

Feb 10: Deuteronomy 16:18-18:22

Sections:

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ESV Study Bible:

### The Hebrew Calendar Compared to the Gregorian (Modern) Calendar

The Hebrew calendar was composed of 12 lunar months, each of which began when the thin crescent moon was first visible at sunset. They were composed of approximately 29/30 days and were built around the agricultural seasons. Apparently some of the names of the months were accommodated from Babylon following the time that the Israelites were exiled there.

<i>Hebrew Month</i>	<i>Gregorian (Modern) Month</i>	<i>Biblical References</i>
First Month: Abib (Preexile) Nisan (Postexile)	March–April	Ex. 13:4; 23:15; 34:18; Deut. 16:1; Neh. 2:1; Est. 3:7(cf. Gen. 8:13; Ex. 12:2, 18; 40:2, 17; Lev. 23:5; Num. 9:1; 20:1; 28:16; 33:3; Josh. 4:19; 1 Chron. 12:15; 27:2, 3; 2 Chron. 29:3, 17; 35:1; Ezra 6:19; 7:9; 8:31; 10:17; Est. 3:7, 12; Ezek. 29:17; 30:20; 45:18, 21; Dan. 10:4)
Festivals: 14th/15th: Passover (Ex. 12:18; Lev. 23:5) 15th–21st: Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:14–20; Lev. 23:6) 16th: First Fruits (Lev. 23:9–11)		
Second Month: Ziv (Preexile) Iyyar (Postexile)	April–May	1 Kings 6:1, 37 (cf. Gen. 7:11; 8:14; Ex. 16:1; Num. 1:1, 18; 9:11; 10:11; 1 Chron. 27:4; 2 Chron. 3:2; 30:2, 13, 15; Ezra 3:8)
Festival: 14th: Later Passover (Num. 9:10–11)		
Third Month: Sivan	May–June	

Festivals: 4th: Pentecost [Feast of Weeks] ( <u>Lev. 23:15–16</u> )		<u>Est. 8:9</u> (cf. <u>Ex. 19:1; 1 Chron. 27:5; 2 Chron. 15:10; 31:7; Ezek. 31:1</u> )
Fourth Month: Tammuz	June–July	<u>Ezek. 8:14</u> (cf. <u>2 Kings 25:3; 1 Chron. 27:7; Jer. 39:2; 52:6; Ezek. 1:1; Zech. 8:19</u> )
Fifth Month: Ab	July–August	Not mentioned by name in the Bible (cf. <u>Num. 33:38; 2 Kings 25:8; 1 Chron. 27:8; Ezra 7:8, 9; Jer. 1:3; 28:1; 52:12; Ezek. 20:1; Zech. 7:3, 5; 8:19</u> )
Sixth Month: Elul	August–September	<u>Neh. 6:15</u> (cf. <u>1 Chron. 27:9; Ezek. 8:1; Hag. 1:1, 15</u> )
Seventh Month: Ethanim (Preexile) Tishri (Postexile)	September–October	<u>1 Kings 8:2</u> (cf. <u>Gen. 8:4; Lev. 16:29; 23:24, 27, 34, 39, 41; 25:9; Num. 29:1, 7, 12; 2 Kings 25:25; 1 Chron. 27:10; 2 Chron. 5:3; 7:10; 31:7; Ezra 3:1, 6; Neh. 7:73; 8:2, 14; Jer. 28:17; 41:1; Ezek. 45:25; Hag. 2:1; Zech. 7:5; 8:19</u> )
Festivals: 1st: Trumpets ( <u>Lev. 23:24; Num. 29:1</u> ) 10th: Day of Atonement ( <u>Lev. 16:29–34; 23:27–32</u> ) 15th–21st: Booths ( <u>Lev. 23:34–40</u> ) 22nd: Solemn assembly ( <u>Lev. 23:36</u> )		
Eighth Month: Bul (Preexile) Marchesvan (Postexile)	October–November	<u>1 Kings 6:38</u> (cf. <u>1 Kings 12:32, 33; 1 Chron. 27:11; Zech. 1:1</u> )
Ninth Month: Chislev (Kislev)	November–December	<u>Neh. 1:1; Zech. 7:1</u> (cf. <u>1 Chron. 27:12; Ezra 10:9; Jer. 36:9, 22; Hag. 2:10, 18</u> )
Festival: 25th: Dedication ( <u>John 10:22</u> )		
Tenth Month: Tebeth	December–January	<u>Est. 2:16</u> (cf. <u>Gen. 8:5; 2 Kings 25:1; 1 Chron. 27:13; Ezra 10:16; Jer. 39:1; 52:4; Ezek. 24:1; 29:1; 33:21; Zech. 8:19</u> )
Eleventh Month: Shebat	January–February	<u>Zech. 1:7</u> (cf. <u>Deut. 1:3; 1 Chron. 27:14</u> )

