

# DEUTERONOMY

## Chapter 18

### *Provision for Priests and Levites*

**18** “The Levitical priests, all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel. They shall eat the LORD's food offerings<sup>[a]</sup> as their inheritance. **2** They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the LORD is their inheritance, as he promised them. **3** And this shall be the priests' due from the people, from those offering a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach. **4** The firstfruits of your grain, of your wine and of your oil, and the first fleece of your sheep, you shall give him. **5** For the LORD your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand and minister in the name of the LORD, him and his sons for all time. **6** “And if a Levite comes from any of your towns out of all Israel, where he lives—and he may come when he desires—to the place that the LORD will choose, **7** and ministers in the name of the LORD his God, like all his fellow Levites who stand to minister there before the LORD, **8** then he may have equal portions to eat, besides what he receives from the sale of his patrimony.

**18:1** *no portion or inheritance.* No private ownership of land. Towns and surrounding pasturelands were set aside for the use of the Levites (Jos 21:41–42), as were the tithes and parts of sacrifices. (CSB)

Unlike the other tribes of Israel, the Levites' inheritance is not to be a territory but portions of the peoples' offerings (cf Lv 7:28–36). Cf Dt 12:19 for an exhortation not to neglect the Levites. (TLSB)

**18:2** Cf Nu 18:20. (TLSB)

**18:5** *minister.* Hbr *sharath*, “attend,” “wait on.” The work of the tabernacle and the rationale for the Levites' special treatment: they were chosen out of all Israel to minister before the Lord in His name for the people. They were the mediators between Israel and the Lord. Cf 10:8; 21:5. (TLSB)

**18:6–8** Levites residing elsewhere in Israel were permitted to come to the tabernacle as they desired to serve the Lord (cf Nu 3:5–4:49). (It is unclear whether this refers to a temporary or permanent change in location—perhaps both.) They were to be given equal portions with the regularly serving priests, even if they had other sources of income (sale of ancestral property, inheritance, etc.). Luther: “God commanded this to exercise their faith and love, that they might learn to share their substance gladly, persuaded by the sure faith that they would be supported by God” (AE 9:174–75). (TLSB)

**18:8** *patrimony.* Likely refers to a source of income that is not to affect his service or share of the offerings. (TLSB)

**18:1–8** Though the Levitical priesthood will not have an inheritance of land that will provide their sustenance, the Lord Himself will be their inheritance. They are to share in the offerings that are brought to the Lord. Today, we are not to neglect the physical needs of those who serve the Lord among us, for “you shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain” (25:4) and “the laborer deserves his food” (Mt 10:10). Cf 1Co 9:9–14; 1Tm 5:18. God provided for the needs of

the Levitical priests through the gifts of His people. So also today, God's people are moved by His grace in Christ Jesus to support those who labor among them, especially in preaching the life-giving Gospel of Jesus. • Lord God, help us to give “double honor” (1Tm 5:17) to those who faithfully labor among us in Your vineyard, calling us to repentance with Your holy Law and uplifting us with the mercy, forgiveness, and life that are ours in Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen. (TLSB)

### *Abominable Practices*

**9 “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. 10 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 11 or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, 12 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. 13 You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, 14 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.**

**18:9** Techniques for invoking occult powers are prohibited. Following such abominable practices as other nations would be a rejection of the Lord, the sole source of truth and power, who provides His people with legitimate priesthood (vv 1–8) and prophecy (vv 15–22). (TLSB)

*abominable practices.* What follows is the most complete list of magical or spiritistic arts in the OT. All were practiced in Canaan, and all are condemned and prohibited. The people are not to resort to such sources for their information, guidance or revelation. Rather, they are to listen to the Lord's true prophets (see vv. 14–22). (CSB)

**18:10–11** Prohibited abominable practices include all types of divination, magic, and consulting with the spirit world. “All such people place their heart and trust elsewhere than in the true God” (LC I 12). (TLSB)

**18:10** *sacrifices his son or daughter.* See 12:31. (CSB)

May refer to a nonlethal trial-by-fire ordeal or to child sacrifice, such as to the false god Molech. (TLSB)

*divination ... fortunes ... omens.* Various means to discover the course of future events or the will of the gods. (TLSB)

*sorcerer ... charmer.* Using magic to supernaturally influence people or events. (TLSB)

**18:11** . *medium ... necromancer ... inquires of the dead.* Cult of the dead or conjuring up spirits of the dead and consulting with the spirit world, esp to have the future revealed (cf 26:14). (TLSB)

