

CHAPTER 18

In this chapter,

- I.** The rights and revenues of the church are settled, and rules given concerning the Levites' ministrations and maintenance (v. 1-8).
- II.** The caution against the idolatrous abominable customs of the heathen is repeated (v. 9-14).
- III.** A promise is given them of the spirit of prophecy to continue among them, and to centre at last in Christ the great prophet (v. 15-18).
- IV.** Wrath threatened against those that despise prophecy (v. 19) or counterfeit it (v. 20), and a rule given for the trial of it (v. 21, 22).

DEUTERONOMY 18:1-8

MAINTENANCE OF THE LEVITES

Magistracy and ministry are two divine institutions of admirable use for the support and advancement of the *kingdom of God among men*. Laws concerning the former we had in the close of the foregoing chapter, directions are in this given concerning the latter. Land-marks are here set between the estates of the priests and those of the people.

I. Care is taken that the priests entangle not themselves with the affairs of this life, nor enrich themselves with the wealth of this world; they have better things to mind. They *shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel*, that is, no share either in the spoils taken in war or in the land that was to be divided by lot, v. 1. Their warfare and husbandry are both spiritual, and enough to fill their hands both with work and profit and to content them. *The Lord is their inheritance*, v. 2. Note, Those that have God for their inheritance, according to the new covenant, should not be greedy of great things in the world, neither gripe what they have nor grasp at more, but look upon all present things with the indifference which becomes those that believe God to be all-sufficient.

II. Care is likewise taken that they want not any of the comforts and conveniences of this life. Though God, who is a Spirit, is their inheritance, it does not therefore follow that they must live upon the air; no,

1. The people must provide for them. They must have their *due from the people*, v. 3. Their maintenance must not depend upon the generosity of the people, but they must be by law entitled to it. He that is taught in the word ought in justice to communicate to him that teaches him; and he that has the benefit of solemn religious assemblies ought to contribute to the comfortable support of those that preside in such assemblies.

(1.) The priests who in their courses served at the altar had their share of the sacrifices, namely, the peace-offerings, that were brought while they were in waiting; besides the breast and shoulder, which were appointed them before (⁴⁰¹²³Leviticus 7:32-34), the cheeks and maw are here ordered to be given them; so far was the law from diminishing what was already granted that it gave them an augmentation

(2.) The first-fruits which arose within such a precinct were brought in, as it should seem, to the priests that resided among them, for their maintenance in the country; the first of their corn and wine for food, and the first of their fleece for clothing (v. 4); for the priests who were employed to teach others ought themselves to learn, having food and raiment, to be therewith content. The first-fruits were devoted to God, and he constituted the priests his receivers; and if God reckons what is, in general, given to the poor, lent to him, to be repaid with interest, much more what is, in particular, given to the poor, lent to him, to be repaid with interest, much more what is, in particular, given to poor ministers. There is a good reason given for this constant charge upon their estates (v. 5), because the Levites were *chosen of God*, and his choice must be owned and countenanced, and those honoured by us whom he honours; and *because they stood to minister*, and ought to be recompensed for their attendance and labour, especially since it was *in the name of the Lord*, by his warrant, in his service, and for his praise, and this charge entailed upon their seed for ever; those who were thus engaged and thus employed ought to have all due encouragement given them, as some of the most needful useful members of their commonwealth.

2. The priests must not themselves stand in one another's light. If a priest that by the law was obliged to serve at the altar only in his turn, and was

paid for that, should, out of his great affection to the sanctuary, devote himself to a constant attendance there, and quit the ease and pleasure of the city in which he had his lot for the satisfaction of serving the altar, the priests whose turn it was to attend must admit him both to join in the work and to share in the wages, and not grudge him either the honour of the one or the profit of the other, though it might seem to break in upon them, v. 6-8. Note, A hearty pious zeal to serve God and his church, though it may a little encroach upon a settled order, and there may be somewhat in it that looks irregular, yet ought to be gratified and not discouraged. He that appears to have a hearty affection to the sanctuary, and loves dearly to be employed in the service of it, *in God's name let him minister*; he shall be as welcome to God as the Levites whose course it was to minister, and should be so to them. The settling of the courses was intended rather to secure those to the work that were not willing to do so much than to exclude any that were willing to do more. And he that thus serves as a volunteer shall have as good pay as the pressed men, *besides that which comes of the sale of his patrimony*. The church of Rome obliges those who leave their estates to go into a monastery to bring the produce of their estates with them into the common stock of the monastery, for gain is their godliness; but here it is ordered that the pious devotee should reserve to himself the produce of his patrimony, for religion and the ministry were never appointed of God, however they have been abused by men, to serve a secular interest.