Twelfth Month: Adar*	February– March	Ezra 6:15; Est. 3:7, 13; 8:12; 9:1, 15, 17, 19, 21 (cf. 2 Kings 25:27; 1 Chron. 27:15; Jer. 52:31; Ezek. 32:1; 32:17)
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\*Periodically, a 13th month was added so that the lunar calendar would account for the entire solar year.

#### The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary:

**judiciary institutions in ancient Near East.** As evidenced by the preface to the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1750 B.C.) and the statements made by the “eloquent peasant” in Egyptian wisdom literature (c. 2100 B.C.), those in authority were expected to protect the rights of the poor and weak in society. “True justice” (see Lev 19:15) was required of kings, officials and local magistrates. In fact, the “world turned upside down” theme found in the book of Judges and in prophetic literature (Is 1:23) describes a society in which “laws are enacted, but ignored” (for example in the Egyptian *Visions of Neferti* [c. 1900 B.C.]). An efficiently administered state in the ancient Near East depended on the reliability of the law and its enforcement. To this end, every organized state created a bureaucracy of judges and local officials to deal with civil and criminal cases. It was their task to hear testimony, investigate charges made and evaluate evidence, and then execute judgment (detailed in the Middle Assyrian laws and the Code of Hammurabi). There were some cases, however, that required the attention of the king (see 2 Sam 15:2–4), and appeals were occasionally forwarded to that highest magistrate (as in the Mari texts).<sup>1</sup>

The ESV Study Bible summarizes this section with:

Remember this is Moses’ second speech:

Moses’ Second Speech: Specific Covenant Stipulations. Following the general stipulations of [chs. 5–11](#), the commands and laws become more specific. The order of the stipulations in these chapters seems to purposely follow the order of categories in the Ten Commandments.

Leaders.

These laws mainly concern various leaders for the people of Israel: judges, priests, kings, and prophets. As in the NT, all leaders of God’s people are under the authority of God’s word. Leaders, like parents, exercise God’s authority toward those under them, **so again the sequence of the Ten Commandments is observable, as this section reflects the fifth commandment, “Honor your father and your mother” (5:16).**

Remember that Deuteronomy seems to be speaking more about the Ten Commandments and now this one relates to the fifth commandments.

I. Deut. 16: 18-20: **judges** and officers and how they judge

<sup>1</sup> Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 16:18–19.

*“You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.”<sup>19</sup> You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous.<sup>20</sup> Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you.*

The ESV Study Bible shares: The appointment of judges in towns for judicial purposes recognizes the size of the population and the spread of the land (cf. [1:9–18](#)).

- a. Colin Smith shared:
- b. 4 office of leadership beginning here and going through next few chapters:
  1. Judge: Chapter 16:18
  2. King: Chapter 17:14
  3. Priest: 18:1-3
  4. Prophet: 18:14-22

God spreads the authority out. Priest is not the king, etc.  
no single person holds all 4 offices.

Think about this in the church. When in the church there are cases of discipline they come to the elders. That is like a king. The pastor is like a prophet. All of God’s people are priest.

Leaders are to be qualified: Deut 17:15ff

We see this w elders in the NT in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Also see 1 Peter 5:3

Deuteronomy 17:12 we see God’s people are to hold their leaders in honor. Church discipline in the NT.

- c. In verse 18 Moses is talking about judges.
- d. They are to judge the people with “righteous” judgment. This is what they are to do.
- e. They are to NOT: distort justice, be partial or take bribes
- f. A bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous.
- g. Ex 23:8 almost says this exact same thing.
  - a. I find that to be very true.
  - b. A bribe does blind our eyes because they are thinking about the money.
  - c. How else do you find this to be true?

