



## **He is our Portion (Deuteronomy 18:1-22)**

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The number of American who identify with no religion in particular is increasing. Perhaps you can relate. Christians have their God. Muslims have their god. Other people practice alternative forms of spirituality. Maybe you're not convinced there even is a god. Or if you believe there is, what's with all the fuss about "worshipping" him in a certain kind of way? If it works for you, great. But why not join the growing number who aren't into worshipping anyone or anything at all?

If that's you, my friend, or if that sounds exactly like what a coworker or classmate believes, consider this. You don't have to identify with a formal religion or a religious organization to be a worshipper. What is worship? It's a personal expression of devotion, delight, and dependence. Answer the following questions and you will discover your functional god of choice.

Where do you ultimately turn for provision? Where do you ultimately turn for wisdom? That's your chosen object of worship, no matter how confidently you profess allegiance to no religion in particular. It could be your own diligence or understanding. It could be what feels right to you or what other people approve. It could be the behavior of your kids. It could be the esteem of your peers. We're all mastered by something.

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is preaching to the Jewish people on the plains of the Jordan right before he dies. He's preparing them for the spiritual challenges they will face across the river in Canaan, in the land the Lord would soon give them under Joshua's leadership. He addresses a variety of imminent scenarios in Ch. 18. But there's a central theme, a consistent current running throughout all he says. "Israel, look to the LORD as your portion."

Where should you turn for the provision you need to sustain life? Look to me. Where should you turn for the spiritual wisdom you need to navigate life? Look to me. I am your provider. I am your wisdom. I am your portion. Oh, that we might say with King David what Josh read earlier: The LORD is my chosen portion...I bless the LORD who gives me counsel...I have set the LORD always before me...You make known to me the path of life...I have no good apart from you...In you I take refuge.

Is that how you're living right now, friend? You may have worshiped something or someone else this week. Deuteronomy 18 teaches we have better reasons to worship the Lord. Friend, **look to the Lord as your portion in all he says and gives.** So how do we do that in practical terms? How should we look to the Lord as our portion?

### **1) TRUST THE LORD TO PROVIDE AS YOU MINISTER IN HIS NAME (vv. 1-8)**

Moses begins in vv. 1-8 by describing how the entire nation should provide for the Levitical priests, the adult males in the tribe of Levi. What made them so special? Numbers 18:6, "And behold, I have taken your brothers the Levites from among the people of Israel. They are a gift to you, given to the LORD, to do the service of the tent of meeting."

The Lord set apart one of the twelve tribes for a unique purpose. They were responsible for conducting the ministry God required at the tabernacle where God dwelt in the midst of his people. They enjoyed the privileges of access to God's presence, serving him on the nation's behalf, and teaching God's Word to his people.

In exchange, the Lord required the other tribes to set aside certain portions of their offerings (v. 3) and the "firstfruits" of the produce of their land (v. 4) for the Levites. Unlike the rest of the tribes, they didn't receive a large allocation of agricultural land. V. 2, "They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the LORD is their inheritance..." They had to trust the Lord to provide as they ministered in his name.

From the surrounding verses, we know Moses isn't commending a life of poverty. The rest of the nation is clearly charged with responsibility to make material provision for the Levites. Yahweh cares for all his people, body and soul.

So what does it mean for the Lord to be Levi's inheritance? It means Levi will be nourished by what is rightfully the Lord's. V. 1, "They shall eat the LORD's food offerings as their inheritance." What is His is theirs. They will be fed not at a table they spread with the labor of their hands, but at a table the Lord has prepared for them! The unique, material dependence the Lord required of Levi reflected the dependence the Lord required from the entire nation.

Deut 11:11-15, "The land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the LORD your God cares for...If you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you



may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil. And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you shall eat and be full.”

Yes, I am Levi’s portion in a visibly material way. But even though the rest of you have land, you are just as dependent on my provision. Follow their example! Brothers and sisters, what does the Levitical priesthood under the Old Covenant ultimately point toward in the New? It’s not pastors or other fulltime Christian workers. It’s Jesus. He’s our great priest!

