



A Holy Nation (1): Deuteronomy 17, 18  
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## Introduction to Deuteronomy 17, 18

Moses began the book of Deuteronomy by rehearsing the failure of Israel as a *nation* to gain the promises of God. He showed the faithfulness of God to His own Word, as He raised up a new generation of Israelites and began to fulfill His promise to them by the conquests on the east side of the Jordan.

In restating the Ten Commandments, Moses emphasized the responsibility of *individuals* for keeping the Law and passing it along to others. He also showed how the Law should shape the life of the *communities* of Israel, and how God provided through the Law for righteousness and justice to be sustained at the community level.

With chapters 17 and 18 the focus becomes building a holy *nation*. Moses is still speaking to individuals and about their lives in community, but the larger scope now is the nation as a whole. Again we will see to what great lengths God goes to aid His people in keeping covenant with Him.

Susie and I hope you will find this study challenging and enriching for your walk with and work for the Lord.

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T. M. and Susie Moore

## 1 Maintaining Holiness

*Opening Prayer: Psalm 115.1-3*

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,  
But to Your name give glory,  
Because of Your mercy,  
Because of Your truth.  
Why should the Gentiles say,  
“So where *is* their God?”  
But our God *is* in heaven;  
He does whatever He pleases.

*Psalm 115.1-3*

(Plainfield: *Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*)

Not to us, O God, not us, but unto Your Name give glory!  
For Your love and faithfulness, ever to Your Name be glory!  
Why should the nations cry, "Where is their God on high?"  
You rule us, Lord, on high: Ever to Your Name be glory!

*Today's Text: Deuteronomy 17.1-13*

*Preparation*

1. How were difficult matters to be resolved?
2. What instruction did God give to deter the people from acting presumptuously?

*Meditation*

These verses mark a transition from instructions aimed mainly at individual and community life to a focus on the life of the nation. This transition was anticipated in the laws concerning the year of release and the annual feasts. In the next several chapters, the people are led to think of themselves not merely as individuals, but as a nation – holy people in holy communities comprising a holy nation unto the Lord.

After a brief reminder that no defective animals are to be offered to the Lord (v. 1) – just as the people must not tolerate any defects in themselves, their households, or their communities - this transition once again underscores the utterly abominable nature of the practice of idolatry (vv. 2-5). Because idolatry leads people away from God, and thus away from holiness, whoever perpetrates idolatry must be given the consequence of their choice – separation from God and His people by death (v. 5).

But not without due process (vv. 6, 7). Proper witnesses are required for all such acts of judgment, especially those involving idolatry and other capital offenses. Moreover, the possibility of false witnesses entering into a matter is mitigated somewhat by making those who witness the abominable crime take the lead in carrying out the just punishment (v. 7).

Verse 8 makes the turn to nation-thinking. Sometimes, local matters are too hard for the judges to decide. At such times, appeal could be made to the priest, the Levites, and the judge who serves in the city where God's dwelling abides (vv. 8, 9). Together they would hear the case and render a verdict, and their verdict was final (v. 10). Punishment, when required, was to be carried out immediately (vv. 10-13). Justice thorough and swift would deter the people from acting “presumptuously”, that is, in violation of God's Law.

We note that, in 1 Corinthians 5.13, Paul quoted verse 12 in the case of the immoral man. The Church does

not bear the *civil* sword, so it cannot enact capital or other physical or material punishments (Rom. 13.1-4). But the Church does bear the *spiritual* Sword of the Word of God. Thus, it wields that Sword to “put away” unrepentant offenders against the Law of God and the holiness of His community, that the offender may be consigned to the rule of the devil and the consequences of his choice (1 Cor. 5.5). But even this is not final; the Church must seek to recover any whom it puts away by excommunication, that they may be restored to the Lord (2 Cor. 2.5-11). Thus Satan is thwarted and holiness is restored and advanced among the people of God today.

*Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

“And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously” (v. 13). The wages of those sins was death. Swift punishment on the spot. Now, in God’s grace because of Jesus, we are allowed and enabled to repent and turn away from our sin. Our sin is wicked, just like the sins of the people of ancient Israel. But now we have the power of the Holy Spirit to flee and turn away from sin. To be sorry for our sins. And to start anew and be obedient. “...keeping the commandments of God is what matters” (1 Cor. 7.19). Here is the joy and mystery of maintaining holiness within the New Covenant: “Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1.27, 28). Herein lies the Good News. What happened to the children of Israel is what should happen to us; but it doesn’t, because the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6.23). “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2.8-10). So let us hear and fear and maintain holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit. Because the presumptuous sin of rejecting God still leads to spiritual death.

