

The Book of Deuteronomy, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 12: Priests, Prophets, and the Prophet to Come

Deuteronomy 18:1-22

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson stands on one of the towering messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. God's promise to raise up "a prophet like you from among their brothers" (18:18) is not a vague hope; the apostles proclaim its fulfillment in Jesus plainly and publicly. Peter says, "Moses said, The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers", and warns that "every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed" (Acts 3:22-23); Stephen says the same (Acts 7:37). The doctrinal stake could not be higher: Jesus is the Prophet to whom every person must listen, and refusing Him is no light matter.

The lesson also handles the chapter's stern prohibition of the occult. God forbids divination, sorcery, mediums, and necromancy as abominations, and that warning still stands. The hunger to know and control the future apart from God remains, dressed in modern clothes. We aim to name these practices clearly as forbidden and to point to the true alternative, the God who speaks His word.

Beyond doctrine, the lesson aims at formation. It asks where we find our security (the Lord, or our possessions), where we seek guidance (His word, or counterfeit voices), and how well we listen to Christ the Prophet. The true-prophet test trains us to weigh every teaching against God's confirmed word. The God who would not leave His people groping in the dark calls us to listen, wholly and gladly, to His Son.

Question 1

Student Question:

What does God's provision for the Levites, who had no inheritance because "the Lord is their inheritance", reveal about Him as the true portion and security of those who serve Him (18:1-8)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The priests and Levites received no allotment of land like the other tribes. Instead, God declared, "They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the Lord is their inheritance" (18:2). They would live off the offerings brought to God, the portions of the sacrifices, the firstfruits. Their livelihood was bound up with God's people's faithfulness and, ultimately, with God Himself.

This was a daily lesson in dependence. While other tribes could look to their fields and herds for security, the Levite had to look to the Lord. His portion was not acreage but God. In a sense, his lack of land was a gift, a continual reminder that real security is found in God alone.

There is rich truth here about God as the true inheritance of those who serve Him. The Psalms pick up this very language: "The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup" (Psalm 16:5). What the Levites lived out literally, every believer is invited to embrace spiritually: God Himself, not our possessions, is our portion and our security.

This points forward to the New Testament, where all of God's people are made "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9) whose inheritance is God Himself and the riches of Christ. The arrangement that set the Levites apart anticipates a people whose true wealth is not earthly but found in the Lord, who is "our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (Ephesians 1:14).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Levites had God, not land, as their inheritance
- Lack of land as a daily lesson in dependence
- God Himself as the true portion and security
- The Psalms echo: the Lord my portion and cup
- All believers a royal priesthood whose wealth is in Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the Lord was the Levites' inheritance?
- How is depending on God for provision a gift rather than a hardship?
- How can God Himself become your true security?

Question 2

Student Question:

The Levites were to find their security in God rather than in land or possessions. Where are you tempted to root your security in what you own, and what would it mean to make the Lord your portion?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Levite's situation presses a question on all of us: where is your security rooted? The other tribes could point to land and herds; the Levite could point only to God. Most of us instinctively look to what we own, our savings, our home, our job, for the sense of safety the Levite had to find in the Lord.

There is nothing wrong with possessions, but there is everything wrong with resting our hearts on them. Jesus warned about the man who built bigger barns and felt secure, only to lose it all

overnight (Luke 12:16–21). Possessions make a poor foundation; they can vanish, and they cannot finally hold us.

This question asks for honesty. When you imagine losing your financial cushion, your job, your home, how deep does the fear go? The depth of that fear often reveals how much of your security has quietly migrated from God to your stuff.

To make the Lord your portion is to relocate your security, to say with the psalmist, “The Lord is my chosen portion”, and to mean it. Practically, this grows through giving (which loosens our grip), through gratitude (which reminds us all is gift), and through trusting God in seasons when the possessions are few. The Levite’s call is, in the end, every disciple’s call.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Security rooted in possessions versus in God
- Possessions as a poor foundation that can vanish
- Fear of loss as a diagnostic of misplaced security
- Giving and gratitude as means of relocating trust
- Making the Lord one’s portion in practice

Discussion Prompts

- Where is your security actually rooted right now?
- What does your fear of loss reveal about your trust?
- What practice could help you make the Lord your portion?

