

November 18, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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LISTEN TO THE PROPHETS Deuteronomy 18:9-22

You live in the information age. Be assured that there is more information at your fingertips than you could possibly access, comprehend, or use. For example, there is an estimated 3 trillion terabytes of information on the internet (though it is nearly impossible to guess the amount accurately). One terabyte of information would be equivalent to about 30,720 feet of books on shelves. That means that all of the information available on the internet would be equivalent to around ninety-nine quadrillion feet of book shelves. Suffice it to say there is a lot of information out there.

Also, the average person speaks about 7,000 words per day. At the same time, the average person hears over 30,000 words spoken per day. What are all those people saying to you? Do you care? Do you ever feel like saying to your world, “Just be quiet!” It does seem as though all the chatter and information becomes like so much white noise to us. The result being that we don’t pay attention to the information we should pay attention to.

At times I think I would have liked to live around Jacob because the Bible says that he was a quiet man (Genesis 25:27). It is also true that a favorite command of Scripture for me is, *Be still, and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10)*. It probably is a good idea for us to follow Solomon’s advice, *The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools (Ecclesiastes 9:17)*.

Having said all that, a very important principle from Moses’s speech is that God’s people need to listen to preachers and be discerning. Giving instruction for maintaining a righteous society in the Promised Land, Moses has taught about the people’s right responses to judges and kings (17:1-20) and Levites and priests (18:1-

8). In our text for this evening, Moses taught the people how to relate to the prophets or the preachers in their society.

It was true then as it is still true in our day, that there are preachers of righteousness and there are preachers of falsehood. The people needed to listen, to pay attention, and to make right judgments about the preachers lest they be led into rebellion against God. That principle has not changed for God’s people. We still need to listen to what preachers say and either reject them out of hand or follow their teaching. This text will teach us the principles behind correct response.

Listen to Identify False Prophets (vv.9-14; 20-22).

Some prophets are obviously opposed to God (vv.9-14). Therefore, God’s instruction for His people established that certain practices for ascertaining God’s will are prohibited (vv.9-11). The root problem was the influence of the people who practiced abominable things and were living in the land that God was about to give to His people. God’s people needed to be aware of the pagan, rebellious influence and be ready to deal with it.

Moses warned the people, *When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations (v.9)*. The inhabitants of the land served many different kinds of imaginary gods. God forbid His people to learn the native religious practices. Those pagans attempted to determine the will of their gods through wicked practices. Or at other times by these practices the pagans tried to please their manmade gods.

God’s instruction made it clear that such wicked practices were out of bounds for His people. He required, *There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a wizard or a necromancer (vv.10-11)*. God forbid His people to copy the pagan practice of making their children pass through the fire. We cannot say exactly what that entailed, but it a practice mentioned nine other times in the Old Testament, which indicates it was fairly well known in that day.

Three times the practice of forcing children through the fire is mentioned in connection with the Ammonite god Molech. It seems that the practice connected with Molech required parents to appease the god by offering their child as a sacrifice in his fire. That would be tantamount to the American practice of abortion. Other cases indicate that this was some strange rite of having children walk on hot coals or walk through fire. Whatever it was, it was forbidden.

Also forbidden to God's people were the *practices of divination, fortune tellers, interpreters of omens, or a sorcerer (v.10)*. Those practices included a broad array of attempts to discern a false god's will. So did things like being a *charmer or a medium or a wizard or a necromancer (v.11)*. All of those things refer to people who made apparitions appear or communicated with the dead or the spirit world. The equivalents in our culture would be the Ouija board, tarot cards, reading palms and tea leaves, or astrology which are all attempts to determine the secrets of the future. They are still out of bounds for God's people.

The reason for the warning is because such abominable practices bring God's disfavor (vv.12-14). Disfavor might be too weak of a word. Moses promised that God destroys the abominable people. *For whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you (v.12)*.

God's people were the recipients of God's loving care and favor. That is a stark contrast to people who God abhors. An abomination is something abhorrent, something repugnant and to be rejected. Not only is false worship, worship of make-believe gods or ideas repugnant to God, but notice that the people who do that stuff are an abomination to God. God promised to drive out, discomfit, destroy the people who were occupying the Promised Land because THEY were repugnant to Him. Try using that for evidence of why Israel has a right to occupy the piece of property God gave to them.

And in the process of driving out the abhorrent people, God promised that His instruments of destruction (Israel) would be blameless when they do God's will. *You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this (vv.13-14)*.

Isn't it true that because God's people don't live like pagans, they are automatically branded as troublemakers. The pagans do blame them, do hold them accountable. Like Ahab the idolater who blamed Elijah the preacher of truth for the drought that harmed his kingdom. And still the person who avoids rebellion against God and encourages sinners to repent and be reconciled to God are not appreciated. But God who authors the confrontation holds His faithful people blameless.

In very practical ways, the preacher of truth will be used by God to "drive out" sin. That is how they are perceived. Think about the words used in the challenge for Christians to do God's work of confronting sin with His truth. *For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete (2 Corinthians 10:4-6)*. Or Paul's instruction to Pastor Timothy: *Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2 Timothy 4:2)*. Or Paul's instruction to Pastor Titus: *Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you (Titus 2:15)*. Though the recipients of such rebuke, correction, and exhortation don't like it, the preachers of righteousness who drive out sin are not troublemakers.

More directly applied to the Israelites was Moses's warning that some prophets appear to speak for God, but do not (vv.20-22). *But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die (v.20)*.