~~(88)~~ DEUTERONOMY 18:9-14

MAINTENANCE OF THE LEVITES

One would not think there had been so much need as it seems there was to arm the people of Israel against the infection of the idolatrous customs of the Canaanites. Was it possible that a people so blessed with divine institutions should ever admit the brutish and barbarous inventions of men and devils? Were they in any danger of making those their tutors and directors in religion whom God had made their captives and tributaries? It seems they were in danger, and therefore, after many similar cautions, they are here charged not to do after the abominations of those nations, v. 9.

I. Some particulars are specified; as,

1. The consecrating of their children to Moloch, an idol that represented the sun, by making them to *pass through the fire*, and sometimes consuming them as sacrifices in the fire, v. 10. See the law against this before, ~~(CRS2)~~ Leviticus 18:21.

2. Using arts of divination, to get the unnecessary knowledge of things to come, *enchantments, witchcrafts, charms, etc.*, by which the power and knowledge peculiar to God were attributed to the devil, to the great reproach both of God's counsels and of his providence, v. 10, 11. one would wonder that such arts and works of darkness, so senseless and absurd, so impious and profane, could be found in a country where divine revelation shone so clearly; yet we find remains of them even where Christ's holy religion is known and professed; such are the powers and policies of the *rulers of the darkness of this world*. But let those give heed to fortune-tellers, or go to wizards for the discovery of things secret, that use spells for the cure of diseases, are in any league or acquaintance with familiar spirits, or form a confederacy with those that are — let them know that they can have no fellowship with God while thus they have fellowship with devils. It is amazing to think that there should by any pretenders of this kind in such a land and day of light as we live in.

II. Some reasons are given against their conformity to the customs of the Gentiles.

1. Because it would make them abominable to God. The things themselves being hateful to him, those that do them are an abomination; and miserable is that creature that has become odious to its Creator, v. 12. See the malignity and mischievousness of sin; that must needs be an evil thing indeed which provokes the God of mercy to detest the work of his own hands.

2. Because these abominable practices had been the ruin of the Canaanites, of which ruin they were not only the witnesses but the instruments. It would be the most inexcusable folly, as well as the most unpardonable impiety, for them to practise themselves those very things for which they had been employed so severely to chastise others. Did the land spue out the abominations of the Canaanites, and shall Israel lick up the vomit?

3. Because they were *better taught*, v. 13, 14. It is an argument like that of the apostle against Christians walking as the Gentiles walked (~~(AM7)~~ Ephesians 4:17, 18, 20): *You have not so learned Christ*. “It is true

these nations, whom God gave up to their own hearts' lusts, and suffered to walk in their own ways (^{<4446>}Acts 14:16), did thus corrupt themselves; but thou art not thus abandoned by the grace of God: *the Lord thy God had not suffered thee to do so*; thou art instructed in divine things, and hast fair warning given thee of the evil of those practices; and therefore, whatever others do, it is expected that thou shouldst be *perfect with the Lord thy God*," that is, "that thou shouldst give divine honours to him, to him only, and to no other, and not mix any of the superstitious customs of the heathen with his institutions." One of the Chaldee paraphrasts here takes notice of God's furnishing them with the oracle of urim and thummim, as a preservative from all unlawful arts of divination. Those were fools indeed who would go to consult the father of lies when they had such a ready way of consulting the God of truth.