**18:12** Not only the practices but also anyone who engages in them is an abomination to the Lord. This is why God's judgment stood against the Canaanites and the Israelites would dispossess them of the land (v 14). (TLSB)

**18:13** *blameless.* Hbr *tam*, “complete” or “sound,” in this case indicating faithfulness to the covenant conditions of fellowship with the Lord. Such undivided commitment would lead to blessedness and remaining in the land. (TLSB)

**18:14** Unlike the Canaanites, who conduct their affairs by listening to sorcerers and diviners, Israel is to conduct its affairs in conformity with the word of the prophets (cf v 15). Luther: “All these—since they are human inventions without the Word of God—must be condemned among the people of God, whose life and works must be governed by the sure Word of God” (AE 9:176). (TLSB)

**18:9–14** As Israel enters the Promised Land, they will be exposed to the influences of the false, occultist worship practices of the nations surrounding them, which they are to avoid. The people are faced with a great challenge: will they remain faithful to the Lord, or will they desert Him? Today, consider to whom you will listen. As parents lovingly protect their children by warning, reminding, and encouraging them, so our gracious God comes to us in His Word, warning us of snares and pitfalls, reminding us of our relationship to Him as His beloved children, and encouraging and comforting us with the assurance of His love and forgiveness. • Lord God, give me an undivided heart that I may always honor Your name and be Your witness to others, a city set on a hill, whose light cannot be hidden (Mt 5:14). Amen. (TLSB)

*A New Prophet like Moses*

**15 “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— 16 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.’ 17 And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. 18 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. 19 And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. 20 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.’ 21 And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?’— 22 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.**

**18:15-20** Deut 16:18–18:22 defines the offices of judge (16:18–17:13), king (17:14–20), priest (18:1–8), and prophet (18:9–22). The last section on prophesy describes the practices of the Canaanites that are “abominations” (vv 9, 12) because they are forms of magic. Two aspects of the Lord’s gift of a prophet in vv 15–22 stand out in this context. The first is the divine initiative over against the human initiatives cited in vv 10–11. The Lord promises, “I will raise up for them a prophet. . . . I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him” (v 18). The second contrast between the way of the Canaanites and the way of Israel is characteristic of the Book of Deuteronomy and its emphasis on the divine Word (vv 18–20). (CSB)

**18:15** *prophet like me*. Verse 16, as well as the general context (see especially vv. 20–22), indicates that a series of prophets is meant. At Mount Horeb the people requested that Moses take the message from God and deliver it to them. But now that Moses is to leave them, he says that another spokesman will take his place, and then another will be necessary for the next generation. This is therefore a collective reference to the prophets who will follow. As such, it is also the

basis for Messianic expectation and receives a unique fulfillment in Jesus (see Jn 1:21, 25, 45; 5:46; 6:14; 7:40; Ac 3:22–26; 7:37). (CSB)

Israel would have a succession of prophets resembling Moses in function, declaring the Word of Lord. *like me*. Moses here describes a prophet having a unique relationship with the Lord, one no other prophet enjoyed (34:10; Nu 12:6–8). Jewish commentators expected the coming of a new Moses. Luther: “This is the chief passage in this whole book and a clearly expressed prophecy of Christ as the new Teacher. Hence the apostles also courageously adduce this passage (Acts 3:22–23; 7:37)... Here Moses clearly describes his own end, and he yields his mastery to the Prophet who is to come... Here he prophesies that Christ will be true man and will come from the blood of the Jews, because salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22). No one has ever arisen from this people who taught a different word from the word of Moses and set up a new ministry except this one Christ of ours” (AE 9:176, 180). (TLSB)

In this context, the prophet (*nabi*) denotes both a single prophet as well as a line of prophets. The prophet will be “from your brothers,” in contrast to a Canaanite. Canaanites “listen” (*shama*) to fortune-tellers (Deut 18:14), but the Lord commands Israel to “listen” (*shama*) to his Word through the prophet. The contrast between the gods of the Canaanites and the Lord is between the visible and audible. Idols have form, but they do not speak (cf. Ps 115:5). The Lord has no form, but he decisively speaks. Idols are visible, but dumb. The Lord is invisible, but eloquent. Attempting to represent the Lord with a lifeless image would serve to gag him. Idolatry (as depicted in Deut 18:9–14) attempts to escape from the living voice of the living God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

Moses described the coming prophet as one who would be “like me,” one who enjoyed a unique relationship with the Lord similar to that enjoyed by Moses. No other OT prophet spoke with the Lord the way Moses did. This prophet would be a fellow Israelite, who could trace his family tree back to one of the sons of Jacob. (PBC)