The problem was the prophet, the messenger who presumed to speak for God. That was to claim to be authorized by God, but in reality to speak on personal authority alone. The Old Testament has many examples of prophets or preachers who claimed to speak or reveal God's will, like the false prophets who encouraged Jehoshaphat to be allied with Ahab to go to war. But those preachers were of their father the Devil who is the father of lies.

The instruction in this section of Moses's speech appears to be God's rule for prophets among God's people who claimed to speak

for God when God did not speak to them. According to the rule, the presumptuous prophet brought the sentence of death on his own head.

How did the people know whom to kill? Moses revealed that there is a way to identify these false prophets. Most obvious would be the fact that the activity or event promised does not come to pass. *And if you say in your heart, "How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?" – when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him (vv.21-22).*

Maybe the most confusing part is that the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD. Multitudes of heretics, false teachers, preachers of cults have presented themselves as speaking in the name of the LORD. They imply that they have God's permission, they speak God's word. More precisely, he or she did not speak the word that the LORD has spoken: *that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously (v.22b)*. To speak apart from God's authoritative message is to speak presumptuously.

Therefore, we should be able to listen to a sermon and determine if the preacher is speaking of his own authority or speaking of God's authority by conveying God's word. Many times someone has told me to listen to a particular preacher or a particular sermon because the man preaches the word of God. So many times I have been disappointed to hear a man speak very persuasively about human ideas, fleshly feelings, popular trends, personal opinions and preferences, and generally how to make people happy, which makes your church grow. That is the problem. It is not YOUR church and YOU can't make the true Church grow. That's Jesus's job according to His word.

So, too, modern prophets are often guilty of reading a verse of Scripture and then talking very convincingly for 30-40 minutes about current events, or their specific concern about certain matters. That is not preaching God's word!

Preaching God's word requires that we open the Bible, read the Bible, identify what the Bible says, explain what the Bible means, and apply that Bible truth to our lives. That and only that is preaching God's word.

By way of brief application, let's consider how we modern people of God identify false prophets. Most simply we must measure their message with the Bible. This requires us to be very familiar with the Bible. We need to learn how to use Scripture to interpret Scripture. Knowing the Bible, we should be able to ascertain if, at the very least, the principle taught is rooted in, validated by Scripture.

We experienced a good example of this process a week ago Wednesday when I read an article from a blogger who is widely popular with young evangelical professing Christians. I pointed out that many of the things he penned were helpful for building human relationships. However, at the same time, I pointed out why the man's advice was dangerous because it was unbiblical. How so?

This is where we measure the message with the Bible. In this blogger's case, there were three clarifying points to consider. The man's advice about how to build the Church was in conflict with Scripture. Jesus promised that He will build His Church. Jesus's Church is made up of people regenerated through the Holy Spirit in salvation. Anyone devoid of that miracle is outside the Church. The unregenerated sinner can attend a service, observe the work of God, but is not part of the Church.

Second, the man's recommended model for growing churches is in conflict with Scripture. His model was the Charismatic churches. That movement is and always has been heretical because it teaches salvation gained and maintained by human works.

Third, and most obvious, was the fact that the man failed to cite or even vaguely refer to a Scriptural basis for his conclusions. No Bible in the message is a pretty clear sign that it does not have God's authority.

Listen to Obey God's Prophet (vv.15-19).

While God warned through Moses that His people needed to flesh out false preachers, God also promised to raise up the ultimate Prophet (vv.15-16). He promised that the ultimate Prophet will convey God's authority. *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen (v.15).*

We have the joy of being the direct recipients of the Perfect Prophet's message. The Father raised up Jesus Christ through the virgin within the people of Israel, from the tribe of Judah. Jesus spoke the precise word of the Father, but people still refuse to accept it as supreme authority. That is what the Israelites wanted on the day God came down to them and conveyed His Law so spectacularly. Moses reminded the people, *Just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, "Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die" (v.16).*

Jesus fulfilled that position perfectly. He spoke exactly the words of the Father. Moses promised that He would. *And the LORD said to me, "They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him" (vv.17,18).*

When we read the New Testament, we become aware that Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of this Supreme Prophet who spoke the very words of God. The writer to the Hebrew Christians described the fulfillment like this: *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:1-3).*

Furthermore, Moses promised that the Prophet to come would be like himself. How was that fulfilled by Jesus? Moses spoke for God to the people. So did Jesus as He brought the precise word of the Father from heaven. Moses led God's people to the Promised Land. So, too, Jesus is the only way, the only door through which we must pass in order to arrive in His Kingdom, the ultimate Promised Land.

Therefore, to listen to Christ the Prophet is the chief concern. *And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him (v.19).* God has spoken. He has revealed the truth about His character in creation and the conscience.

Primarily God has spoken in His word the Bible. We modern English speaking people, of all people in history, are without excuse for not paying attention to what God has said.

Because God has spoken, we are accountable to God for what we do with His word. *Whoever will not listen to my words . . . I myself will require it of him (v.19).* You make the choice to pay attention or not. God makes the choice of how to deal with you if you will not pay attention.

It remains for us, the people of God, to read God's word, know God's word, apply God's word to life, share God's word with others. Use God's word to measure the preacher's messages in order to distinguish truth from error.

The other day I attempted to find the pins that mark the boundary on the back of our property. It was an awful and futile experience. I had a machete and was hacking through all kinds of brush, and vines, and briars. I couldn't even walk through the junk. And all I wanted to do was find the authoritative markings, the iron pins that declare, "This is the boundary line."

That is how I feel much of the time in the jungle of American religion. We have to hack through so much junk and garbage to flesh out the true boundaries. The word of God, the sword of the Spirit, is the only instrument God has given to us for hacking through the junk.