*Reflection*

1. The Law of God is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7.12). How does the Law of God serve today to help us increase in holiness (1 Cor. 7.19; Matt. 22.34-40)?
2. How should church leaders today help and encourage church members to pursue holiness?
3. What is the role of church discipline in helping the *community* of believers increase in holiness?

*Courts of judgment were to be set up in every city. Though their judgment had not the Divine authority of an oracle, it was the judgment of wise, prudent, experienced men, and had the advantage of a Divine promise. Matthew Henry (1622-1714), Commentary on Deuteronomy 17.8-13*

*Lord, ground me so firmly in Your Word, that I may always know the right and just thing to do as I...*

*Closing Prayer: Psalm 115.4-18*

Wait on the Lord in prayer, that He may show you any drift in your soul, away from Him and toward idols. Repent and return to the Lord, rejoicing in Him and His salvation.

*Psalm 115.4-18*

(Plainfield: *Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*)

Idols made by men's own hand – ever to Your Name be glory –  
see nor hear nor understand – ever to Your Name be glory!  
They neither feel nor walk, nor can they speak or talk;  
all those who serve them fall, but unto Your Name be glory!

All who trust in Jesus yield – ever to His Name be glory! –  
find in Him their help and shield – ever to Your Name be glory!  
O Israel, trust the Lord! He helps us evermore!

Fear Him obey His Word: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Blessings from our gracious Lord – ever to Your Name be glory –  
will attend us evermore – ever to Your Name be glory!

Bless all who fear You, Lord, all who obey Your Word,  
all who Your Name adore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Grant us, Savior, great increase – ever to Your Name be glory!

Bless us with eternal peace – ever to Your Name be glory!

Heaven and earth are Yours; let every soul adore  
and bless You evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

## 2 Regulations concerning Kings (1)

*Opening Prayer: Psalm 2.7-10*

“I will declare the decree:  
The LORD has said to Me,  
‘You *are* My Son,  
Today I have begotten You.  
Ask of Me, and I will give You  
The nations *for* Your inheritance,  
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.  
You shall break them with a rod of iron;  
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.”  
Now therefore, be wise, O kings;  
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.

*Psalm 2.7-10*

(Agincourt Hymn: [O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!](#))

Proclaim the message far and wide, that God has exalted the Crucified!  
From heav’n He sent us His only Son, Who has for us salvation won!

To Christ the Lord be given all who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.  
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

*Today’s Text: Deuteronomy 17.14-17*

*Preparation*

1. What criteria were to guide the selection of a king?
2. What must the king not do?

*Mediation*

God understood that the people would one day seek to have a king rule over them, like the surrounding nations. He was not opposed to this in principle; however, He instructed the people concerning who should be their king and how the king should rule.

God would choose their king for them. God had promised Abraham that kings would descend from him (Gen. 17.6). In Genesis 49.8-11, Jacob prophesied a royal dynasty would come from the tribe of Judah, and that dynasty would only end when “Shiloh” comes. “Shiloh” is a Hebrew contraction which means, loosely, “Him Whose it is”, that is, Him for Whom the Kingdom was ultimately intended. All kings descending from the tribe of Judah until the coming of the final King would serve two purposes: They would keep the nation ordered for holiness; and they would point to the coming King for Whom the Kingdom of God’s holy people is ultimately intended.

Sadly, most of the kings of Israel did neither of these very well.

God insisted that only a Hebrew should reign over His people. He must not be a man of mere self-interest, multiplying horses, wives, and wealth for himself (v. 16). Nor must he lead the people to pursue or accumulate such things (v. 16). Such interests and pursuits would turn the king’s heart away from his true calling, which was to rule the people of Israel for holiness. And that self-interest would turn the heart of the people away from their true calling, to be a holy people unto the Lord.

*Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

“...for the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again’” (v. 16). Here God is telling them not to go back to Egypt to buy horses; but there is a bigger “don’t go back” for them, and for us. Once we have turned to Christ, we are warned not to turn back to our old ways, but “let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus...” (Heb. 12.1, 2). Because if we risk breaking these regulations and recommendations, we face a terrible consequence. “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning” (2 Pet. 2.20). God wants what is best for us, and He is always turning us toward Him and onto a better path. He doesn’t want us to go backward, but forward in Him. When Thomas asked Jesus how he could know the way to eternal life, He said to him “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14.6). Knowing that, why would we ever go back to Egypt for anything?

*Reflection*

1. What would “going back to Egypt” look like for you? How can you resist that temptation?
2. Our King is Jesus. What does it mean for you to submit to His rule in your life?
3. How does Jesus work to order His Kingdom for holiness?

*... the power of kings is here put beneath that of God; and kings themselves are consecrated unto obedience to Him, lest the people should ever turn to ungodliness, whatever change of government might take place.* John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Deuteronomy 17.14*

*Give me a generous heart, O Lord, so that I always...*

*Closing Prayer: Psalm 2.1-6, 11, 12*

Pray for the world, that it will come to its senses and turn to King Jesus for forgiveness, salvation, life, and hope.

*Psalm 2.1-6, 11, 12*

(Agincourt Hymn: [\*O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!\*](#))

Why do the nations vainly rage, conspiring together from age to age?  
Earth’s kings and all of their counselors stand against the Lord and His Right Hand:

“Now let us cast His yoke below, His Kingdom authority overthrow!  
Throw off His Law, reject His Word; no more be governed by this Lord!”

The Lord in heaven laughs in wrath at all who embark on this cursed path.  
His angry Word to them is plain: “Yet shall My King in Zion reign!”

Rejoice with fear in Jesus’ grace, and worship before His exalted face!  
Beware His anger and judgment grim: How blessed are all who rest in Him!

### 3 Regulations concerning Kings (2)

*Opening Prayer: Psalm 115.1-3*

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,  
But to Your name give glory,  
Because of Your mercy,  
Because of Your truth.  
Why should the Gentiles say,  
“So where *is* their God?”  
But our God *is* in heaven;  
He does whatever He pleases.

*Psalm 115.1-3*

(Plainfield: [\*Nothing but the Blood of Jesus\*](#))

Not to us, O God, not us, but unto Your Name give glory!  
For Your love and faithfulness, ever to Your Name be glory!  
Why should the nations cry, “Where is their God on high?”  
You rule us, Lord, on high: Ever to Your Name be glory!

*Today’s Text: Deuteronomy 17.18-20*

*Preparation*

1. What was to be the king’s first responsibility upon taking office?
2. Why was this so important?

*Meditation*

Moses completes his instructions concerning the duty of kings. Judges and officers were appointed for each local community, to judge and instruct the people out of the Law of God. Once kings begin to rule in Israel, they would have general oversight of all people and their judges and communities; therefore, it was essential that they be men steeped in and obedient to the Law of God.

That began by their making a copy of the Law in their own hand (v. 18). By “this law” I understand the entirety of Moses’ corpus of writings, Genesis through Deuteronomy. Only thus would the king be reminded of the original purpose of God for His creation, the devastation of sin, the covenant with Abraham, God’s faithfulness to His people, their rescue from Egypt and failure at Kadesh Barnea, and the entirety of the corpus of the Law which was to guide the people in loving God and their neighbors. Once the king had copied this out, it would be checked and approved by the priests and Levites. Then he was to keep his copy at hand and read from it daily, “that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes” (v. 19).

By so doing, the king would guard his heart from being puffed up above the people, and he would be more inclined to walk the path of obedience than to turn from it (v. 20). As he fulfilled this duty, day by day, he would ensure longevity to his reign and that of his children and the nation.

Alas, we have no record of *any* king of Israel undertaking this effort. Perhaps Josiah came the closest (2 Chron. 34.14-33), but by then it was too little, too late.

Jesus ascended to glory and took His seat as King of kings at the right hand of God (Ps. 110). Now He sends His Spirit into the hearts of His people, and His duty is the write the Law of God on our hearts, that we may

learn and keep it all the days of our lives (Ezek. 36.26, 27).

*Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

Since we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people (1 Pet. 2.9), doesn't it follow that we, too, would benefit from following the regulations for kings? "Mercy and truth preserve the king, and by lovingkindness he upholds his throne" (Prov. 20.28). Goodness and mercy should always be following in our wake (Ps. 23.6). The Bible is now readily available to us; we have it with us always. We should read it daily, that we will learn to fear the LORD our God and be very careful to observe all the words of this Law and these statutes; so that we don't become prideful, and we don't fall into sin (vv. 19, 20). We have been "bought with a price" (1 Cor. 7.23); we belong to Him. "Jesus Christ ... the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever" (Rev. 1.5, 6). So we must say with King David, regarding these regulations, "I delight to do your will, O My God, and Your law *is* within my heart" (Ps. 40.8).

*Reflection*

1. What does it mean to say that Jesus has made us "kings and priests"? How should this encourage us in our use of God's Word?
2. Think back over the past 11 chapters. At how many different levels was the Law of God to be taught and used in ancient Israel? What should we in the church learn from this?
3. Remember: We don't keep the Law to *become* saved, but *because we are* saved, and we want to live in love for God and our neighbors. Can we really understand the rest of God's Word if we neglect His Law? Explain.

*But although it was without exception to be common to all, yet in order that kings might be more assiduously attentive in reading it, God would have a copy peculiarly dedicated to their use by the priests and Levites, and given into their hands in a solemn ceremony; that kings might know that they required greater wisdom and counsel for ruling the people than private persons.* John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Deuteronomy 17.18-20*

*Lord, I offer my body today as a living sacrifice to You, so help me to...*

*Closing Prayer: Psalm 115.9-18*

Pray for the rulers of your country, that God might restrain them from evil and empower them to serve His good purposes and glory.

*Psalm 115.9-18*

(Plainfield: [\*Nothing but the Blood of Jesus\*](#))

All who trust in Jesus yield – ever to His Name be glory! –  
find in Him their help and shield – ever to Your Name be glory!  
O Israel, trust the Lord! He helps us evermore!  
Fear Him obey His Word: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Blessings from our gracious Lord – ever to Your Name be glory –  
will attend us evermore – ever to Your Name be glory!  
Bless all who fear You, Lord, all who obey Your Word,  
all who Your Name adore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Grant us, Savior, great increase – ever to Your Name be glory!  
Bless us with eternal peace – ever to Your Name be glory!  
Heaven and earth are Yours; let every soul adore  
and bless You evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

## 4 Concerning Priests and Levites

*Opening Prayer: Psalm 144.1, 2*

Blessed *be* the LORD my Rock,  
Who trains my hands for war,  
And my fingers for battle—  
My lovingkindness and my fortress,  
My high tower and my deliverer,  
My shield and *the One* in whom I take refuge,  
Who subdues my people under me.

*Psalm 144.1, 2*

(*Tidings: O Zion, Haste, Your Mission High Fulfilling*)

Blessed be the Lord, Who trains my hands for battle;  
He is my Rock, my steadfast love and strength!  
He is my shield; no foe can shake or rattle;  
He will subdue them all to me at length.

*Refrain v. 15*

Happy are they on whom blessings fall!  
Blessed are the people who on Jesus' mercy call!

*Today's Text: Deuteronomy 18.1-8*

*Preparation*

1. How were the priests and Levites to be supported in Israel? Why?
2. What responsibility did the priests and Levites chiefly perform?

*Meditation*

God did not allow the priests and Levites to have an “inheritance with Israel” (v. 1). By that He meant a specific territory, like the other tribes were assigned. Instead, the priests and Levites were scattered among all the tribes of Israel. They owned no land or permanent dwellings, nothing they could pass on as an inheritance to their children.

Except the Lord Himself (v. 2).

The work of the priests and Levites was “to stand to minister (Hebrew, **תָּרַץ** *sharat* – to minister, serve) in the name of the LORD” (v. 5). What did this involve? Primarily, teaching the Law of God, administering the various sacrifices and offerings, assisting the judges who sat in the gates of the city, and being living representatives of the Presence of God among the people. This last role they chiefly fulfilled by eating the offerings that were given unto God (v. 1), as if God Himself were in them receiving the people's gifts.

For this ministry, the people were to support them liberally and ungrudgingly (vv. 3, 4).

