advertisements for fortune tellers and others of like mind even on TV. We are not to have anything to do with the actual practices of the occult.

In addition to not giving heed to those who practice various forms of the occult, Moses says:

II. DON'T GIVE HEED TO FALSE PROPHETS

Don't go after them seeking guidance or help. Satan is the great counterfeiter. Whatever God does, he offers a counterfeit. Always remember that.

How can you recognize a false prophet? In fact, Moses anticipates this question when he says in v.21, "How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?" After all, just because someone claims to be a prophet of God does not make it so. Likewise, the apostle John warned in 1 John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." There are several characteristics of a false prophet given in our text:

A. The Signs of a False Prophet

1. They Are Self-Appointed – In v.20 Moses speaks of "the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak...." The word translated "presumes" is a word that conveys the idea of pride, someone who lifts himself up as a prophet of God when God has not called him or appointed him or her.

2. Some of Their Prophecies Fail - Moses says in v.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." One sign of a false prophet is they make at least some predictions that do not come to pass. Any inaccuracy at all would immediately disqualify them as a true prophet of God. God alone can predict the future with 100% accuracy, and then transmit such information to His prophets. It was said of the prophet Samuel in 1 Sam. 3:19, "the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground."

There have been many false prophets through the years who have predicted the date for the Second Coming of Christ and have been proven wrong. Their followers should have immediately stopped listening to them!

Another sign of a false prophet is they tend to tell people what they want to hear. There are several examples of false prophets in the Old Testament who prophesied peace even though the true prophets prophesied of the judgment of war.

So learn to recognize the characteristics of the false prophet, and when you discover one, stop listening to him or her!

B. The Response to a False Prophet - Moses says in the last of v.22, "you shall not be afraid of him." Nor should we be afraid of those who practice the occult. Num. 23:23 says, "there is no sorcery against Jacob, Nor any divination against Israel." That was spoken by Balaam, who practice divination!

Even so, we should not fear their threats of judgment for not following them. 1 John 4:4 says, "... greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (KJV). No one can curse the one God has promised to bless!

III. GIVE HEED TO GOD'S PROPHETS

In Isa. 8:19 God said, "And when they say to you, 'Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,' should not a people seek their God?" One of the primary ways they were to seek a Word from God was through His prophets. Moses spoke of the prophet in the singular in vv.15 & 18, not because it was a strictly messianic prophecy, because God would typically raise up one prophet at a time for His people. According to 1 Cor. 12:28-29 and Eph. 4:11-12, God also raised up prophets during the time the New Testament was being written.

A. The Role of a Prophet – When Moses explained why God would raise up prophets among them, he said in v.16 that he would do so "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.'" The people's previous experience with hearing the voice of God directly was very fearful. What was needed was a mediator who could approach God for them and who then could transmit the divine revelation to them. So they wanted someone to speak on God's behalf. That's exactly what a prophet does.

Because the Lord promises to provide Israel with prophets, there is no need to resort to divination, magic, and necromancy.

B. The Characteristics of a True Prophet -

1. They Rise from Within the People of God - Moses says in v.15 that God would "raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren." Likewise, he says in v.18 that the prophet would be raised up "from among their brethren..." Thus, there would be no necessity for Israel to turn to heathen soothsayers or prophets.

2. They Speak Only God's Word - God says in the last of v.18 that, "I... will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him." In Jer. 1:9 God even said to Jeremiah, "Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth." Thus, they will speak with authority, saying, "Thus says the Lord..." The word that he preaches is not his own but a message revealed by God himself. I can also say that a true prophet will never speak contrary to the Word of God in Scripture. They would reaffirm the truths of Scriptures, give new revelations, and apply previous revelations to new situations.

Today, instead of seeking guidance the occult, or from false prophets, we are to seek guidance from the Word of God and from the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14) as we seek the Lord in prayer. The written Word was intended to replace the presence (and need) of the prophet (Dt. 31:26-27).

By the way, nothing is said here about signs and wonders as a sign of a true prophet. That's because false prophets are able to do such things as well. God had already warned about that in chapter 13 (vv.1-5). Though God's prophets may do signs to authenticate their message (Ex. 4:1-9, etc.), the most important sign of a true prophet is their conformity to the Word of God, and their faithfulness to follow God.

C. The Response We Should Give to God's Prophet - God says in v.19, "And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him."

We do not have prophets today. What we have are the words of the prophets faithfully recorded in Scripture. Instead of prophets who are still receiving new revelation from God, we are to give heed to God-called ministers who faithfully preach and teach the Word of God.

IV. GIVE HEED TO THE GREATEST PROPHET

Though this prophecy of Moses was fulfilled each time God raised up a prophet in Israel, the ultimate fulfillment is Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...." He has nothing more to say to the world than He has said in Jesus Christ.

This passage of Scripture is referred to or quoted at least eight times in the New Testament. In John 1:45 Philip said to Nathanael, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." The apostle Peter referred to this prophecy in his sermon found in Acts 3. He said in vv.22-23, "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.'" Stephen referred to this prophecy in Acts 7:37 shortly before he was martyred. Though some of the contemporaries of Jesus believed John the Baptist was the prophet Moses spoke of (John 1:21), others believed that Jesus was that prophet (Mark 6:15; John 7:40). In fact, after hearing Him preach and seeing His miracles, they said in John 6:14, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." Even the Lord applied this prophecy to Himself in John 5:46, when He said to the Jews, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me." Even the Samaritans founded their expectation of the Messiah (John 4:25) upon these words of Moses.

Was Jesus the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy? Indeed so because he fulfilled the prophecy in every detail. 1) He was like Moses, as predicted in vv.15, 18. He was a mediator between God and man like Moses. He had special access to the Lord like Moses. As the Son of God He had even greater access! 2) He arose from among the people of Israel. 3) He only spoke the words that His Heavenly Father gave unto to Him. Jesus said in Jn. 8:28, "...as My Father taught Me, I speak these things." Jesus was probably referring to Dt. 18:18 when He said in John 12:49, "For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak." In John 17:8 He said, "For I have given to them the words which You have given Me...." 4) He even did great miracles like Moses. Yet, the miracles of Jesus were even greater!

Just as God commanded Israel to give heed to each prophet He raised up, even so, at the baptism of Jesus we read in Mt. 17:5 that a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" We are to take very seriously the words of God's prophets especially the greatest prophet Jesus Christ.

Let me give a few statements of Jesus that you should be sure to give heed to. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Do you believe Jesus? Have you come to him in faith? Jesus also said in Mt. 16:26, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"

2019; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Eugene H. Merrill, *New American Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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