**IVP BBC: 16:19. bribes in the ancient world.** The temptation for judges and government officials to accept bribes is found in every time and place (see Prov 6:35; Mic 7:3). Taking bribes becomes almost institutionally accepted in bureaucratic situations as competing parties attempt to outmaneuver each other (see Mic 3:11; Ezra 4:4–5). However, at least on the ideal level, arguments and penalties are imposed to eliminate or at least lessen this problem. Thus Hammurabi’s code places harsh penalties on any judge who alters one of his decisions (presumably because of a bribe), including stiff fines and permanent removal from the bench. Exodus 23:8 forbids the taking of bribes and the perversion of justice as an offense against God, the weak and innocent, and the entire community (see Is 5:23; Amos 5:12).

Ex 23:2 *“You must not follow a crowd in doing evil things; in a lawsuit you must not offer testimony that agrees with a crowd so as to pervert justice,*

Le 19:15 *“ You must not deal unjustly in judgment: you must neither show partiality to the poor nor honor the rich. You must judge your fellow citizen fairly.*

Dt 1:17 *They must not discriminate in judgment, but hear the lowly and the great alike. Nor should they be intimidated by human beings, for judgment belongs to God. If the matter being adjudicated is too difficult for them, they should bring it before me for a hearing.*

Dt 10:17 *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty, and awesome God who is unbiased and takes no bribe,*

Pr 24:23 *These sayings also are from the wise: To show partiality in judgment is terrible:*

Ex 23:8 *“You must not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and subverts the words of the righteous.*

Pr 17:23 *A wicked person receives a bribe secretly to pervert the ways of justice.*

Ec 7:7 *Surely oppression can turn a wise person into a fool; likewise, a bribe corrupts the heart.*

h. Verse 20: justice and only justice is to be pursued.

i. There is a purpose—go in and possess the land. See Deut 4:1

II. Deut. 16: 21-22: no sacred pillars or Asherahs [still mainly dealing with judges]

<sup>21</sup> *“You shall not plant for yourself an Asherah of any kind of tree beside the altar of the Lord your God, which you shall make for yourself. <sup>22</sup> You shall not set up for yourself a sacred pillar which the Lord your God hates.*

- a. Canaanite worship items were to be destroyed.
- b. We have talked about these previously.
- c. They were not to mix worship practices.
- d. Asherah poles were wooden symbols of female deities
- e. This was forbidden and violated.

III. Deut. 17: 1-7: examples of legal cases [still dealing with judges]

*“You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep which has a blemish or any defect, for that is a detestable thing to the Lord your God.*

<sup>2</sup> *“If there is found in your midst, in any of your towns, which the Lord your God is giving you, a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, by transgressing His covenant, <sup>3</sup> and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly host, which I have not commanded, <sup>4</sup> and if it is told you and you have heard of it, then you shall inquire thoroughly. Behold, if it is true and the thing certain that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, <sup>5</sup> then you shall bring out that man or that woman who has done this evil deed to your gates, that is, the man or the woman, and you shall stone them to death. <sup>6</sup> On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. <sup>7</sup> The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.*

- a. Deut. 15:21 also talks about this.
- b. We have talked about this idea before.
- c. The sacrifices to the Lord are to be the first and the best.
- d. Verses 2-3: this passage now begins to deal with the “if.” What are they to do “if” someone violates the covenant?
- e. The case is given “if” someone does something “evil” in the sight of the Lord by transgressing His covenant.
- f. Verses 2-3 deal with the incident which is vague. Deut 13 is about this as well.
- g. Verses 4-7 is about hearing and confirming the incident.

- h. They are to inquire THOROUGHLY and then stone them. It must be corroborated by 2-3 witnesses. No one is stoned based off of 1 witness.
- i. Verse 7 is cross referenced and notice that the hand of the witness is the first to cast the stone (Lev 24:14; Deut 13:9).

The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary [may not share]

*The worship of the celestial bodies (sun, moon, planets, stars) was common throughout the ancient Near East. One of the principal gods of Assyria and Babylonia was a sun god (Shamash), and a moon god (Thoth in Egypt; Sin in Mesopotamia; Yarah in Canaanite religion) was widely worshiped. During most of their history the Israelites would have been familiar with and heavily influenced by Assyrian culture and religion (see Deut 4:19; 2 Kings 21:1–7; 23:4–5). These forbidden practices continued to be a source of condemnation during the Neo-Babylonian period, as Israelites burned incense on altars placed on the roofs of their houses to the “starry hosts” (Jer 19:13). Because worship of the elements of nature diminished Yahweh’s position as the sole power in creation, they were outlawed. However, the popular nature of this type of worship continues to appear in prophetic literature and in Job (see Job 31:26–28; 38:7). For additional information see comment on Deuteronomy 4.<sup>2</sup>*