^{<5185>}DEUTERONOMY 18:15-22

THE GREAT PROPHET

Here is,

I. The promise of the great prophet, with a command to receive him, and hearken to him. Now,

1. Some think it is the promise of a succession of prophets, that should for many ages be kept up in Israel. Besides the priests and Levites, their ordinary ministers, whose office it was to teach Jacob God's law, they should have prophets, extraordinary ministers, to reprove them for their faults, remind them of their duty, and foretel things to come, judgments for warning and deliverances for their comfort. Having these prophets,

(1.) They need not use divinations, nor consult with familiar spirits, for they might enquire of God's prophets even concerning their private affairs, as Saul did when he was in quest of his father's asses, ^{<996>}1 Samuel 9:6.

(2.) They could not miss the way of their duty through ignorance or mistake, nor differ in their opinions about it, having prophets among them, whom, in every difficult doubtful case, they might advise with and appeal to. These prophets were like unto Moses in some respects, though far inferior to him, ^{<7540>}Deuteronomy 34:10.

2. Whether a succession of prophets be included in this promise or not, we are sure that it is primarily intended as a promise of Christ, and it is the clearest promise of him that is in all the law of Moses. It is expressly applied to our Lord Jesus as the Messiah promised (~~402~~ Acts 3:22; 7:37), and the people had an eye to this promise when they said concerning him, *This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world* (~~404~~ John 6:14); and it was his Spirit that spoke in all the other prophets, ~~401~~ 1 Peter 1:11. Observe,

(1.) What it is that is here promised concerning Christ. What God promised Moses at Mount Sinai (which he relates, v. 18), he promised the people (v. 15) in God's name.

[1.] That there should come a prophet, great above all the prophets, by whom God would make known himself and his will to the children of men more fully and clearly than ever he had done before. He is the *light of the world*, as prophecy was of the Jewish church, ~~402~~ John 8:12. He is the Word, by whom God speaks to us, ~~400~~ John 1:1; ~~300~~ Hebrews 1:2.

[2.] That God would *raise him up from the midst of them*. In his birth he should be one of that nation, should live among them and be sent to them. In his resurrection he should be *raised up at Jerusalem*, and thence his doctrine should go forth to all the world: thus God, having raised up his Son Christ Jesus, sent him to bless us.

[3.] That he should be like unto Moses, only as much above him as the other prophets came short of him. Moses was such a prophet as was a law-giver to Israel and their deliverer out of Egypt, and so was Christ: he not only teaches, but rules and saves. Moses was the founder of a new dispensation by signs and wonders and mighty deeds, and so was Christ, by which he proved himself a teacher come from God. Was Moses faithful? So was Christ; Moses as a servant, but Christ as a Son.

[4.] That God would put his words in his mouth, v. 18. What messages God had to send to the children of men he would send them by him, and give him full instructions what to say and do as a prophet. Hence our Saviour says, *My doctrine is not mine originally, but his that sent me*, ~~406~~ John 7:16. So that this great promise is performed; this Prophet has come, even Jesus; it is he that should come, and we are to look for no other.

(2.) The agreeableness of this designed dispensation to the people's avowed choice and desire at Mount Sinai, v. 16, 17. There God had spoken to them in thunder and lightning, out of the midst of the fire and thick darkness. Every word made their ears tingle and their hearts tremble, so that the whole congregation was ready to die with fear. In this fright, they begged hard that God would not speak to them in this manner any more (they could not bear it, it would overwhelm and distract them), but that he would speak to them by men like themselves, by Moses now, and afterwards by other prophets like unto him. "Well," says God, "it shall be so; they shall be spoken to by men, whose *terrors shall not make them afraid;*" and, to crown the favour beyond what they were able to ask or think, in the fulness of time the Word itself was made flesh, and they saw his glory as of the *only-begotten of the Father*, not, as at Mount Sinai, full of majesty and terror, *but full of grace and truth*, ^{<414>}John 1:14. Thus, in answer to the request of those who were struck with amazement by the law, God promised the incarnation of his Son, though we may suppose it far from the thoughts of those that made that request.