A Levite's calling (and we can assume that includes priests, all of whom were descendants of Levi) was not necessarily fixed to any particular community. As the Lord led, they could move to serve elsewhere, especially at the central place where God had chosen for sacrifices and feasts (vv. 6-8). This gave the people locally an incentive to treat their priests and Levites well, or they might lose them to some other town.

The priests and Levites ministered and served by faithfully carrying out their spiritual duties on behalf of the people. For this, they were well worthy of the people's support, as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 9.13, 14).

*Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

It seems God made allowances for one who, perhaps by doing a genealogical check, realized that he was actually a Levite. Such a man could choose where he would serve, but "all the desire of his mind" needed to be focused on service to the LORD and his fellow man (vv. 6, 7). The passage addresses one who was expecting an inheritance, but which, by taking up the work of the Levite, he would be required to forego (v. 8). He had to leave his old life behind and claim a new inheritance. This is an excellent example for us to follow, as we turn from our old lives to a sanctified life of service to God (Rom. 12.1, 2). We must say with the Psalmists, "You are my portion, O LORD; I have said that I would keep Your words" (Ps. 119.57). "Whom have I in heaven *but You?* And *there is* none upon earth *that* I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; *but God is* the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73.25, 26). When God is our portion, and we know that we belong to Him, we can give thanks with other believers to the Father "who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. In Him we have obtained an inheritance... incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for us. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Col. 1.12; Eph. 1.11; 1 Pet. 1.4; Acts 20.32). Our new portion and inheritance are gained through Jesus Christ. And He must be all the desire of our mind.

#### *Reflection*

1. In what sense is God our "inheritance"? Why is that a very good thing?
2. Besides giving financially, what can we as believers do to support those who minister and serve among us?
3. In what sense are believers all ministers and servants to one another?

*God accounted as received by Himself what He had assigned to the Levites; not only lest any portion should be withheld from them, but also that every one should willingly pay the lawful dues of God's ministers; and again, lest any should wickedly murmur because the first-fruits and some portion of the sacrifices were appropriated for the subsistence of the priests.* John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Deuteronomy 18.1-8*

*Thank You, Lord, for the leaders of my church. Help me appreciate and encourage them by...*

*Closing Prayer: Psalm 144.3-15*

Praise God for those who have helped you in your walk with and work for the Lord. Ask Him to put two or three of these people on your mind for prayer throughout the day.

*Psalm 144.3-15*

*(Tidings: O Zion, Haste, Your Mission High Fulfilling)*

Lord, who are we, that You regard and love us?

Why should You care for our poor sinful plight?

We are but breath; You dwell on high above us;

our days like shadows pass before Your light.

*Refrain v. 15*

Happy are they on whom blessings fall!

Blessed are the people who on Jesus' mercy call!

Bow down the heav'ns, come down and touch the mountains.

Flash forth like lightning; scatter all Your foes!

Send out Your arrows, send them out to rout them;  
stretch forth Your hand and save us from all woes!

*Refrain*

From every foe and every lie deliver!  
Then will we sing new songs unto Your praise.  
Rescue Your servants, who are Yours forever;  
grant us deliv'rance by Your hand always.

*Refrain*

Bless, Lord, our children, strengthen them forever.  
All our provision, day by day supply.  
Bless our endeavors; from distress deliver.  
Keep us from harm and all distressing cries.

*Refrain*

## 5 Blameless before the Lord

*Opening Prayer: Psalm 135.19-21*

Bless the LORD, O house of Israel!  
Bless the LORD, O house of Aaron!  
Bless the LORD, O house of Levi!  
You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD!  
Blessed be the LORD out of Zion,  
Who dwells in Jerusalem!  
Praise the LORD!

*Psalm 135.1-21*

(St. Gertrude: *Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

Bless the Lord you people, all who love the Lord!  
Bless Him, you who trust His sovereign, holy Word!  
Bless the Lord from Zion, Him Who in it dwells;  
praise Him! Lift your voices, all His grace and glory tell!

*Refrain, v. 1*

Praise the Name of Jesus, you who serve His Word!  
Raise your voice and praise our good and glorious Lord!

