

LAWS THAT GOVERN THE ADMINISTRATION OF RELIGION: SOME CONCERNS OF BELIEVERS DEUTERONOMY 18:09–22

Introduction

Religion is and always has been one of the dominant forces in the world. Within every major city of the world, some worship centre sits within just a few blocks of its citizens. Moreover, every major city has a host of charismatic personalities claiming the supernatural ability to see into the future and to help people control the events and destiny of their lives. This is the world of the occult. The occult is followed by masses within most nations of the world. With so many religions and different voices of the occult claiming to know the true path of life, how can a person discern who or what is right? Who really knows the truth? Which religion, which voice can really lead us to God and give us a full, victorious life upon this earth? Which voice can honestly point to and prepare us for eternity? Which message can lead us to heaven, to live eternally with God?

These are the concerns of the LORD as well as of man. God wants man to know the truth. For this reason, God gave the present Scripture to help His people discern between true and false religions and true and false voices in the world. This passage is: *Laws that Govern the Administration of Religion: some Concerns of Believers*, Deut. 18:1-22.

- I. Concern 1: The dedication and support of priests or ministers of God (vv. 1-8).
- II. Concern 2: The detestable practices and ways of the occult world (vv. 9-14).
- III. Concern 3: A permanent prophet to replace Moses (a prediction of Christ) (vv. 15-19).
- IV. Concern 4: False prophets (vv. 20-22).

I. *Deuteronomy 18:09–14 The Practices and Ways of the Occult World*

The second concern is the world of occult — the detestable practices and ways of the occult world. People want a full and satisfying life. Because of this, people seek to know their destiny, future events that might affect their lives. If they can know future events, they feel they might be able to manipulate or change the future so as to have a better life. The world of the occult claims to have insight into the future and into the destiny of people. Because of their claims, people by the millions turn to the world of the occult, seeking to control their lives and their future. As the Israelites entered the promised land, there was the danger that they would adopt the occult practices of the Canaanites. To prevent this, God established this law against the world of the occult:

1. Moses declared the law: you must not follow the detestable practices of the occult world (vv. 9-11).
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- a. There was the occult practice of child sacrifice (v. 10). A child was sacrificed in order to secure the favour of some false god or to seek the revelation of some future event. (Peter C Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*).
 - b. There was the occult practice of divination or fortune-telling (v. 10). This was an attempt to foresee or foretell future events or to discover some hidden knowledge.
 - c. There was the occult practice of sorcery which was the attempt to learn or control future events by the power of evil spirits (v. 10).
 - d. There was the occult practice of interpreting omens (v. 10). This was the attempt to tell future events based upon signs such as fire, rain or the movement of birds. (John Maxwell. *The Preacher's Commentary on Deuteronomy*, p. 229).
 - e. There was the occult practice of witchcraft (v. 10). This was an attempt to influence people or events through sorcery or magic. This they do by using some supernatural method or by consulting the devil or some familiar spirit.
 - f. There was the occult practice of casting spells upon people (v. 11). A person who casts spells is literally "one who ties others in knots." The idea is that of binding other people by magical utterings. (Ibid., p. 230).
 - g. There was the occult practice of a medium (v. 11). This is a person who seeks to communicate with the dead or the world of spirits and actually ends up communicating with evil spirits.
 - h. There was the occult practice of a spiritist or psychic (v. 11). This was a person who claimed to be sensitive to supernatural forces and influences; a person who claimed to know the forces and events that would affect a person's future.
 - i. There was the occult practice of consulting the dead (v. 11). In some cases, this person claimed to be able to predict future events by communicating with the dead.
2. Moses strongly warned the people: these things make a person detestable in the sight of God. The person who practices these things will arouse the judgment of God, and God's judgment will fall upon him. This was the very reason God's judgment was falling upon the Canaanites. The Canaanites were being destroyed and expelled from their land because they had become consumed with the terrible evil of the occult world.

God's people must never allow this to happen to them. They must reject the practices of the occult world. They must never participate nor engage in any practice of the occult.

Thought 1. Psychics, fortune-tellers, palm-readers, sorcerers, diviners, self-proclaimed prophets of new-age movements or of the zodiac — the whole world of the occult — have all been sought by people down through the centuries of human history. People want to know their destiny, what the future holds. They want the blessings of the gods that be, or else they want some enemy cursed. They want only good things to happen to them, not bad things. They want good experiences, not bad

experiences. They want plenty, not the bare necessities. They want more, not less. They want acceptance, not rejection. They want to be highly esteemed, not put down. They want position and power, not servitude and enslavement.