He’s the one who stands and ministers (v. 5) in the name of the LORD on our behalf, pleading the merit of his shed blood. He’s the one who guards the church, the people of God in whom the Spirit dwells. He’s the Word made flesh who teaches us all we need for life and godliness. He’s the faithful Son who shows us what it means to be fully human, depending on the Father for all our needs. All Levi was supposed to do, Jesus does in a greater and infinitely better way!

Heb 7:23–25, “The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

And here’s the amazing thing. When you become a Christian, Jesus’ privileges and blessings become your privileges and blessings, including the privilege of serving as a priest. 1 Pe 2:9, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood...” Do we have the exact same office? No! There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. But do we share in his priestly privileges? Absolutely! As Jesus stands and ministers before the Lord (Deut 18:7) so do we as his people.

What’s my job as a pastor? Eph 4:12, “To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Upholding the worship of God is your work! Guarding the purity of our church is your work. Taking God’s Word and helping people to trust and obey him is your work! That’s not what pastors get paid to do. That’s the privilege God has given you!

What does God say to the Levites as model Israelites? Trust me to provide as you minister in my name. What does God say to you, Christian? Trust me to provide as you minister in my name. I will be faithful to care for you too! Is there a work of ministry you know God has called you to, friend, where the fear of lacking provision is keeping you from saying yes? Remember, trusting the Lord isn’t just a nice idea or a comforting spiritual notion. It requires action. It looks like something.

It looks like quitting a second job or declining a promotion so you can spend time ministering to your wife and kids. It looks like giving sacrificially to resource gospel ministry instead of accumulating a larger nest egg. It looks like asking your non-Christian friend a spiritual question when you don't have all the answers. It looks like stepping into a new realm of service in the church even when you feel weak and insufficient. Why can we trust God in those ways and many more, brothers and sisters? 2 Cor 9:8, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."

I think of my boy's experience of going on a trip with their mom versus my boy's experience of going places with just me. Mom, I need water? It's right here, son. Mom, I need food. It's right here, son. Mom, I need some dry socks. They're right here, son. Dad, I need hand sanitizer. Yeah...I didn't think to bring that.

God isn't like me. He's like Aliza. He knows your need. He made you dependent. He will show himself faithful! The Lord's call to Levi is the Lord's call to you, Christian. Trust him to provide as you minister in his name. The nation of Israel often failed the Levites. The True Israel, Christ Jesus, will never fail you.

## **2) DO NOT SEEK WISDOM IN THE KINGDOM OF DARKNESS (vv. 9-13)**

The spiritual kingdom and power of Satan is just as real as the spiritual kingdom and power of God. Eph 6:12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." The Evil One's doom is sure, but his present influence is deadly.

1 Pe 5:8, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." How does the Evil One devour us? His tactics haven't changed since the Garden of Eden. He sets himself up as an alternative source of spiritual knowledge, guidance, and power. "Eve, don't look to God to reveal the truth. Listen to me."

Satan knows many things about the past, present, and future. He's a cunning foe. He's able to reveal many things to those who lend their ear. But the spiritual knowledge he gives, even when partially true, doesn't produce life and joy. It leads to slavery, fear, and death. Commenting on vv. 9-14, Christopher Wright observes:

“It is a universal human desire to know the unknown, to have some preview of the future, to get guidance for decisions, to exercise control over others and ward off the harm others may aim at oneself. Alienated from the living God, humans devise the dark arts...for such purposes.”

That’s exactly what the Canaanites did. They sought wisdom in the kingdom of darkness. They didn’t look to God as the way, the truth, or the life. They looked to the Evil One. And in rejecting God’s wisdom, God’s revelation, God’s guidance, they rejected God himself. Vv. 10-12, “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 or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD.”

The Lord forbids any practice that traffics in the occult, that involves seeking spiritual guidance and power apart from the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Whether it feels as innocent as a horoscope or as deadly as pagan witchcraft, to engage in such things is more than toying with alternative forms of spirituality. You are embracing what God hates. You are exchanging dependence and trust in the authority of his revelation for the word of an imposter. To traffic in the occult is to commune with the Father of Lies, to commit spiritual treason, and betray “the LORD your God” – as Moses indicates three times in vv. 12-14.

Now I doubt many of you are thinking, “Thanks for that warning, Matthew. You know, I was just wondering this morning whether I should experiment with a little voodoo.” The temptation to engage with the occult isn’t high on the list of perceived spiritual dangers for Christians in the west. Alternative forms of spirituality, witchcraft included, are becoming more commonplace. But here’s where I see the greatest risk for most of us.