*Today's Text: Read Deuteronomy 18.9-14*

*Preparation*

1. Why did God expel the pagan nations from the land of Canaan?
2. What did He expect His people to learn from this?

*Meditation*

The pagan peoples who occupied the land of Canaan were, to be blunt, gross. Descendants of Noah, they had long ago abandoned the faith he practiced, making up religions of their own devising, which were designed to allow the powerful to keep and grow their power by subjugating the rest of the people through religious fear and ritual.

The pagan nations fairly vied with one to see who could be the more depraved, the more disgusting and vile, and the more violent. Pagans knew that violence in religion could be used to maintain power in rule.

Pagan religion was corrupt, debasing, evil, and just plain horrific. Over and over, Moses enjoined the people of Israel not to take up any of these pagan ways. Instead, they were to destroy altars, worship sites, totems, and all articles used in pagan worship. They were not to incorporate anything from pagan practice into the worship of God.

Do we suppose that God has changed His mind about that in our day? Or can we simply not resist the pagan ways that we find in the culture around us?

Like Israel of old, we the people of God today are to be “blameless.” Luke explains what that means, in his description of Zacharias and Elizabeth: “And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Lk. 16).

*Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

Learning is defined as gaining or acquiring knowledge of or skill in something by study, experience, and being taught. It takes an effort to learn something new. It doesn't just happen. Intentionality is involved. And so Moses warned the Israelites, "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" (v. 9). There must not be found among them anyone who has learned the skill set of human sacrifice, witchcraft, soothsaying, interpreting omens, sorcery, conjuring spells, being a medium or spiritist or who calls up the dead. In other words, don't sign up for a class in Abominable Practices 101. This same warning comes to us as well. Anything that looks, tastes, feels, or seems like this is to be avoided. Period. We must learn to be like Jesus! "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Is. 1.16, 17). And Jesus says to us, "Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light" (Matt. 11.28-30). In order to be blameless before the LORD, all our learning must be to "know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that we may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3.19).

*Reflection*

1. We don't strive to be blameless so that we might *be* saved, but because we *are* saved. Explain.
2. How would you counsel new believers to guard their hearts against the corruptions of the sinful world?
3. Can we be blameless without obeying God's Word? Explain.

*This perfectness, then, is opposed to all those mixtures or corruptions which withdraw us from the sincere worship of the one true God; because the simplicity which retains us in obedience to heavenly teaching, is that spiritual chastity which God requires in His Church. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Deuteronomy 18.13*

*Lord, keep me from all idols, and from every pagan and unbelieving way as I...*

*Closing Prayer: Psalm 135.1-14*

Give praise to our sovereign Lord for His great salvation, infinite wisdom, unfailing faithfulness and goodness, and all His steadfast love.

*Psalm 135.1-14*

(St. Gertrude: *Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

Praise the Savior, praise Him, for His Name is good;  
Sing, for it is pleasant, to our glorious God!  
All whom He has chosen and redeemed by grace,  
praise His Name together, praise Him in this holy place!

*Refrain v. 1*

Praise the Name of Jesus, you who serve His Word!  
Raise your voice and praise our good and glorious Lord!

Great and sovereign, Jesus rules o'er all above,  
doing as He pleases, sovereign in His love.  
Clouds and seas obey Him, lightning, too, and rain;  
He the winds brings forth in pow'r and sends them back again.

*Refrain*

Egypt's firstborn fell to God's redeeming pow'r;  
kings and nations crumbled in redemption's hour.  
He the land of promise to His people gave;

thus His Kingdom Jesus gives to all He's pleased to save.

*Refrain*

Evermore Your Name, O Savior, shall endure!

Your renown throughout all ages is secure.

For You have compassion, vindicating all  
those who serve Your Name and on Your saving mercy call.

## 6 Prophets True and False

*Opening Prayer: Psalm 128.1, 2*

Blessed is every one who fears the LORD,  
Who walks in His ways.  
When you eat the labor of your hands,  
You *shall be* happy, and *it shall be* well with you.

*Psalm 128.1, 2*

(Fountain: *There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood*)

How blessed are they who fear You, Lord, who walk within Your ways!  
Rejoicing in Your bounteous Word, they prosper all their days!  
They prosper all their days, they prosper all their days!  
Rejoicing in Your bounteous Word, they prosper all their days!