**17:6–7. witnesses in the ancient court system.** *The task of serving as a witness occurs in a variety of legal contexts and is a solemn duty which is not to be abused (Ex 20:16; Num 35:30; Deut 19:16–19). It can involve hearing testimony, signing commercial or civil documents, or testifying on a legal matter (laws of Ur-Nammu, Code of Hammurabi and the Middle Assyrian laws). Witnesses serve an essential purpose in verifying business transactions (Jer 32:44; Hammurabi), such as the sale of property, marriages and changes in social status (Middle Assyrian laws). Occasionally, they function as representatives of the people in matters brought before a god (Ex 24:9–11; Hammurabi).<sup>3</sup>*

IV. Deut. 17: 8-13: difficult matters, appeal to higher court [dealing with judges and priests]

<sup>8</sup> “If any case is too difficult for you to decide, between one kind of homicide or another, between one kind of lawsuit or another, and between one kind of assault or another, being cases of dispute in your courts, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the Lord your God chooses. <sup>9</sup> So you shall come to the Levitical priest or the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall inquire of them and they will declare to you the verdict in the case. <sup>10</sup> You shall do according to the terms of the verdict which they declare to you from that place which the Lord chooses; and you shall be careful to observe according to all that they teach you. <sup>11</sup> According to the terms of the law which they teach you, and according to the verdict which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left. <sup>12</sup> The man who acts presumptuously by not listening to the priest who stands there to serve the Lord your God, nor to the judge, that man shall die; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel. <sup>13</sup> Then all the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again.

- a. They had a way of appealing higher cases.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 17:3.

<sup>3</sup> Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 17:6–7.

- b. Straightforward cases are handled locally.
- c. Notice verse 8 once again references the place the Lord God chooses. The place the Lord chooses is the central sanctuary which united worship and justice. This is showing that God is the ultimate judge.
- d. They go to the Levitical priest and to the judge.
- e. Verses 10-11 emphasize how important it is that they follow what the priest and the judge say to do.
- f. Verses 12-13 emphasize the consequence of not listening to the priest or the judge.
- g. Once again, “purge the evil.”
- h. Verse 13—this is an example.

The IVP BBC [probably won't share]

**verdict by omen in ancient Near East.** In situations where physical evidence was not present or was insufficient, a verdict could be determined by the reading of omens. This meant that plaintiffs had to consult religious professionals (Levitical priests in 17:9), whose service included seeking divine verdicts. Among the divination methods used in the ancient Near East were the examination of a sheep's liver (hepatoscopy), the interpretation of dreams (specific Babylonian texts contain lists of dreams and what they portend— accidents, deaths, military defeats or victories; see Dan 2:9), the noting of freak occurrences in nature and the use of astrological charting (especially during the period of the Assyrian empire in the tenth to seventh centuries B.C.). In the biblical text, the Urim and Thummim (Ex 28:30; Num 27:21) were used to help divine God's will, and a number of the prophets point to famines, droughts and other natural calamities as a sign of God's judgment on an unfaithful people (Amos 4:10–12; Hag 1:5–11).<sup>4</sup>

V. Deut. 17: 14- 20: rules for a king (the 4 offices of leadership, judges and now kings)

<sup>14</sup> “When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,’ <sup>15</sup> you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, ‘You shall never again return that way.’ <sup>17</sup> He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.

<sup>18</sup> “Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. <sup>19</sup> It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, <sup>20</sup> that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn

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<sup>4</sup> Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [\*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament\*](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 17:8–13.

*aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.*

ESV Study Bible: (See [1 Sam. 8:5, 20](#)) Even though it will be several centuries before Israel has a king, Deuteronomy provides legislation for that eventuality, in language that suggests time elapsing: you possess it and dwell in it and then say. Kings descended from Abraham were anticipated in [Gen. 17:6](#), whom the LORD your God will choose. To counter the people's request to have a king like the nations, God insists that their king will be his choice. Yet God seems to allow the people some role in setting up a king. The king must be from among your brothers, that is, a fellow Israelite.