**Example #1:** Whether the games we play, the movies we watch, or the books we read, we slowly but surely think of spiritual evil as entertainment. “Hey man, want to go watch that new horror flick? I heard it’s pretty epic.” I’m not going to give you a list of movies God approves. Such a list doesn’t exist. But I warn you Christian, on the authority of the Word of God, guard your soul. Many a producer, many a screenwriter, delves into the demonic in an attempt to give you an even bigger fright than the last year’s mini-series.

Spiritual darkness isn’t funny or idle entertainment. It’s more real than you know. And Satan would love nothing more than to dull your senses and sear your conscience such

that when the power of darkness is literally on display before your eyes, you're thinking about the popcorn.

Scripture doesn't hide our eyes from the reality of the occult. Nor should we. But there is a huge difference between becoming numb to evil and rejoicing in the triumph of Christ over evil. I'm not talking about what you can watch or read without getting "too scared." I'm talking about ensuring you perceive as abominable what God says is abominable.

**Example #2:** Every evil practice in vv. 10-11 involves looking to someone or something other than the Lord for spiritual wisdom. It denies the truth and sufficiency of what Yahweh has revealed. It says, "Not good enough, Lord. I need more. I want another counselor." Brothers and sisters, there is no neutral territory when it comes where we look for knowledge of the truth. Either you are looking to the Lord or you are looking to the Evil One.

"But I'm not worshiping demons, Matthew. I just find New Age spirituality and self-help podcasts more useful than all the stuff I heard in church growing up. It's not like I'm sacrificing my kids to Molech." I'm grateful, friend! But know this. There is a face that presses through every rival to the spiritual wisdom and guidance God has given us in his Word. No matter how harmless it appears on the surface, it's the face of Satan himself.

Supposedly "secular" approaches to wisdom – look within yourself, go with whatever feels true to you – are his specialty. Anytime you abandon God's Word for another authority, yourself included, you forge an alliance with the kingdom of darkness. Brothers and sisters do not seek wisdom in the kingdom of darkness. The Lord is your portion. Look to him! How do we do that?

### **3) LISTEN TO THE GOD WHO HAS SPOKEN THROUGH JESUS (vv. 15-22)**

The contrast between vv. 14 and 15 is stark. V. 14, "These nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners." V. 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..." What was a true prophet in the Old Testament? Someone who spoke God's Word on God's behalf to God's people at God's initiative.

So why not speak directly? The Lord did that for Israel 40 years earlier at Mt. Sinai. And when it happened, they were utterly terrified. They cried out to Moses (v. 16), "Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire anymore, lest I

die.” Why were they unable to bear the audible voice of God? Because the Word of God reveals the glory of God. In the presence of his glory, who can stand?

We’ve had some pretty crazy thunderstorms over the last week, haven’t we? Listen to how Ps 29:3-9 describes the power of God’s voice: “The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders...The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty...The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness...The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in his temple all cry, ‘Glory!’”

The fear that filled Israel’s heart at Sinai was exceedingly good and right. “They are right in what they have spoken,” the Lord says in v. 17. Oh that we would have the same posture of heart when the Word of read today, brothers and sisters. Like Israel, we need a mediator. A direct revelation of the glory of God would utterly crush us. The promise of a prophet like Moses was a tremendous expression of God’s grace.

And the distinguishing marks of a true prophet in vv. 18-19 become the standard by which every prophet in the rest of the Old Testament is measured. Here again, I found Christopher Wright’s observations helpful.

**First, true prophecy is marked by God’s initiative.** V. 18, “I will raise up for them a prophet...” No one gets to appoint themselves. God does the appointing no less than God does the revealing. We don’t create or discover spiritual revelation for ourselves. We are revelation receivers. God takes initiative to reveal himself to us.

**Second, true prophecy is marked by God’s model.** V. 18, “I will raise up for them a prophet like you...” Moses’ humility. Moses’ submission to God’ authority. The personal integrity that marked his life and leadership validated his message. God’s ways haven’t changed.