*Today's Text: Deuteronomy 18.15-22*

*Preparation*

1. What did God promise to do for His people?
2. How could the people tell false prophets from true?

*Meditation*

I can imagine that many of the people were wondering what they would do after Moses died. Who would receive God's Word from Him, and pass it along to them? How would they ever know when God was speaking to them again?

The term "a Prophet" points forward beyond Moses and indicates both the succession of prophets that appeared throughout the Old Testament, and the final Prophet, our Lord Jesus Christ. These prophets would be "like" Moses in that they would receive and work from the same Law of God, and God would give additional revelation through them (vv. 15, 18). The words of the prophets were God's Word, and were to be received and obeyed as such (v. 19).

At the same time, other "prophets" would arise, claiming to speak in the Name of the Lord (vv. 20-22). The words of all prophets were to be tested against the revelation of God received to that point. Any prophet whose claim to divine revelation did not come to pass was thus not a prophet called by God, and should not be obeyed. All those determined to be false prophets should be sentenced to death (v. 20).

So Moses allayed the concern of the people by assuring them that God would not forsake or abandon them. He would continue to bring His Word to them through faithful prophets, until the day His only-begotten Word and final Prophet came to fulfill all the promises of God's covenant and to endure all His wrath against sinners.

*Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

The answer to the question, "How shall we know?" is plain and simple. If what the prophet says comes true, he is a valid prophet. If not, don't be afraid of him, and don't listen to him. Jesus, as the ultimate and final Prophet, strove to tell His disciples and us, "I'm saying this. It will come true. Believe in Me." He told His disciples on the night He was betrayed, "Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He" (Jn. 13.19). And then the angel said to the disciples, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee,

saying, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (Lk. 24.5-8). And God prophetically spoke all those years beforehand, saying, "I will raise up for them a Prophet...and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him" (Deut. 18.18). This Prophet Jesus is true. Our salvation depends upon His validity. So we say with Simon Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6.68).

*Reflection*

1. The Word of God is the Source and Touchstone for all true preaching and teaching. Explain.
2. How can we know if someone today is a false prophet?
3. How can we keep from falling into falsehood and error in our own lives?

*Hence we conclude that the expression, "a Prophet," is used by enallage for a number of Prophets. For it is altogether absurd, as some do, to restrict it to Joshua or Jeremiab; since Moses is here treating of the continual manner of the Church's government, and is not speaking of what God would do within a short time. Not at all more correct is their opinion, who apply it strictly to Christ alone... John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Deuteronomy 18.15**

*Thank You, Lord, for faithful prophets, and especially for Jesus. Help me to...*

*Closing Prayer: Psalm 128.3-6*

Pray for God's blessings to fall on and sustain all who trust His Word and who believe in Jesus and seek His Kingdom and righteousness.

*Psalm 128.3-6*

(Fountain: *[There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood](#)*)

Their homes with happy children bloom who fear Your holy Name;  
their tables and their every room declare Your glorious fame!  
Declare Your glorious fame, declare Your glorious fame!  
Their tables and their every room declare Your glorious fame!

O Lord, from Zion send Your peace, and prosp'rous make our ways;  
thus may Your blessings e'er increase upon us all our days!  
Upon us all our days, upon us all our days!  
Thus may Your blessings e'er increase upon all us all our days!

## 7 Toward Nationhood

*Opening Prayer: Psalm 132.13-18*

For the LORD has chosen Zion;  
He has desired it for His dwelling place:  
“This is My resting place forever;  
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.  
I will abundantly bless her provision;  
I will satisfy her poor with bread.  
I will also clothe her priests with salvation,  
And her saints shall shout aloud for joy.  
There I will make the horn of David grow;  
I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.  
His enemies I will clothe with shame,  
But upon Himself His crown shall flourish.”

*Psalm 132.13-18*

(Finlandia: *Be Still, My Soul*)

God dwells among us, and He will forever, to meet our needs and clothe us with His grace.  
He has to us sent Jesus Christ, our Savior, and made us His eternal resting-place.  
His foes are banished from His Presence ever, but we shall reign with Him before His face.

*Review Deuteronomy 17 and 18; meditate on Deuteronomy 17.18-20 and 18.18-22.*

*Preparation*

1. Why would the king need to read from the Law of God daily?
2. How would that help to minimize the threat of false prophets?