- a. This is another case study, but it does happen.
- b. Moses, is foreseeing a time when they want a king.
- c. Notice the details: they want a king, "like the other nations..."
- d. Verse 15: God gives them permission for the king.
- e. Strong emphasis that the king must be one of them, NOT a foreigner.
- f. Verses 16-17 emphasize that he is not to acquire wealth and not to return to Egypt.

The IVP BBC:

## **The King**

**17:14–20. king chosen by deity.** The Sumerian King List, which purports to contain the names of kings from before the flood until the end of the Ur III dynasty (c. 2000 B.C.), begins with the line, "When the kingship was lowered from heaven." The assumption throughout Mesopotamian history is that every ruler received his certification to reign from the gods. Thus Hammurabi (1792–1750 B.C.) speaks in the prologue to his law code of the gods' establishment of "an enduring kingship" in Babylon and how the gods Anum and Enlil specifically chose him to rule on behalf of the people. The result is an obligation imposed on the king to rule wisely and with justice, never abusing his power and being responsible to the commands and requirements of the gods. The situation is slightly different in Egypt, where each pharaoh was considered to be a god.

**17:16. proliferation of horses.** Since horses were used primarily to draw chariots and carry horsemen into battle, the acquisition of large numbers of these animals implies either an aggressive foreign policy or a monarch who wishes to impress his people and his neighbors with his wealth and power. The reference to Egypt is suggestive of dependence on that nation as an ally and a supplier of horses for war (Is 36:6–9). Such alliances in the late monarchy period proved disastrous for Israel and Judah and were roundly condemned by the prophets (Is 31:1–3; Mic 5:10).

**17:17. royal marriage as alliance.** Marriage was a tool of diplomacy throughout the ancient Near East. For instance, Zimri-Lim, the king of Mari (eighteenth century B.C.), used his daughters to cement alliances and establish treaties with his neighboring kingdoms. Similarly, Pharaoh Thutmose IV (1425–1412 B.C.) arranged a marriage with a daughter of the Mitannian king to demonstrate good relations and end a series of wars with that middle Euphrates kingdom. Solomon's seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3) were a measure of his power and wealth (just as horses are in Deut 17:16), especially his marriage to the daughter of the pharaoh (1 Kings 3:1). While the political advantages were quite evident, the danger of such marriages is demonstrated in the introduction of the worship of other gods by Solomon's wives (1 Kings 11:4–8).

**17:17. royal treasuries.** The theme of excessive acquisition of royal symbols of power (horses, wives, gold and silver) continues in this admonition against overtaxing the people simply to fill the royal treasury. All of the categories of wealth are said to lead to excessive pride, apostasy and a rejection or diminution of Yahweh's role (compare 8:11–14). The vanity of kings who amass wealth without purpose other than pride is found in Ecclesiastes 2:8–11 and Jeremiah 48:7. The treasuries typically contained the precious metal assets of temple and state, including contributions as well as plunder. Though coinage or bullion may have been included, much of it would be in the form of jewelry, vessels for ritual use, religious objects or the various accessories of royal or wealthy households. Payment of tribute at times required drawing from or even emptying the treasuries (see 1 Kings 14:26; 2 Kings 18:15). Excavations or descriptions of temples and palaces often indicate rooms as treasuries, and royal officers included keepers of the treasuries.<sup>5</sup>

- g. Verses 18-20 tell us that he is to write out the book of Deuteronomy.
- h. He is to write out a copy of the law as approved by the Levitical priest.
- i. Verse 19 is key: he shall keep the law with him, he shall learn to fear the Lord by keeping all of the words and statutes and doing them.
- j. Verse 20: it is important that he not stray and verse 20 ends with purpose, “so that he may continue living in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.”
- k. The blessings of the kingdom are contingent on following the Lord.

The ESV Study Bible summarizes this nicely: The warnings about too many horses and wives and too much wealth—which reflect the standard prerogatives of ancient kings in military, personal, and economic spheres—are precisely the pitfalls of Solomon ([1 Kings 4:26; 10:14; 11:3–4](#)). Here God is warning that governmental leaders will constantly face the temptation to abuse their power for the sake of personal gain, which is contrary to his will. Since Egypt was the place of slavery from which the Lord had just rescued Israel, it was prohibited for Israel to return to Egypt for help (e.g., [Isa. 31:1](#); cf. [Deut. 28:68](#)).