**Third, true prophecy is marked by God’s message.** V. 18. “I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” A true prophet doesn’t mix what he thinks with what God says. He speaks what God tell him to speak and only what God tells him to speak. Whatever he says is consistent with what God has already said.

**Fourth, true prophecy is marked by God’s authority.** V. 19, “Whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.” The way you respond to God’s appointed messenger is the way you’re responding to God himself.

Now let's make something crystal clear. The way prophecy functioned under the Old Covenant is very different than the way prophecy functions today. What's changed? It's not God's faithfulness to speak. It's that prophetic words today do not come with the normative force of "thus says the Lord."

When a member of our church comes to the ministry mic with a spontaneous impression of a something they believe the Lord wants to communicate for our upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation, they are sharing a precious gift that is essential, not optional, for the spiritual life and health of our body. Pay attention to what the Spirit is doing in our midst on Sunday mornings or when you gather with your CG during the week. Listen for what he's saying to you. Listen for what he wants to say to the people around you. Earnestly desire the gift of prophecy. But know when you step out in that gift, you are not speaking the inerrant Word of God. Why else would Paul tell us to "weigh" or judge prophecies in 1 Cor 14:29 or that prophecies will "pass away" in 1 Cor 13:8?

What makes prophecy in the church today different? Why does God no longer give us authoritative self-revelation through prophets? It's because he has spoken to us in a definitive and supremely glorious way, a once-and-for-all kind of way, through the person of work of his Son, Jesus Christ! Heb 1:1-3, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature..."

What a prophet we have in Jesus, brothers and sisters! As Apostle Peter recognizes in Acts 3, Jesus is the long-awaited prophet like Moses. If you want spiritual wisdom, knowledge, revelation, direction, insight, or power, listen to Jesus. The most important way we look to the Lord as our portion is by listening, trusting, and obeying the Word of Christ as our highest authority. The inspired Word of the Old Testament is all about him. The inspired Word of the New Testament is all about him.

So is all true, albeit imperfect, prophecy today! 1 Jn 4:1, "Test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world." What's the test? Are the words they speak consistent with the Word of Christ? Many self-appointed prophets in the church today fail the test no less than prophetic voices on social media. Be careful what you listen to, brothers and sisters.

God is committed to upholding the integrity of his Word and will not stand idly by while his Word is twisted, added to, or misused for personal gain. The consequences



for false prophets in v. 20 could not be more serious. “That same prophet shall die.” Why? Because God is committed to protecting his glory by guarding the integrity of his Word. There’s a warning for us here, brothers and sisters.

When you are speaking to other people, whether in person or online, be careful to not represent your thoughts or our opinions as if they carry the same authority as God’s Word. Can we have biblically informed opinions about how to vote, what movies to watch, what music to listen to, or what kind of public health policy is best in a pandemic? Absolutely. But our application of Scripture is not the same thing as Scripture. Take care that your strongest feelings and public expressions of certainty are reserved for what Scripture explicitly says.

What Scripture says, God says. So, I implore you, friend. Don’t ultimately listen to what your friends think, or what your family says, or what you feel is real. Listen to the God who has spoken through Jesus. Look to him for revelation. Look to him for guidance and understanding.

And if you’re not sure how to do that when it comes to making life decisions, check out Kevin DeYoung’s small book, *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God’s Will*, subtitled, “How to make a decision without dreams, visions, fleeces, impressions, open doors, random Bible verses, casting lots, liver shivers, writing in the sky, etc.” It’s delightfully biblical! Listen to the God who has spoken through Jesus.

## **CONCLUSION**

May we be a people who look to the Lord as our portion in all he says and gives. And do it with this confidence, brother and sisters. Every gift he gives to us is supremely good and every Word he speaks to us is gloriously true. The test of a true prophet in vv. 21-22 is fulfillment. Does what he prophesies come to pass?

Why is that the test? Because the only words the LORD has spoken, the only words the LORD will ever speak, are true words that always come to pass. Isa 45:19, “I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right.” Jer 1:12, “I am watching over my word to perform it.” Isa 55:11, “[My word] shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” Why? In the words of Rev 19:11, because “the one sitting on [the throne] is called Faithful and True.”

There is no gift like Jesus. There is no revelation like Jesus. In what the Lord gives and says, make Jesus your portion. Worship him. For there is no one like our God.