Question 3

Student Question:

Why does God so severely forbid the occult practices of the nations, child sacrifice, divination, sorcery, mediums, and necromancy, calling them an abomination (18:9–14)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

As Israel entered Canaan, God forbade them to imitate its religion. The list is sweeping: no one who burns “his son or his daughter as an offering”, no one who practices “divination” or “tells fortunes” or “interprets omens”, no “sorcerer” or “charmer”, no “medium” or “necromancer” who inquires of the dead (18:10–11). “Whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord”, and it was for these very practices that God was driving out the nations (18:12).

These were not harmless superstitions. Child sacrifice was monstrous cruelty done in the name of religion. Divination, sorcery, and consulting the dead were attempts to gain knowledge and power from spiritual sources other than God. Behind them lay both deception and, Scripture indicates elsewhere, real spiritual darkness opposed to God.

Why does God call them abominations? Because they reject His rightful place. To consult a medium or read omens is to seek guidance, comfort, or control from somewhere other than the living God, treating Him as insufficient or absent. It is spiritual unfaithfulness, going behind God's back to other powers.

This prohibition is not merely Old Testament ceremony; it reflects God's unchanging character and is reaffirmed in the New Testament, where sorcery is listed among the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20) and those who practiced magic burned their books at conversion (Acts 19:19). The occult in any form, ancient or modern, remains forbidden, because it turns from the God who speaks to counterfeit voices that cannot save.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sweeping prohibition of occult practices
- Child sacrifice as monstrous religious cruelty
- Divination and necromancy as guidance sought apart from God
- The occult as spiritual unfaithfulness to God
- Reaffirmed in the New Testament (Galatians 5:20; Acts 19:19)
- The occult forbidden in any form, ancient or modern

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God call these practices an abomination?
- What hunger lies behind divination and consulting the dead?
- How does the New Testament confirm this prohibition?

Question 4

Student Question:

The occult promises knowledge and control apart from God. In what subtle or obvious ways are you tempted to seek guidance, control, or comfort from sources other than the Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The occult promised what every human heart craves: knowledge of the future and a measure of control over it, apart from submitting to God. While few of us are tempted toward literal séances, the underlying hunger is universal and finds many modern outlets.

Consider the subtler forms: obsessing over horoscopes “just for fun”, reaching for fortune-tellers or psychics in anxiety, chasing superstitions, or, more respectably, trying to seize control of our future through worry, manipulation, or frantic self-reliance that never pauses to seek God. The common thread is seeking guidance, control, or comfort from somewhere other than the Lord.

This question invites honest reflection. Where do you turn when you are anxious about the future or desperate for direction? Do you seek the Lord through His word and prayer, or do you reach for counterfeit assurances that bypass Him? Even good things, advice, planning, research, become dangerous when they replace listening to God.

The cure is not to stop seeking guidance but to seek it rightly, from the God who speaks. Israel was forbidden the occult and given a Prophet instead. We are not left to charms and guesses; we have God's word and God's Son. The antidote to every counterfeit voice is to listen to the true One.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The universal craving to know and control the future
- Modern and subtle forms of occult and superstition
- Worry and frantic self-reliance as control apart from God
- Seeking comfort and direction from counterfeit sources
- Seeking guidance rightly from the God who speaks

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you turn when anxious about the future?
- What subtle counterfeits of guidance tempt you?
- How can you seek direction from God rather than around Him?

Question 5

Student Question:

God promised, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you", and required that the people listen to him. What does this promise reveal about God's commitment to speak to His people and to guide them by His word rather than by the occult (18:15-19)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Right after forbidding the occult, God supplies the true alternative: "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" (18:15). The people had asked at Horeb not to hear God's terrifying voice directly (18:16-17), and God graciously promised to speak through prophets, and ultimately through one Prophet like Moses.

This is the heart of the contrast. The nations groped in the dark, consulting the dead and reading omens, because they had no word from God. Israel did not need such things, because God Himself would speak. "I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him" (18:18). God's answer to the human hunger for guidance was not a technique but His own revealed word.

Notice the seriousness God attaches to this word: “Whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him” (18:19). To refuse the prophet’s word was to answer to God Himself. The privilege of being spoken to carried the weighty responsibility of listening.

This reveals God’s gracious commitment to His people. He does not leave us to superstition and guesswork. He speaks. The whole trajectory runs toward the One who is the Word made flesh, but already here we see the principle: God’s people are guided not by the occult but by listening to the word God Himself provides. The fuller messianic weight of this promise is taken up in question nine.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s word given as the true alternative to the occult
- God graciously speaks through the prophet
- Israel needs no divination because God speaks
- Refusing the prophet’s word means answering to God
- The privilege and responsibility of being spoken to

Discussion Prompts

- How is the promised prophet God’s answer to the occult?
- What does it reveal that God commits Himself to speak to His people?
- Why is refusing the prophet’s word so serious?