The ESV Study Bible: a copy of this law. This refers probably to [chs. 1–30](#) (see [31:9](#)). Even the king is to be under the authority of God's word or law (see [Josh. 1:7–9](#)). Reading and obeying the word of God trains people to fear the LORD (see note on [Deut. 6:1–2](#)). heart. See notes on [4:37–39](#); [6:5](#); [6:6](#). to the right hand or to the left. See [Josh. 1:7](#) and note on [Deut. 5:32–33](#).

VI. Deut. 18: 1-8: the Levites; remember the 4 offices of leadership; we have talked about judges and kings and this has to do with priests.

*“The Levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the Lord's offerings by fire and His portion.<sup>2</sup> They shall have no inheritance among their countrymen; the Lord is their inheritance, as He promised them.*

<sup>3</sup> *“Now this shall be the priests' due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, either an ox or a sheep, of which they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach. <sup>4</sup> You shall*

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<sup>5</sup> Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 17:14–17.

give him the first fruits of your grain, your new wine, and your oil, and the first shearing of your sheep. <sup>5</sup> For the Lord your God has chosen him and his sons from all your tribes, to stand and serve in the name of the Lord forever.

<sup>6</sup> “Now if a Levite comes from any of your towns throughout Israel where he resides, and comes whenever he desires to the place which the Lord chooses,<sup>7</sup> then he shall serve in the name of the Lord his God, like all his fellow Levites who stand there before the Lord. <sup>8</sup> They shall eat equal portions, except what they receive from the sale of their fathers’ estates.

- a. Verse 1 is re-stating what we already know.
- b. Verse 2: the Lord is their inheritance.
- c. Verses 3-4 are what the people should send them: *either an ox or a sheep, of which they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach.* <sup>4</sup> You shall give him the first fruits of your grain, your new wine, and your oil, and the first shearing of your sheep.
- d. Verse 5 is powerful, think about it: the Lord has chosen... to stand and serve in the Name of the Lord Forever.
- e. Verses 6-8 are dealing with a special circumstance of a traveling Levite.

The IVP BBC gives insight:

During the early settlement period, Levites officiated at local shrines and altars. It would have been their role to serve as religious professionals, performing sacrifices and instructing the people on the law. While some Levites may have been tied to these places for generations (1 Sam 1:3), there is also evidence of itinerant Levites, who traveled about the country and were hired to serve for a time at a local shrine or high place (Judg 17:7–13). Without an inheritance of their own (Josh 14:3–4), the Levites stood out within a society that was territorial. The Levites were supposed to instruct the people in proper worship, though the book of Judges makes it clear that sometimes they were a major part of the problem rather than the solution. They were supposed to be preservers of tradition and law and would have often served as judges.<sup>6</sup>

VII. Deut. 18: 9-14: spiritualism forbidden

<sup>9</sup> “When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. <sup>10</sup> There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft,

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<sup>6</sup> Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [\*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament\*](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 18:6–8.

or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,<sup>11</sup> or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.<sup>12</sup> For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you.<sup>13</sup> You shall be blameless before the Lord your God.<sup>14</sup> For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do so.

- a. We have talked about this before and Deuteronomy is repeating this because of its importance.
- b. They are not to get into the pagan practices.
- c. Making children pass through the fire is child sacrifice.

The ESV Study Bible summarizes this: A thorough list is given of people and practices seeking divine help, guidance, or revelation apart from the Lord. No such practices are to be tolerated (e.g., [Lev. 19:26](#); [1 Samuel 28](#); [2 Kings 17:17](#); [Isa. 2:6](#); [21:6](#); [Mic. 5:12](#)). All are abominable ([Deut. 18:9, 12](#)). Even child sacrifice was for some pagan religions an act of seeking divine guidance or help ([2 Kings 3:26–27](#)). Deliberately juxtaposed with this section are instructions about God’s prophets ([Deut. 18:15–19](#)), the avenue for true revelation.

- d. Verse 12: notice this: because of these abominations the Lord is driving them out. The land was corrupt by these evil practices. The Israelites are to be set-apart.

#### VIII. Deut. 18: 15-20: a prophet like Moses (4<sup>th</sup> office of leadership the prophet)

<sup>15</sup> “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.<sup>16</sup> This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.’<sup>17</sup> The Lord said to me, ‘They have spoken well.<sup>18</sup> I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.<sup>19</sup> It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.