**18:16–18** Precedent for making prophecy the means for God’s communication with Israel (cf 5:22–29). Israel felt the fear of sinners faced by a perfect, holy God and His demands, so they asked Moses to be the one who met with God on their behalf and brought His Word to them. (TLSB)

**18:16-17** Moses was the mediator par excellence in the Old Testament (e.g., Ex 32:11–14; Deut 5:5). Other prophets also function in this role (e.g., Amos 7:1–6). Israel’s greatest prophetic intercessor and insister in the Bible is Jesus, who continually intercedes for sinners (Is 53:12; Lk 23:34; Rom 8:34). Climactically, Jesus not only prays for us, he steps into our place (2 Cor 5:21) and rises again for our vindication (Rom 4:25). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

**18:16** See Ex 20:18–19; Heb 12:18–21. (CSB)

*let us not hear the voice of the Lord* – The fear Israel felt at Sinai is the kind of terror people will always feel when they are faced with God’s perfect demands and they must reckon with their own sin. We can’t comprehend how fully we’ve failed to do what God wants us to do until we have tried our hardest and still we’ve fallen short. After we try over and over to be good but fail every time, we finally arrive at the frightening moment when we turn to God and say, “If there is any hope for me at all, it has to come from you. I can’t do it!” (PBC)

**18:17** The Lord acknowledged the appropriateness of their request. (TLSB)

**18:18** *my words in his mouth.* See Ex 4:15–16. (CSB)

This emphasizes the authority of this coming prophet.

“I will put my words in his mouth.” Joshua is commanded to keep the Lord’s words in his mouth (Josh 1:8). The Lord places his word into the mouths of other prophets as well (e.g., Is 6:8; Jer 1:9; 15:16; Ezek 2:9–10; 3:1–2). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

The true prophet speaks only God’s Word (cf Jer 15:16; Ezk 2:9-3:3; 1 Pt 1:10-11; 2 Pt 1:19-21. Cyprian says, “Concerning (the prophet,) Christ says in the Gospel according to John: ‘Search the Scriptures, in which you think you have eternal life. These are they which testify concerning Me.... For if you had believed Moses, you would also believe Me.’” Chemnitz states, “When minds have in this way been prepared and crushed by the Law (v. 15), then God explains and repeats His promise about raising up another prophet and about another kind of teaching, namely the Gospel. (TLSB)

*all that I command* – This is wide variety of subjects: religion, domestic affairs, and foreign affairs. When the prophet speaks, the Lord speaks (Ex 4:15-16). (TLSB)

**18:19-20** False prophets are depicted in other texts, for example, Is 30:10–11; Jeremiah 27–28; Micah 2:11; 3:11. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

**18:19** *I myself will require it of him* – This is a stern warning for any that do not listen to Jesus and his Word. (CSB)

To obey the prophet’s words was to obey the Lord’s words. To ignore the prophet’s word would lead to divine judgment. The Lord made no similar declaration about the orders of an Israelite king. (TLSB)

**18:20** *must be put to death.* See 13:5; Jer 28:15–17. (CSB)

Two types of prophecy are punishable by death: falsely attributing a prophecy to the Lord, and speaking in the name of other gods. (TLSB)

**18:21–22** This negative form of statement is always true. But the positive statement, “If the prophecy comes true, it is from the Lord,” may not always be true (see note on 13:1–5). (CSB)

**18:22** If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, a record of reliability must be established: what the prophet says will or will not come to pass (cf 1Sm 3:19–20). If not, he has spoken falsely. They were not to be afraid of a false prophet’s power or be afraid to punish him; such a prophet was a fraud and could not harm them (a true prophet apparently could; 1Ki 18:20–40). Luther: “Those who come in the name of strange gods are those who come without the Scriptures and the Word of God but use their own spirit as a pretext” (AE 9:187–88). (TLSB)

**18:15–22** Criteria for identifying false prophets and false prophecy are given. God will provide a source of revelation to communicate with His people: He will send a line of prophets that will culminate in the great Prophet promised here, the Lord Jesus Christ. God’s Word is holy and is to be treated as such. Neglect of His Word, denial of His Word, adding to or subtracting from His Word, or twisting His Word are all sin. God graciously desires to speak to us to give to us what we cannot live without, the Word that has the power to bring us to repentance (Rm 3:20, Law), make us alive to eternal life (Rm 1:16, Gospel), and keep us in the truth (Jn 8:31–32). • “Lord,

keep us steadfast in Your Word; Curb those who by deceit or sword Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son And bring to naught all He has done.” Amen. (*LSB* 655:1) (*TLSB*)