Question 6

Student Question:

God’s people are called to listen to the Prophet He sends. How well are you actually listening to and obeying God’s word, and where have you been treating it as optional rather than as the voice you must heed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God said of the prophet, “it is to him you shall listen” (18:15). The whole point of God speaking is that His people would hear and obey. It is possible to possess God’s word, even to study it, and still not truly listen, treating it as information to consider rather than the voice we must heed.

This question presses the gap between hearing and obeying. James warns against those who are “hearers” of the word who deceive themselves and are not “doers” (James 1:22). We can nod at Scripture on Sunday and quietly set it aside on Monday whenever it crosses our preferences. That is to treat God’s word as optional.

Examine yourself honestly. Are there areas where you have decided, in practice, that God's clear word does not apply to you, your speech, your money, your relationships, your purity, your forgiveness of others? Where have you been a polite hearer rather than an obedient doer?

To listen to the Prophet is to receive His word as binding and to act on it. Jesus said the wise man hears His words "and does them" (Matthew 7:24). The measure of our listening is not how much we know but how fully we obey. The God who graciously speaks deserves to be truly heard.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Possessing the word versus truly listening to it
- The gap between hearer and doer (James 1:22)
- Treating God's word as optional where it crosses us
- Self-examination for areas of practical disobedience
- Listening measured by obedience, not information

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you treated God's word as optional?
- What is the difference between hearing and truly listening?
- What clear command is God calling you to obey now?

Question 7

Student Question:

What test did God give to distinguish a true prophet from a false one, and what does this teach about the importance of measuring all teaching against God's confirmed word (18:20-22)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Because false prophets would also arise, God gave a test. A prophet who spoke presumptuously in God's name, or spoke in the name of other gods, "that same prophet shall die" (18:20). And the people's question, "How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?" is answered: "if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken" (18:21-22).

The test was the reliability of God's confirmed word. A true prophet's words came true; a false prophet's did not. This was not the only test, for elsewhere even a sign-working prophet who calls people to other gods is to be rejected (13:1-3), but it established a crucial principle: claims to speak for God must be tested, not swallowed whole.

This guards God's people from being led astray by confident voices. Presumption and sincerity are not enough; a prophet might speak boldly and be utterly false. The standard was objective, God's word proven true, not the speaker's charisma or conviction.

The principle endures and intensifies in the New Testament. “Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits” (1 John 4:1). The Bereans were commended for examining even Paul's preaching “to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). All teaching must be measured against God's confirmed, completed word in Scripture. We are never to accept a teaching simply because the teacher is impressive or sincere.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A test to distinguish true and false prophets
- False prophecy as a deadly serious matter
- Fulfillment as a mark of God's genuine word
- Claims to speak for God must be tested, not swallowed
- Test the spirits; examine all teaching (1 John 4:1; Acts 17:11)
- Scripture, God's confirmed word, as the standard

Discussion Prompts

- What test did God give for distinguishing a true prophet?
- Why must claims to speak for God always be tested?
- How does Scripture serve as our standard today?

Question 8

Student Question:

We are surrounded by competing voices claiming to speak for God. How carefully do you test what you hear, teachers, books, and influences, against the confirmed word of God, and where might you be listening uncritically?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We live amid a flood of voices claiming to speak for God: preachers, authors, podcasts, social media influencers, and countless confident opinions. The command to test the prophet is intensely practical for us. Not everything said in God's name is from God, however popular or polished.

The danger is listening uncritically, accepting teaching because it is appealing, because the teacher is likeable, or because everyone around us embraces it. The Bereans set the better pattern, receiving the word eagerly yet “examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Eagerness and discernment belong together.

This question asks how carefully you weigh what you hear. Do you measure teachers, books, and influences against Scripture, or do you absorb them passively? Are there voices you follow simply out of loyalty or habit, without ever checking them against God's word?

Testing all things is not cynicism; it is faithfulness. It protects us from being “tossed to and fro... by every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14). The student of God’s word learns to hold every teaching up to the light of Scripture and to keep what is true while rejecting what is not.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A flood of competing voices claiming God’s authority
- The danger of uncritical, passive listening
- Eagerness joined with Berean discernment (Acts 17:11)
- Following voices out of loyalty without testing
- Discernment as faithfulness, not cynicism

Discussion Prompts

- How carefully do you test the teaching you take in?
- Which voices might you be following uncritically?
- How can you grow more Berean in your listening?