The ESV Study Bible shares: Now God speaks of Moses as a prophet and promises a future prophet like him for Israel. In the first century A.D., Jews expected a final prophet, whom NT writers identified as Jesus ([Acts 3:22–24](#); [7:37](#); cf. [John 1:21](#)).

- a. The Lord will provide a Prophet and they must listen.
- b. The prophet speaks the Lord Words.

#### IX. Deut. 18: 20-22: testing the prophets

<sup>20</sup> But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.<sup>21</sup> You may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’<sup>22</sup> When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

- a. This is a simple test of the prophets.

- b. False prophets are put to death.

Nostradamus was wrong and not a prophet

IVP BBC:

### Receiving Information from Deity

**18:10. divination.** See the comment on Leviticus 19:26. Divination involves a variety of methods used by prophets (Mic 3:11), soothsayers, mediums and sorcerers to determine the will of the gods and to predict the future. These included the examination of the entrails of sacrificial animals, the analysis of omens of various types and the reading of the future in natural and unnatural phenomena (see Gen 44:5). While there were acceptable divination practices among the Israelites (use of the Urim and Thummim), what is being condemned here is a group of practitioners, who served as professional fortunetellers.

**18:10. sorcery.** Since magic in the ancient world was a means of contacting the supernatural realm, it was considered to have two facets: good magic and evil. In Mesopotamia and among the Hittites harmful magic was practiced by sorcerers and was punishable by death. It involved the use of potions, figurines and curses designed to bring death, disease or bad luck to the victim. This was distinguished from the practical and helpful magic of professional exorcists and “old women,” whose role included the rites involved in temple construction and dedication, as well as medical aid. Only in Egypt was there no distinction between white and black magic. There the practitioners’ job involved intimidating demons and other divine powers to perform required tasks or to remove curses. The Israelite law totally rejected all these practices because of their polytheistic character and the diminishing of Yahweh’s role as lord of creation (see Ex 22:18).

**18:10. omens.** One of the priestly classes mentioned in Mesopotamian texts is the *baru*-diviners. It was their task to perform extispicy (generally on lambs), examining the liver and interpreting this omen for the person who has asked for a reading of the future. The *baru* might be consulted by a king who wished to go to war (compare 1 Kings 22:6), a merchant about to send out a caravan or a person who had become ill. Government officials often included the report of omens in their letters (Mari texts). However, since omens were not always clear, several groups of diviners might be used before action was taken. An entire body of omen texts (with descriptions of past events and predictions) were archived in temples and palaces for consultation by staff diviners. Even clay models of livers were used in schooling apprentices in the trade.

**18:10. witchcraft.** Like sorcery, witchcraft was generally classed as an illegitimate use of magic. Its practitioners might serve in royal courts or temples or as local herbalists and itinerant diviners, who would, for a price, provide the means to harm or destroy an enemy (see Lev 19:26; 20:6; 2 Kings 21:6). The Mesopotamian distinction between good and evil magic is lost in Israelite law, where the female witch is condemned (Ex 22:18) and the words of sorcerers are declared to be unreliable (Jer 27:9; Mal 3:5).

**18:11. spells, medium, spiritist.** The practitioners of spiritism and sorcery are condemned because of their association with Canaanite religion and because their “art” attempted to circumvent Yahweh by seeking knowledge and power from spirits. They represented a form of popular religion that was closer to the folk practices of the common people and served as a form of “shadow religion” for many. Sometimes, because of its association with divination, their rituals and methods stood in direct opposition to official religion or as an alternative to be used in times of desperation

(see Saul's use of the outlawed witch of Endor in 1 Sam 28). Sorcery and potions used in the practice of magic were also banned in the Code of Hammurabi and the Middle Assyrian laws, suggesting that the prohibition and fear of these practices were not unique to Israel.

**18:11. consulting the dead.** Although there was no clear sense of an afterlife in ancient Mesopotamia, no envisioning of a place of reward or punishment, ancestor worship did exist, and offerings were made to the spirits of the dead. A group of magical practitioners created a means for consulting the spirits of the dead to find out about the future (see the witch of Endor in 1 Sam 28:7–14). This was called necromancy and could involve consulting a particular or “familiar” spirit, or it could be the raising of any ghost attracted by the spells of the medium. Ritual pits, stuffed with bread and blood, were commonly used in Hittite ritual by diviners, and the Greek hero Odysseus used a pit filled with blood to attract the shades of his dead companions. It was believed that if libations were poured out to them, the spirits of dead ancestors could offer protection and help to those still living. In Babylon the disembodied spirit (*utukki*) or the ghost (*etemmu*) could become very dangerous if not cared for, and such spirits were often the objects of incantations. Proper care for the dead would begin with proper burial and would continue with ongoing gifts and honor of the memory and name of the deceased. The firstborn was responsible for maintaining this ancestor worship and therefore inherited the family gods (often images of deceased ancestors).