For these reasons, and for so many more, people seek the leaders of the occult. They seek the help of any person who claims to have the power of astrology, the power to read the stars, the zodiac or any other medium. If a person claims to have the answer to the future or to people's problems, they flock to him. But Scripture is clear: the world of the occult is a world of sin and evil. Man is to have nothing — absolutely nothing — to do with the world of the occult.

***Acts 16:16-19** Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her. When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.*

***Gal 5:19-21** The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

***Rev 21:8** But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.*

***Deut 18:9-13** When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD; because of these same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God.*

***2 Kng 17:17** They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sought omens and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger.*

***2 Kng 21:6** He [king Manasseh] sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger.*

Isa 47:9 Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells.

Micah 5:12 I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast spells.

Zec 10:2 The idols speak deceitfully, diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd.

Mal 3:15 But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it.

III. Deuteronomy 18:15–19 A Permanent Prophet to Replace Moses — Prediction of Christ

The third — concern is that of a permanent prophet to replace Moses. Moses was old, very old, and he was soon to pass off the scene. What were the Israelites to do once he was gone? Who was going to stand as a prophet before them to proclaim the will of God? Who was going to keep them on the straight and narrow path of holiness? Who was going to protect them from the world of the occult and from the other evils of this world? Who was going to warn them and call them back when they began to go astray? Who was going to stand before them as the spokesman for God, declaring the Word of God? Standing there preaching to the Israelites, Moses answers these questions, and in so doing, he makes an astounding prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ:

1. Moses assured the people that God would raise up a special prophet from among their own brothers. Once he appeared, the people must listen to him (v. 15).
2. The work of the special Prophet was to be threefold:
 - a. The prophet was to be the mediator between the people and God (v. 16). Moses reminded the people that this was exactly what they had requested at Mt. Sinai. When they heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire proclaiming the Ten Commandments, they were stricken with terror. They shrunk back from the mountain, fearing the holiness of God, and begged Moses to stand as mediator between them and God. They begged Moses to approach God on their behalf, receiving the Word of God and then proclaiming His Word to them. Thus Moses was not only God's mediator to the people, he was also God's prophet to the people.
 - b. Moses reminded the people that God agreed with their request. It was His will for Moses to be their mediator and prophet (v. 17).
 - c. Moses then declared that God made a wonderful promise to the people: He would raise up a prophet just like Moses from among the Israelites (v. 18). That prophet would be the spokesman for God, declaring the Word of God.

3. But note: after making the wonderful promise. God had Moses issue a strong warning to the people (v. 19). A person must heed the words of the prophet or else face the judgment of God.

Now note: this passage obviously has a double reference. God was promising a permanent line of prophets who would be His spokesmen to declare the Word of God to His people. But He was also promising a very special Prophet who would be the pre-eminent spokesman for God. This Prophet would be the Divine Communicator in revealing God and His will to the people. Note nine facts:

- a. The great *Pulpit Commentary* says this: “The use of the singular here is remarkable, for nowhere else is the singular, *nabhi*, employed to designate more than one individual.” (*The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 3. p. 304)
- b. This passage continues God’s wonderful promise of the “promised seed” that was first given to Adam and Eve, and through them to all believers down through the centuries.

Gen 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (see notes, Gen 3:15).

Gen 12:3 “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (see notes, Gen 12:1-3).

Gen 22:18 And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.

Gal 3:8 Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”

Gal 3:16 The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ.

- c. In the days of Christ, the religious leaders were still looking for the fulfilment of this prophecy, and John the Baptist said that he was not the promised Prophet.

John 1:21, 25 They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No.”... They questioned him, “Why then do you baptise if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

- d. Philip, one of the twelve apostles, declared that Jesus Christ was the promised Prophet.

John 1:45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

- e. The people thought that Jesus was the Prophet promised by God.

John 6:14 After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

John 7:40 *On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."*

- f. Jesus Christ Himself was obviously claiming that He was the Prophet Moses predicted.

John 5:46 *"If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me."*

- g. Jesus Christ claimed to fulfil the requirements of the promised Prophet.