*Meditation*

In these chapters, Moses sharpens the focus of the people on what had always been God’s intention, that they should be *His* people, a *holy* people, even a *holy nation*. Nations require government; God’s Law provided for sound government at both the local and national level. Judges and officers were appointed town by town, and they sat in the gates of the city to ensure justice and righteousness.

At the national level, God allowed for a king to be chosen from among the people. He, too, was to be ruled by the Law of God, and to govern by it. The king and the local officials thus provided a balance for the nation, and a way to guard against false teachers, which would certainly at some point arise.

But God promised yet another office to serve the needs of the nation, that of the prophet. The prophets in the Old Testament studied and interpreted the Law of God for all the people (cf. Ezra 7.10). They also (though not all of them) received additional revelation from God, which looked back to God’s promises, works, and Law, ahead to the coming of God’s Kingdom and King, and around at the state of the people, to call them to repentance and faith all over again.

False prophets would always be a threat, but with sound rulers and faithful prophets, as well as diligent and able priests and Levites distributed throughout the nation, false prophets should not have posed a great problem.

Only after the great and final Prophet had come, however, would God's people be able truly to begin to realize His great and glorious plan.

*Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

The king was to write the Law of God in his own hand, to have his own copy and to read from it each day, so that he would learn to fear God and be careful to observe all the words of the Law, and not fall into sin. We, too, have these same words to guide us daily into the fear of God and obedience to His Word. Solomon says to us, "Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, that I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you?" (Prov. 22.20, 21). Then Luke says to us, "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account...that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed" (Lk. 1.1-4). Paul sends this to us: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15.4). And we answer with the psalmist, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Ps. 119.11). Whether kings, rulers, priests, or the people, all are under the same mandate: "You shall be blameless before the LORD your God" (Deut. 18.13). Happily, we all have equal access to God's Word.

As the old hymn asks, "What more can He say than to you He has said,/to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?"

*Reflection*

1. Why is the Law of God so important for rulers and citizens of God's Kingdom?
2. What can we expect if we neglect to read, mediate on, and study God's holy Word?
3. What can you do each day to increase in blamelessness before the Lord? For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

*The king must carefully study the law of God, and make that his rule; and having a copy of the Scriptures of his own writing, must read therein all the days of his life. It is not enough to have Bibles, but we must use them, use them daily, as long as we live. Christ's scholars never learn above their Bibles, but will have constant occasion for them, till they come to that world where knowledge and love will be made perfect., established upon better promises, there is a tendency to set up idols, under one form or another, in the human heart. Matthew Henry (1622-1714), Commentary on Deuteronomy 17.14-20*

*Help me to pursue holiness, Lord, as I...*

*Closing Prayer: Psalm 132.1-12*

Give thanks for Christ and His Kingdom, and for your salvation. Seek the Lord's help in seeking His Kingdom and righteousness today.

*Psalm 132.1-12*

(Finlandia: *Be Still, My Soul*)

Remember, Lord, we pray, in David's favor,  
the hardships he endured, the oath he swore,  
the vow he made to Jacob's mighty Savior:  
"I shall not enter through my palace door;  
I shall not sleep, nor slumber my eyes favor,  
until I make a dwelling for the Lord!"

The word throughout the chosen nation spread,  
to Ephrata, and in the fields of Jaar:  
“Now let us go,” the faithful people said,  
“and worship where our Savior’s dwellings are!  
Around His footstool let our worship spread;  
come, gather to Him, all from near and far!”

Arise, O Lord, come to Your resting place;  
Your holy Presence meet with us in might.  
Clothe us with righteousness in Jesus’ grace,  
and we will shout to Your divine delight!  
For David’s sake, turn not away Your face,  
but look upon us in Your holy light.

Remember, Lord, the oath You swore to David;  
do not turn back, do not deny Your Word:  
“One of your sons, with your throne I will favor,  
and He shall keep My cov’nant evermore,  
and walk within My testimonies ever,  
thus He shall ever rule as Israel’s Lord.”

*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. How were the people of Israel to be governed at the local level?
2. What would having a king add to that local government?
3. What was to be the role of the prophets? How does Jesus fulfill that role?
4. Do Christians today need to keep an eye out for false prophets? Explain.
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Deuteronomy 17 and 18? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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