(3.) A charge and command given to all people to hear and believe, hear and obey, this great prophet here promised: *Unto him you shall hearken* (v. 15); and whoever will not hearken to him shall be surely and severely reckoned with for his contempt (v. 19): *I will require it of him*. God himself applied this to our Lord Jesus in the *voice that came out of the excellent glory*, ^{<415>}Matthew 17:5, *Hear you him*, that is, this is he concerning whom it was said by Moses of old, *Unto him you shall hearken*; and Moses and Elias then stood by and assented to it. The sentence here passed on those that hearken not to this prophet is repeated and ratified in the New Testament. *He that believeth not the Son, the wrath of God abideth on him*, ^{<416>}John 3:36. *And how shall we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven?* ^{<425>}Hebrews 12:25. The Chaldee paraphrase here reads it, *My Word shall require it of him*, which can be no other than a divine person, Christ the eternal Word, to whom the Father has committed all judgement, and by whom he will at the last day judge the world. Whoever turns a deaf ear to Jesus Christ shall find that it is at his peril; the same that is the prophet is to be his judge, ^{<428>}John 12:48.

II. Here is a caution against false prophets,

1. By way of threatening against the pretenders themselves, v. 20.

Whoever sets up for a prophet, and produces either a commission from the true God, shall be deemed and adjudged guilty of high treason against the crown and dignity of the King of kings, and that traitor shall be put to death (v. 20), namely, by the judgment of the great sanhedrim, which, in process of time, sat at Jerusalem; and therefore our Saviour says that a prophet could not perish but at Jerusalem, and lays the blood of the prophets at Jerusalem's door (^{<4033>}Luke 13:33, 34), whom therefore God himself would punish; yet *there* false prophets were supported.

2. By way of direction to the people, that they might not be imposed upon by pretenders, of which there were many, as appears, ^{<2025>}Jeremiah 23:25; ^{<4336>}Ezekiel 13:6; ^{<1216>}1 Kings 22:6. It is a very proper question which they are supposed to ask, v. 21. Since it is so great a duty to hearken to the true prophets, and yet there is so much danger of being misled by false prophets, *how shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?* By what marks may we discover a cheat? Note, It highly concerns us to have a right touchstone wherewith to try the word we hear, that we may know what that word is which the Lord has not spoken. Whatever is directly repugnant to sense, to the light and law of nature, and to the plain meaning of the written word, we may be sure is not that which the Lord has spoken; nor that which gives countenance and encouragement to sin, or has a manifest tendency to the destruction of piety or charity: far be it from God that he should contradict himself. The rule here given in answer to this enquiry was adapted chiefly to that state, v. 22. If there was any cause to suspect the sincerity of a prophet, let them observe that if he gave them any sign, or foretold something to come, and the event was not according to his prediction, they might be sure he was not sent of God. This does not refer so much to the foretelling of mercies and judgments (though as to these, and the difference between the predictions of mercies and judgments, there is a rule of discerning between truth and falsehood laid down by the prophet, ^{<2028>}Jeremiah 28:8, 9), but rather to the giving of signs on purpose to confirm their mission. Though the sign did come to pass, yet this would not serve to prove their mission if they called them to serve other gods; this point had been already settled, ^{<4511>}Deuteronomy 13:1-3. But, if the sign did not come to pass, this would serve to disprove their mission. "When Moses cast his rod upon the ground (it is bishop Patrick's explanation of this), and said it would become a serpent, if it had not accordingly been turned into a serpent, Moses had been a false prophet: if,

when Elijah called for fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice, none had come, he had been no better than the prophets of Baal.” Samuel's mission was proved by this, that *God let none of his words fall to the ground,* ~~1~~ Samuel 3:19, 20. And by the miracles Christ wrought, especially by that great sign he gave of his resurrection the third day, which came to pass as he foretold, it appeared that he was a teacher come from God. *Lastly,* They are directed not to be afraid of a false prophet; that is, not to be afraid of the judgments such a one might denounce to amuse people and strike terror upon them; nor to be afraid of executing the law upon him when, upon a strict and impartial scrutiny, it appeared that he was a false prophet. This command not to fear a false prophet implies that a true prophet, who proved his commission by clear and undeniable proofs, was to be feared, and it was at their peril if they offered him any violence or put any slight upon him.