**18:10–13. worldview basis for prohibiting divination.** The worldview promulgated in the Old Testament maintains that Yahweh is the sole God and is the ultimate power and authority in the universe. In stark contrast, the polytheistic religions of the ancient Near East did not consider their gods (even as a group) to represent the ultimate power in the universe. Instead they believed in an impersonal primordial realm that was the source of knowledge and power. Divination attempted to tap into that realm for the purposes of gaining knowledge; incantations tried to utilize its power. Both divination and incantation can therefore be seen to assume a worldview that was contradictory to Yahweh's revealed position.

**18:14–22. function of the prophet.** These individuals were more than simple religious practitioners. While some of them were members of the priestly community, they stood outside that institution. Their role was to challenge the establishment and the social order, to remind the leadership and the people of their obligation to the covenant with Yahweh and to provide warning of the punishment that went with violation of the covenantal agreement. The prophet is invested with special powers, a message and a mission, and there is a special compulsion associated with being called as a prophet. It can be denied for a time (see Jonah's flight) but ultimately must be answered. It should also be noted that prophets may be reluctant to speak harsh words or condemnations of their own people. When this occurs, the prophet will experience a compulsion to speak that cannot be resisted (Jer 20:9). Since they speak a message that comes from God, they separate themselves from the words and thus cannot be charged with treason, sedition or doomsaying. The message is thus the most important thing about the prophet, not the prophet himself or herself. Certainly, there were some prophets like Balaam and Elijah who acquired a personal reputation, but this was based on their message or their ability to speak for God. For a prophet to gain credibility with the people, the message must come true. Although sometimes the prophets are mentioned as part of the cult community (Isaiah and Ezekiel) and as court prophets (Nathan), they always seem to be able to stand apart from these institutions to criticize them and to point out where they have broken the covenant with God. In the early periods of the monarchy, the prophets primarily addressed the king and his court, much like their ancient Near Eastern counterparts did (they have been termed “preclassical” prophets). Beginning in the eighth century,

however, they turned their attention increasingly to the people and became the social/spiritual commentators whom we most readily identify with the prophetic institution (the “classical” prophets and the “writing” prophets). Their role was not to predict as much as it was to advise of God’s policies and plans.

**18:20–22. false prophecy.** Like Deuteronomy 13:1–3 and its discussion of persons urging the worship of other gods, false prophets are generally those who speak in the name of other gods. Deuteronomy discounts the existence of these other gods and thus the veracity of their prophets. In cases where prophets presume to speak in Yahweh’s name without permission, the test of true prophecy is whether what they say actually occurs. There are a number of examples of false prophecy cited in the biblical text. Jeremiah rails against it in his accusation against Hananiah (Jer 28:12–17) and in his warning against other prophets who predicted a quick end to the exile (29:20–23). In some cases, the potential for confusion involved is such that events must take their course before the true prophet is revealed (see 1 Kings 22). The Israelites were not alone in their caution concerning false prophecy. In other cultures, however, they generally used divination to try to confirm the message of the prophet, but this was not permissible for Israel.

**18:14–22. prophecy in the ancient Near East.** Texts from Mesopotamia, Syria and Anatolia contain a large number of prophetic utterances, demonstrating the existence of prophets throughout much of ancient Near Eastern history. While some of these texts may actually fall into the realm of wisdom literature or omen reports, many involve individuals who claim to have received a message from a god. Most famous among these texts are about fifty texts from Mari (eighteenth century B.C.) that contain reports from both male and female prophets: warnings about plots against the king, admonitions from a god to build a temple or to provide a funerary offering, and assurances of military victory. These prophets present divine messages received in dreams or through omens. Others are said to fall into a trance state and speak as ecstatic prophets. This type of prophecy is also found in the eleventh-century B.C. Egyptian tale of Wenamon and in 1 Samuel 10:5–11 and 2 Kings 3:15.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 18:9–22.