Question 9

Student Question:

The promise of “a prophet like me” is one of the great messianic prophecies, and the apostles proclaim its fulfillment plainly in Jesus. How is Christ the Prophet like Moses, why must every soul listen to Him, and what is at stake in refusing Him (Acts 3:22–23; 7:37)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The promise of “a prophet like me” (18:15, 18) stands among the greatest messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. While God raised up many prophets, the singular promise pointed beyond them all to one supreme Prophet like Moses. And the apostles, preaching after the resurrection, identify Him without hesitation. Peter declares to Israel: “Moses said, The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you” (Acts 3:22). Stephen says the same: “This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers” (Acts 7:37). The fulfillment is Jesus, proclaimed plainly and publicly.

Jesus is like Moses in profound ways, yet greater. Moses led Israel out of Egypt; Jesus leads His people out of bondage to sin. Moses mediated the old covenant; Jesus mediates a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6). Moses spoke the words God put in his mouth; Jesus is Himself the Word made flesh, and He said, “I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment, what to say and what to speak” (John 12:49). Hebrews frames the whole sweep: God who long ago “spoke to our fathers by the prophets” has now “spoken to us by his Son” (Hebrews 1:1–2). Jesus is the final, fullest, decisive word of God.

This is why the command “to him you shall listen” carries ultimate weight. At the transfiguration the Father’s own voice echoed Deuteronomy 18: “This is my beloved Son... listen to him” (Matthew 17:5). Jesus is not one voice among many to be weighed against our preferences; He is the Prophet to whom every soul must listen. To hear Him is to hear God; to refuse Him is to refuse God.

And the stakes are absolute. God had said, “whoever will not listen to my words... I myself will require it of him” (18:19), and Peter sharpens it: “And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people” (Acts 3:23). To reject Christ the Prophet is not a neutral preference; it is to forfeit one’s soul. There is no salvation in turning from the One God appointed to speak His final word.

So this chapter, written long before Bethlehem, sets Jesus before us with stunning clarity. He is the Prophet God promised, the One in whom God has spoken decisively and finally. Everything hangs on whether we listen to Him. We come to Him as God commands, hearing the gospel, believing He is Lord and Christ, repenting, confessing Him, and being baptized into Him (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4), and then we spend our lives listening to and obeying the Prophet to whom all must give heed. To listen to Jesus is life; to refuse Him is ruin.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The prophet like Moses among the greatest messianic prophecies
- Apostles proclaim its fulfillment in Jesus plainly (Acts 3:22–23; 7:37)
- Jesus like Moses yet greater, the Word made flesh (John 12:49)
- God has spoken finally by His Son (Hebrews 1:1–2)
- The Father commands: listen to Him (Matthew 17:5)
- Refusing the Prophet means being destroyed (Acts 3:23)
- Coming to Christ and listening to Him as life itself

Discussion Prompts

- In what ways is Jesus the Prophet like Moses, yet greater?
- Why must every soul listen to Him, and what is at stake in refusing?
- How does this chapter call you to listen to Christ today?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across this chapter, name one specific way Jesus is forming you through it, whether in where you find security, what voices you reject, or how fully you listen to Him as the Prophet.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This chapter moved from the Levites who found their inheritance in God, to the stern prohibition of the occult, to the towering promise of the Prophet to come, to the test of true and false prophets. Every thread converges on Jesus: He is our true portion, the One who answers our hunger for guidance, the Prophet to whom we must listen, and the standard against which every voice is measured.

The chapter asks us to relocate our security to God, to reject every counterfeit voice and source of control, and above all to listen, fully and gladly, to Christ the Prophet on whom everything hangs.

This capstone asks you to name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this chapter. Perhaps it is where you find your security, a counterfeit voice or habit He is asking you to reject, or a fresh resolve to truly listen to and obey Him as the Prophet.

Name one concrete thing and act on it. The God who would not leave His people in the dark has spoken to you in His Son. The fitting response is not a vague nod but specific obedience, listening to Jesus and doing what He says, this week and every week, as the Prophet to whom you belong.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Inheritance, the occult, and the Prophet converging on Christ
- Security relocated to God
- Counterfeit voices rejected
- Listening to Christ the Prophet as the heart of the chapter
- Specific obedience as the fitting response

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of this chapter pressed most deeply on you?
- What one specific thing is Jesus forming in you here?
- What concrete step of listening obedience will you take this week?