John 12:49-50 *"For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."*

- h. Peter declared that Jesus Christ was the Prophet predicted by Moses.

Acts 3:22-24 *For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.' "Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days."*

- i. Stephen, at his execution trial, boldly proclaimed that Jesus Christ was the promised Prophet.

Acts 7:37 *This is the Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.'*

IV. Deuteronomy 18:20–22 False Prophets

The fourth concern is that of false prophets. How does a person tell whether a prophet is true or false? Whether or not what he preaches or predicts is of God? This was of great concern to God; therefore, He led Moses to establish a very clear law to help the people discern between true and false prophets.

1. The law was a strong warning to all false prophets (v. 20). Two acts will clearly identify a false prophet:

=> proclaiming a message other than God's Word or commandments

=> speaking in the name of another god

Note the seriousness of this crime in God's eyes. The false prophet was to be executed.

2. But how could a person tell if a message was really of God? By the outcome of the message or prophecy (v. 21): Did it come true? J. Vernon McGee gives an excellent statement and illustration on this passage that enables the reader to see just how the test of prophets was applied:

Let us take time to look at this for a moment. Isaiah is a prophet of God, a true prophet of God. How do we know? He prophesied that a virgin would conceive and bring forth a son. He clearly marked out the coming of the LORD Jesus, His birth, His life, His death [Isa 7:14; 53:1f]. Suppose someone had asked Isaiah when all this would take place. He would have answered that he was not quite sure but that it could be hundreds of years. (Actually, it was seven hundred years.) Well, that crowd

would laugh and say they would never be around to know whether he was telling the truth or not. The test of the prophets was that they had to give a prediction about a local situation that would come to pass right away, and they had to be completely accurate. They couldn't miss on any point of their predictions. Any inaccuracy at all would immediately disqualify them as a true prophet of God.

Now let us look at Isaiah again. He prophesied the virgin birth, and we today can look back 1900 years to the fulfilment of that and know that he was accurate. But how could the people in his day know that? They could know because Isaiah went to the king, Hezekiah, with a prophecy concerning a local current event. There was a great Assyrian army of trigger-happy soldiers surrounding the city, but Isaiah said that not one arrow would enter the city. Those Assyrians had conquered other nations and they were there to conquer Jerusalem and to carry Israel into captivity. Isaiah told them what God had said about it:

Isa 37:33-34 “Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria: “He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it. By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city,” declares the LORD.

All of the Assyrian army had bows and arrows. You'd think that just one of them might let an arrow fly over the wall just to see if he could hit someone. Now if one arrow was shot into the city, Isaiah would lose his job as a true prophet of God. He would be out of business. That was one of the tests which Isaiah passed. There were others where Isaiah spoke to a local situation, and it came to pass just as he had said. The true prophet had to be correct 100 percent of the time. (J Vermon McGee. *Thru the Bible*, Vol. pp. 579-580).

3. The charge against the false prophet is a strong indictment and warning (v. 22): what he says is his own man-made message. His message is not the message of God, not the Word of God. The false prophet is not to be feared. What he predicts — whether encouraging or threatening predictions — will not come true.

Thought 1. False prophets and teachers are everywhere, both inside and outside the church. There are many charismatic, attractive personalities with fluent, soothing messages that appeal to human nature, to the desires of our flesh. But there is only one true message from God Himself, the message of His Holy Word. God loves us, cares so much for us that He would never leave us in the dark, grasping about seeking the truth of life and death. This is the reason He sent Christ into the world and gave us the Word of God, to reveal the truth to us. Any other message is false. Any person who preaches or teaches another message is a false prophet or teacher. Note how strongly Scripture proclaims this:

Mat 5:19 “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Mat 7:15-20 *“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn-bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”*

Mat 24:11 *“And many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.”*

Mark 13:22 *“For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”*

Gal 1:6-9 *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!*

1 Thes 2:3-8 *For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*

1 Tim 1:7 *They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.*

1 Tim 4:2 *Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.*

1 Tim 6:3-5 *If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.*

2 Tim 4:3-4 *For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*

Titus 1:9-11 *He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach — and that for the sake of dishonest gain.*

2 Pet 2:1 *But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves.*

Deut 13:5 *That prophet or dreamer must be put to death for inciting rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. That prophet or dreamer tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.*

Jer 14:14 *Then the LORD said to me, “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds.”*

Jer 23:16 *This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.” ■*